The Struggle for Recognition: Muslim American Spokesmanship in the Age of Islamophobia

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THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION: MUSLIM AMERICAN SPOKESMANSHIP IN
THE AGE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

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The Struggle for Recognition: Muslim American Spokesmanship in the Age of Islamophobia

by

Nazia Kazi

Advisor: Vincent Crapanzano

The events of 9/11/2001 intensified the hypervisibility of U.S. Muslims, making them the subject of academic, artistic, and cultural curiosity. Alongside this public hypervisibility came a campaign of institutionalized Islamophobia, manifest in such measures as the anti-Muslim legislation of the USA PATRIOT Act. The result for Islamic Representative Organizations (or IRO’s) was that combatting Islamophobia became a central concern. In this dissertation, I consider the multifaceted and complicated politics of representation used by IRO’s in the aftermath of 9/11. I consider both the negative, or Islamophobic, and the so-called positive, or Islamophilic, representations of U.S. Muslims in the discourse of these groups. Based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork at IRO events dealing with the subject of “Islam in America,” this dissertation addresses the racial, class-based, and cultural politics of representing U.S. Muslims. I consider the aspirations and ambitions of IRO members: Do they understand their anti-Islamophobia activism as a way to include Muslims in the existing social order, or do they imagine themselves engaged in a revolutionary process of transformation? I present ethnographic data that reveals IRO members imagining the United States as at once a pluralistic, diverse, and egalitarian nation and a foundationally racist, imperial formation. Hardly uniform, IRO representations reveal both transformative, counterhegemonic processes and a deeply entrenched neoliberal multiculturalism that is constitutive of the paradox of representation in the age of empire.
DEDICATION

For Maya and Zara

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I consider the intersection of race, the War on Terror, and multiculturalism by focusing on Muslim American organizations and the representational politics they have employed in the face of Islamophobia. The amount of scholarship devoted to U.S. Muslims has undoubtedly skyrocketed since September 11th, 2001. Much of this work has focused on the racialization, demonization, and exclusion experienced by Muslims, South Asians, and Arab Americans. Certainly, this is an important scholarly focus. The events of 9/11/2001 and the ensuing War on Terror ostensibly reconfigured Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians1 as a potential threat to homeland security. As Bayoumi (2009), Ewing (2008), Stubbs (2003), Cainkar (2002), and others demonstrate, Muslim Americans (and those mistakenly thought to be Muslims) have been the prime targets in this hostile climate.

While leaders assured Americans that 9/11 would not usher in an era of anti-Muslim bigotry2, the age of Islamophobia has been undeniable. On an official or institutional level, domestic Islamophobia is evident in the immediate aftermath of the 2001 attacks. More than 1200 people were detained without trial in the immediate months following 9/11, most of whom were detained not for reasons related to terrorism but rather immigration-related charges such as overstaying a visa (Hing 2006). The Special Registration program similarly subjected thousands of Arabs and Muslims to additional surveillance in a purported attempt to uncover terror links.

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1 In an analytic and practical sense, it is important to note that the term “Muslim” is a slippery category. Those of us who study Muslim Americans find ourselves awkwardly using terms like “Muslims and South Asians,” “Muslims and Arab Americans,” or “Muslims and Sikhs,” demonstrating the inadequacy of the term “Muslims,” a difficulty Naber has called “the politics of naming” (Naber 2008: 5).

2 President George W. Bush famously visited a mosque on September 17th, 2001 and delivered comments on the importance of inclusion of Muslim Americans.
The passage of the USA PATRIOT Act on October 26, 2001 ushered in a new age in which civil rights, especially for those deemed 'suspicious' of terrorist activity, were waived, and a newfound surveillance state took shape.

On a cultural and structural level, Islamophobia surfaced in the abundance of pejorative racialized representations in film and on television, of an Islamophobia “industry” that targeted not just Muslims but their pro-Muslim allies, and an overarching bigotry and questioning of Muslim's “Americanness.” The national anxiety about President Obama's potentially “Muslim” identity was just one manifestation of the overarching climate of U.S. Islamophobia. During my time in the field, one interviewee put it eloquently by saying that he felt two types of Islamophobia had emerged. “You have the ignorant, bigoted, right wing Islamophobia, which is basically the same as any age-old white supremacist attitude,” Saeed told me over a cup of coffee. “And then you have this highbrow, ivory tower, Samuel Huntington type of Islamophobia. This kind is really scary, because you see it in academia and among very educated, well-read Americans.”

The most useful way for me to understand Islamophobia(s) was as follows: 1) domestically (as in the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act or the growth in anti-Muslim bigotry) and 2) internationally (the military actions in Afghanistan or targeted assassinations in Yemen, for instance) and 3) institutionally (encoded in law, such as the NDAA) and 4) socioculturally (existing on the level of representation, discourse, and language). The table below demonstrates these scales.
I categorize the justifications and framings given for U.S. Islamophobia in three ways: as essentialist, nativist, and national security-focused. In its first form, anti-Muslim sentiment rests on some preconceived notions of Arab and Muslim barbarity, sexism, and proclivity to violence. This is a continuation of age-old colonialist tropes such as ‘the Arab mind’ (Patai 1973) in which environmental determinism, racism, and ethnocentrism suggest a terrifying essence of all followers of Islam. As Bill Maher told Anderson Cooper, “They bring that desert stuff to our world…You know, we don’t threaten each other, we sue each other. That’s the sign of civilized people” (Cooper 2010). The nativist brand of U.S. Islamophobia, on the other hand, focuses more on the fear of a takeover of normative American culture by Muslims, through the imposition of shariah law or the introduction of Muslim holidays. For instance, a group called Stop Islamization of America is committed to public awareness of a Muslim campaign to destroy American values. The national security-focused brand of Islamophobia uses acts of terrorism as
justification for anti-Muslim sentiment. When former NPR journalist Juan Williams appeared on Fox News admitting that he gets anxious upon seeing Muslims on his flight, he expressed a type of fear of violence that has become synonymous with Islam and Muslims.

Yet my project departs from a singular focus on Islamophobia. Instead, I turn to the ways in which Muslim Americans have responded to Islamophobia using what I term representational practices. Islamic representative organizations (which I refer to as IRO’s) of varying sizes and constituencies have been at the forefront of combating Islamophobia through a number of strategies that aim to undo the negative popular images of Muslims. Following 9/11, IRO’s – even those who were not officially focused on the mission of representing Muslims to mainstream Americans or of combatting Islam – essentially had to make fighting Islamophobia a central concern. “Regardless of their original mission and goals, the 9/11 backlash necessitated that Middle Eastern and Muslim American organizations engage in claims making on behalf of their constituents” (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009: 118).

This project looks at the discursive practices and activist strategies employed by IRO's and the ways these practices fit within a larger context of U.S. militarism, the so-called 'post-racial' landscape, and a renewed interest in the Huntingtonian “clash” between Islamic and Western civilizations (Huntington 1996). For most Muslims living in America, Islamophobia has hardly been an all-encompassing, oppressive force against which they are powerless to respond. Indeed, and given the varying shades of privilege among a diverse population, the experience of Islamophobia has been unevenly experienced by America's Muslims. My project looks instead at some of the many ways in which Muslim Americans have been active agents in the face of a climate of both xenophobic hostility and multicultural sensitivity. In this way, I challenge the commonplace narrative of Muslims as a newly-demonized, racialized, and othered group.
Instead, I offer an account of simultaneous privilege and marginality and a conflicted sense of belonging and exclusion experienced by U.S. Muslims.

In fact, one of the central questions my work asks is the ways privilege along lines of class, educational attainment, and immigrant status affects the experience of Islamophobia. It is true that high-profile cases like that of Sami al-Arian or Salaam al-Marayati suggest that even fame and wealth do not fully protect one from experiencing Islamophobia. Dr. Al-Arian’s case became one of the most infamous American cases surrounding surveillance, academic freedom, and the War on Terror as his ties to Palestinian terrorists groups came into question, putting his professorship in jeopardy and leading to his subpoenas for terrorism-related investigations. Salaam Al-Marayati, renowned leader of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, was also detained with his family at LAX airport, in spite of his vocal activism as a moderate Muslim American spokesperson. In spite of these cases in which privileged Muslims became targets of Islamophobia, it also becomes evident upon closer inspection that the domestic War on Terror disproportionately affects underprivileged groups, many times not even Muslims. For instance, the detention of undocumented immigrants after 9/11 – none of whom were found to have any connection to the attacks – left documented immigrants and U.S. citizen Muslims untouched. Additionally, it brought into peril non-Muslim undocumented immigrants through the increased policing of overstayed immigrant visas. While Muslims are undoubtedly the intended targets of much Islamophobic action and discourse, some Muslims bear the brunt of the burden. Meanwhile, those who do the 'representative' work are often from the most privileged among U.S. Muslims – U.S. citizens, highly educated, relatively well-to-do Muslims. The 'representative' voices combatting Islamophobia, then, may be sheltered from the worst aspects of the domestic War on Terror.
My work aims to explore the ways in which Muslim American or “Islamic” organizations in the U.S. have, especially since September 11th, 2001, been enmeshed in the politics of Islamophobia. Ultimately, a singular focus on Islamophobia may actually obscure the lived experiences of Muslim Americans and ignore the diversity of Muslim American experiences. Shryock argues that Islamophobia is a polemical term that may actually gloss over diverse phenomena, including racism, anti-terrorism, and xenophobia (2010). Looking closer at the term Islamophobia itself, it assumes that Muslims are the explicit targets. In fact, in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11/2001, a Sikh man was murdered in a hate crime, presumed to be an Arab or Muslim (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). After the fatal shooting at a Sikh temple near Milwaukee in 2012, many speculated that it was likely a case of “mistaken identity,” as Sikhs are not Muslims. Most recently, in New York City, a Hindu man, Sunando Sen, was killed after being pushed in front of a train in what is generally understood to be an act of Islamophobia. Furthermore, Arabs have ostensibly come under attack as victims of “Islamophobia,” in spite of the large Christian Arab population. Islamophobia as a term also does not attend to the ways in which various types of privilege mitigate the experiences of Muslim American populations.

As Alsultany points out, the rise in visibility of Muslims has also included a striking increase in sympathetic or positive portrayals (2007). Even in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, prominent political leaders denounced anti-Muslim bigotry and urged Americans to avoid Islamophobia (Milbank and Wax 2001). Muslim American leaders were invited to meet with President George W. Bush at the White House, and concerned politicians visited mosques and appeared at IRO events. On September 17th, 2001, President Bush said during a visit to a mosque, “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace” (Bush 2001). While many mosques and Islamic schools received hate mail and bomb
threats, several also reported receiving flowers and vows of support from churches, synagogues, and community members. The “generalized affection for Islam and Muslims” is what has come to be known as Islamophilia (Shryock 2010: 9). Islamophilic tactics often define a modern, safe, or acceptable Muslim who is to be folded into a diverse and pluralistic U.S. society. Through Islamophilia, often encapsulated by a larger, uncritical multicultural discourse, American Muslims are positioned as patriotic, peaceful, or moderate; the 'good' American Muslim may be a critic of extremism and a champion of American secularism or individualism (Shryock 2010; Mahmood 2008). By looking at the work of Islamic organizations and the involvement of U.S. Muslims in these organizations, my work begins to explore the ways the politics of inclusion, multiculturalism, and tolerance function for the very population whose Americanness has been in jeopardy in the wake of the War on Terror.

Based on 16 months of fieldwork (described below), I came to understand these representational acts as critical components of larger global phenomenon. While the U.S. domestic racial landscape and global geopolitics are often seen as distinct theoretical concerns, my research suggests that we must attend to domestic politics of multiculturalism as inseparable from U.S. empire and militarism. Indeed, I have come to understand the representational practices of Muslim American organizations as intertwined with the U.S. role in international politics, often times in contradictory or surprising ways. In this way, my work responds to claims by Grewal (2005), Puar (2007), and Maira (2009) to situate uniquely 'American' conditions within transnational processes and power dynamics. As McAlister points out, there are links between U.S. racial realities, anti-immigrant sentiment, and the supercarceral U.S. state, “in which Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo are part of a much longer US story of war and torture enacted on racialized bodies, often in the name of empire” (2010: 221). I explain this connection
While I take the events of September 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2001\textsuperscript{3} as a key moment of intensification in the story of Islamophobia, I do not mean to imply that anti-Muslim sentiment was not a concern for IRO's before the events of 9/11/2001. In fact, one can see a growing concern with public image, political involvement, and representation in the programming of CAIR or ISNA events well before 2001. Indeed, topics such as interfaith dialogue, tolerance, negative stereotypes surface at many pre-9/11 IRO events. Yet it is clear that 9/11 made these concerns paramount, even for organizations that had a decidedly more theological orientation before 9/11. It seems that, though Islamophobia has been present in the U.S. for decades, combatting Islamophobia only became a primary concern to IRO's after 9/11. This is an important distinction: it reminds us that Islamophobia as a practice was not born on 9/11, but was a long-standing feature of the U.S. racial landscape. The fact that Islamophobia became a staple part of the lexicon of civil rights activists and Muslim Americans after 9/11 is telling: because 9/11 intensified the anti-Muslim gaze, IRO's went from being concerned with it to singularly preoccupied with it.

Indeed, American Islamophobia has deep roots. Mastnak shows how the birth of Christian Islamophobia likely began in the mid-ninth century, when Muslim authorities in Europe executed several Christians found guilty of blasphemy (2010). Mastnak highlights waves of ebbing and flowing anti-Muslim sentiment in European history that were embedded in the psyches of American settlers, a long history that includes the Spanish inquisition, the European

\textsuperscript{3} While I use the term '9/11' for the sake of brevity throughout my work, it has been noted that the US “branding” of 9/11 serves perhaps as a form of prioritizing the 2001 attacks over several historic events, including the US-backed overthrow of Salvador Allende or the 2012 factory fires that killed hundreds of Pakistani workers. The ‘monopoly’ over the term 9/11 may be critiqued as further evidence of the U.S.’ imperial role.
compulsion to drive out all “Turks”, and the Crusades. The fact that the Columbian expedition of 1492 coincided with the Spanish Inquisition, which aimed to purge Spain of its Jewish and Muslim populations, places anti-Muslim sentiment squarely in the center of the very founding of “America.” In a sense, one could argue that Islamophobia is embedded in the very foundation of America, that the “colonization of America was, to a large degree, conceived in the framework of a crusading imagination” (37). Much of European identity as defined by the Muslim as “other” crystallized with the Crusades; when George W. Bush evoked the Crusades in a speech initiating the War on Terror, many Muslims were rightfully disturbed by the connotation. Mastnak shows how the Crusades were perhaps the moment when Islam was deemed the enemy of all of Christendom. In more recent history, the 1979 hostage crisis in Iran reinvigorated anti-Muslim sentiment, providing another moment of intensification of Islamophobia. Jack Shaheen locates the many ways media images denigrated Arabs and Muslims well before 9/11 (Shaheen 1994; Shaheen 1984). I outline this history to underscore the fact that US Islamophobia has deep roots preceding 9/11.

Indeed, many of the themes and strategies I identify as part of the representational practices were present even before September 11th. Organizations like the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) were already engaged in projects of inclusion and cultural citizenship quite similar to the ones I describe below prior to 9/11. For instance, Muslim Student Association (MSA) chapters across the country have sponsored “Islam Awareness Week” on campuses for decades as a means of educating college students about the presence of Muslims in the US. However, 9/11 ostensibly intensified the vilification of Muslims and, on a policy level, was an ideological tool used to garner support for many components of the War on Terror on a domestic and international level.
In this way, the representational strategies already present took on an urgency and intensity that had perhaps not been present before. I noticed an uneven engagement with 9/11 in the field, as some deemed it an unequivocal turning point in the story of U.S. race and tolerance and others saw it as just another event among many in a long history of foundational U.S. racism. The tension between those who understand the United States to be a fundamentally inclusive, tolerant, open country and those who consider racism and imperialism of the U.S. is explored throughout my work.

*Muslims and Islamic Organizations in the U.S.*

The story of Muslims in America is essential to understanding the more recent practices of representation. While the early documented history of Muslims in America is sparse, strong evidence points to a Muslim presence as early as at the time of Spanish voyages to the Americas (Turner 1997). The slave trade from Africa brought practicing Muslims to the “New World,” many of whom continued to practice Islam privately in spite of violent and forceful conversions to Christianity (Gomez 1994). Furthermore, even those who did convert likely held on to various Islamic traditions that had lasting impacts on African American culture. The narrative of African American Muslim slave Yarrow Mamout was a popular example at IRO events where black Islam or the history of Islam in America was being discussed. Mamout, a manumitted slave in Georgetown in the early 19th century, is regarded as one of the few known slaves to resist the often violent, generally coercive conversions to Christianity (Turner 1997). The term “black Islam” popularly conjures up images of Malcolm X or the Nation of Islam, overlooking the vast diversity among African-descended Muslims living in America (Abdullah 2010; Turner 2003; Rouse 2004). While Islam is generally associated by many Americans with Arabs and South
Asians, the remarkable history and diversity of African American Islam can enrich the possibilities for discussion of race, xenophobia, and Islamophobia in the U.S.

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire brought many West Asian Muslims to the United States in the early 1900s, labeled in the immigration documents as “Turks” or “Syrians” (Nyang 1999). This period also saw an influx of Yugoslavian and Albanian Muslims. U.S. immigration policy during and following the Cold War brought over droves of Asian Muslim professionals, including scientists, engineers, and physicians (those whose presence would ultimately be used to bolster the myth of the Asian American ‘model minority’). These professionals would, often times, sponsor other relatives from their native countries to emigrate, resulting in a “two-tiered” Asian immigrant population resulting from the immigration policies of the 1960s and chain migration. The sponsored immigrants often lacked the professional credentials and did not satisfy the same labor needs at the time of their arrival as their sponsoring families, leading to a bifurcated, stratified Asian Muslim presence. Diasporic South Asian immigrants from the West Indies included Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus, leading to the presence of American Muslims from Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica. Following the Iranian revolution in 1979, there was a surge in the Irani Muslim population in America, and subsequently a marked rise in the proportion of U.S. Shi’ite Muslims. In recent decades, refugees from Bosnia, Somalia, and other parts of the Muslim world has led to a rise in the presence of Muslims in small rural towns across the country (Singer and Wilson 2006). Mistakenly, many assume that American converts to Islam must necessarily be African-American. Yet, white Muslim converts (dubbed ‘reverts’ due to the Muslim principle that all people are born Muslim) also occupy an interesting niche in the Muslim American population. I explore in my work the prominence of the white convert, especially in the post-9/11 climate of Islamophobia. Recently, the rise in Latino American
converts to Islam has also captured attention in the mainstream media (Aidi 2004; Aidi 1999).

This demographic overview highlights the breadth of Muslim American experiences and the diversity of the population at hand. As my project will demonstrate, this diversity is constitutive of the strategies undertaken by organizations tasked with representing this multifaceted population. Indeed, the fact that Muslim Americans are diverse, fragmented, and often divided, in addition to the fact that many non-Muslims fall victim to the dangers of Islamophobia, to speak of my ethnographic subject as “the American Muslim” is inaccurate. Instead, my project focuses on the ideological construction of the “American Muslim” by IRO's.

“In the aftermath of 9/11 and the war on terrorism, Islam has emerged as a major classification category for governmental policy, and it has subsequently been adopted by the media and the rest of society” (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009: 243). Those groups that may strongly identify with nation of origin, race, or ethnic group have thus been grouped together as “Muslims.” Indeed, the term American Muslim is a catchall phrase that is utilized strategically by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. As a descriptive term, the demographic term may mask more than it reveals. Indeed, I explore the tensions around the construct “American Muslim” in my work, attending to the ways a 'colorblind' logic has dominated many calls for unity and togetherness by IRO messaging.

It was over the past several decades that official organizations formed with the aim of representing, uniting, and organizing diverse populations under the label “Muslim.” Distinct from mosques or ethnically-specific cultural groups, these organizations served an important function in creating something like an American ummah. The Islamic concept of ummah refers to a pan-Islamic community. Professing faith in (often-debated) Islamic principles is enough for membership in the ummah; membership in the ummah for many Muslims takes precedence over
ethnic, tribal, or racial affiliations. (The Prophet Muhammad is credited with saying that the Muslim ummah is like one human body – when any one limb aches, the whole body feels this pain.) During my time in the field, I heard the Prophet Muhammad's final sermon in which he eschewed racial hierarchies and tribal differences cited numerous times in attempts to forge unity among diverse Muslims. Naber considers the Iranian revolution the moment at which a pan-Islamic 'ummah' became important in the U.S., describing the “socio-historical context that makes the emergence of “Muslim first” as a collective identity possible” (2005: 479). Naber claims that the label “Muslim” is also a “politics of identity, a politics of race, and a politics of gender” (480) and that using the “Muslim first” form of identification is also a method of strategic essentialism in claims-making. In this way, the concept of ummah for IRO politics is not simply a theological one. For the IRO's I study, creation of a specifically American “ummah” surfaced as an utmost concern.

The history of such organizations is vast. Islamic organizations beyond the mosque have arisen with a number of missions, a range of sizes, and varying levels of orthodoxy and engagement with “mainstream” America. While often delegitimized by the orthodoxy as distorted or even blasphemous, the influence of the Nation of Islam introduced and circulated Islamic principles that would inspire many African Americans to convert to Islam in the mid- to late-20th century. The Nation of Islam provided a forum for Black Muslims to assemble outside of mosque settings and explore matters of Americanism, race, politics, war, and religion. Malcolm X, a central leader within the Nation before his expulsion from it, remains a crucial figure for American Muslims of all colors.

Immigrant Muslim students also played a critical role in forming IRO's. Nyang describes the wave of immigrant Muslims who came to the U.S. due to Cold War policies favoring the
“recruitment and training” (18) of Third World students. While the U.S. ostensibly opened its doors to these immigrant students as a way to expand U.S. influence in the face of the Soviet threat, many of whose initial desires to return to their native countries would go unfulfilled and they would remain in the U.S. These students were the founders of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) in 1963, a thriving force to this day on college campuses across the country.

Today, most university MSA chapters are affiliated with MSA-National, an umbrella organization dedicated to Islam on college campuses. At the time of this writing, MSA is celebrating its 50th anniversary. (While I was in the field, MSA briefly captured headlines in mainstream media when it was discovered that local MSA chapters were being monitored for suspicious activity by the NYPD. I explore this incident in a separate chapter.) It is significant that many credit the MSA as being the historic locus of IRO's, given their university affiliation and largely immigrant composition. MSA's founders “are the founding fathers of such Muslim organizations as the Islamic Society of North America, (ISNA), the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA),...” (Nyang 18). ISNA leadership considers MSA to be the early iteration of ISNA itself, tracing its origins to the 1963 founding of MSA. ISNA is generally considered the largest Muslim organization in North America. Organizations like ISNA are significant in their divergence from the traditional mosque, in which obligatory prayers form the primary function.

These organizations set the tone, so to speak, for how Muslim Americans are to be represented to the rest of America. They are the hub in which the “image” of the Muslim American is manufactured, and the medium through which this image is deployed to the rest of the country.

While historically, these organizations were largely composed of immigrant Muslim memberships, the merging of “black Islam” with so-called “mainstream” Sunni Islam has marked a turning point from these organizations as historically immigrant-based toward a more
(at least in principle) pan-Islamic membership. Warith Deen Muhammad, son of Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad, disbanded the Nation of Islam in 1976 in order to bring the movement closer in line with more orthodox (Sunni) Islam. I noticed a deliberate effort by organizations like ISNA to increasingly reach out to African American Muslims and to shun ethnocentrism among immigrant Muslim populations. Ethnic and racial difference and unity across diversity surfaced repeatedly as organizational concerns.

**Representational Politics in the Age of Islamophobia**

Since 9/11, targeting Islamophobia and representing America's Muslims favorably has become a far more central concern on an organizational level for many IRO's. To this end, goals such as unity across difference among diverse Muslim populations, interfaith dialogue between Muslims and other religious communities, and combatting negative mainstream media and cultural representations have become of utmost importance for many such organizations. Furthermore, finding a solid foothold for Islam in America – by discursively and culturally positioning Islam as a permanent fixture of American diversity – has become a solid tactic for IRO's. In this way, there emerged certain cohesive strategies that were thought to be both a source of support to America's Muslims – a way to build unity and community for often far-flung populations and thus amass institutional and social power – and a way to project a positive image outward.

Certainly, these strategies are a response to the newfound hypervisibility experienced by Muslim communities since September 11th. Their mosques, headscarves, beards, accents, skin color, and restaurants have become more conspicuous since 9/11/2001 and the ensuing surges of Islamophobia. Muslim Americans are acutely aware of this hypervisibility. “We are being
watched.” I was told in the field by an aspiring Muslim American journalist. “Everything we do is being watched. I'm seen as a Muslim, not a person. Anything I do, it's seen as something a Muslim did. I can't run a stop sign and not have it reflect badly on all American Muslims.”

Indeed, awareness of this spotlight seemed at times to be an embodied reality for many people I met in the field. The decision to wear a hijab, to remove a hijab, to grow a beard, to shave, to paint ones nails, to hold doors open for strangers, to smile at non-Muslims upon making eye contact – each of these surfaced in the field as examples of how Muslim bodies must navigate this climate of being watched. This hypervisibility has also taken the form of more university departments and course offerings in Islamic studies, fiction and non-fiction literature about Islam, and news programs, films, and documentaries about Muslims.

Perhaps most significantly, this hypervisibility is evident in the massive surveillance apparatus that has been institutionalized against Muslims over the past decade. Surveillance became even more intensified after the completion of my fieldwork, when Muslim communities sued the NYPD over its use of surveillance and the American public learned about the NSA's relationship to internet privacy. Yet even during my time in the field, surveillance was a central concern. The USA PATRIOT Act marked the beginning of the institutionalization of anti-Muslim surveillance politics and ostensibly reconfigured the ways in which Muslim Americans understood (lack of) privacy rights. This climate of hypervisibility is of central concern for this project, as I examine the strategies used to manage and subvert this hypervisibility.

I ask in this work, what possibilities are enabled, and which are foreclosed, by this project of positive hypervisibility? By focusing on Islamophilic strategies, my project looks past the totalizing narrative of Islamophobia as an inescapable, oppressive force upon U.S. Muslims. Islamophilic strategies, I argue, are debatable in their transformative potential. As Bakalian and
Bozorgmehr point out, Islamic organizations have made 'integration' a primary focus in the face of anti-Muslim backlash (2009). Yet this strategy is not unproblematic; rather, it is fraught with marginalization, divisiveness, and hegemony. Rather than assuming that Islamic organizations have necessarily responded to Islamophobia in transformative, progressive ways, I look closely at the representational strategies that have emerged and argue that responses have often been unrepresentative or mitigated by a climate of stifled or limited discourse. Furthermore, IRO members have varying levels of approval of these strategies. An uncritical multiculturalism often dominates the strategies I describe, as opposed to an activism that holds accountable the very roots of contemporary Islamophobia.

As Susser and Maskovsky suggest, the domestic consequences of a new U.S. imperialism often go ignored in anthropological scholarship in North America (2009). My project uses ethnographic analysis to examine American Muslim responses to Islamophobia as a domestic manifestation of U.S. imperialism. The War on Terror has offered a dichotomous 'us versus them' duality to U.S. citizens in combatting terrorism. Faced with this opposition, many American Muslims have been eager to exonerate themselves of blame for the events of September 11th, 2001, positioning themselves as "not with the terrorists." Proving oneself to not be a terrorist is a fraught act, as is proving oneself to be "one of us." My fieldwork suggests that Muslims in the U.S. use the language of civil rights and multiculturalism to combat Islamophobia, yet often deliberately silence certain geopolitical or foreign policy concerns. The quest for legitimacy and recognition in a new imperial homeland perhaps necessitates these silences. By this logic, Muslims are free to demand inclusion and tolerance provided that they are unquestioningly patriotic subjects, or at the very least that they fully support the War on Terror.

By employing Islamophilic representations of American Muslims, these responses often
fit into a discourse about colorblindness, pluralism and tolerance. American Muslims, who often times feel powerless to discuss geopolitical concerns such as the War on Terror, US militarism in the Muslim world or their concerns about Palestine and Israel often find ample space to express their concerns about tolerance and inclusion in the U.S. This tradeoff – between portraying U.S. Muslims in a favorable light and tackling difficult domestic and foreign policy concerns – is a salient one that demonstrates the domestic ramifications of U.S. imperialism. U.S. Muslims who do critique foreign policy or military intervention are painted as unpatriotic or anti-American. In the field, I learned that many have internalized a sense that, in order for successful claims making, certain topics are not to be discussed. Thus, the possibilities for earnest engagement are limited, and it is these limitations that figure centrally in my work.

Methodology

I spent a total of 16 months in the field exploring my questions about possibilities, visibility, and inclusion emanating from Muslim American organizations. Because 'representational strategies' are not geographically bounded (i.e. in a heavily Muslim town), I was required to look beyond sites such as residential towns as my analytic units. Instead, my fieldwork focused on the relationship between Muslims from across the U.S. and their “representative” organizations. I studied individuals who are mobile and closely connected to geographically distant U.S. Muslims through important formal and informal networks. These networks have been central to my analysis. My methods required focusing on those events in which Islamic organizations grappled with the issue of “Islam in America”, a broad topic encompassing religiosity, race, multiculturalism, and current politics. Thus, I spent my time in the field traveling across the country to Islamic conventions, panels, conferences, and workshops
that convened Muslim Americans concerned with the issue at hand. I attended workshop, conventions, fundraisers, and conferences in cities across the country, including Washington, D.C., Detroit, Cincinnati, Chicago, New York. Those I spoke with included members/participants and organizers/leaders. I quickly discovered the 'celebrity' status (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009) that many prominent IRO leaders enjoy and thus, consequently, had limited access to speak directly with many of these leaders. Leading up to and following attendance at these events, I interviewed attendees and (when possible) organizers and speakers regarding their involvement and planning. Most of the events lasted two to four days, though I also attended several banquets, fundraisers, and afternoon workshops. The larger events included a mix of cultural events, panels, bazaars, film screenings, and social functions.

The lack of a geographically bounded field-site is an important one. It is significant to note that Muslim Americans, as such, do not necessarily have “community” in a traditional sense of geographic proximity. In fact, as discussed above, the term “Muslim American” itself serves as a misnomer, an ideological term that eludes more than it reveals. While a dense Bangladeshi neighborhood in Jackson Heights, NY is largely Muslim, there is little connection between it and the large Islamic organizations I explore. Similarly, the Arab American neighborhoods of Detroit are not representative of the national population of South Asian, African American, and African Muslims, nor is the dense African-American Muslim population near Masjid Al-Taqwa in Brooklyn. These “Muslim” neighborhoods are usually ethnically- or racially-specific enclaves. Furthermore, for many Muslim Americans, a stable sense of community is often at large. In a conversation with a young Pakistani-American lawyer (also the former president of his university MSA), I was told that “community exists wherever you bow your head in prayer. I travel a lot for work. So for me, the Muslim community happens to be whichever mosque I'm
praying at that week. It struck me when I went away to college, and again when I relocated for law school. There aren't really “Muslim” towns, and even very few “Muslim” neighborhoods in this country. There are Bosnian neighborhoods and Yemeni neighborhoods, but that's not a “Muslim” neighborhood. So the sense of community in a pan-Islamic sense is fleeting, unless you're at an ISNA convention or something.” Another respondent told me that she's a “self-proclaimed masjid-hopper,” that she rarely performs congregational prayers at the same mosque twice in a month. I agree with Grewal’s claim that scholars “often overterritorialize Muslim American communities, relying far too heavily on demographic variables when dividing Muslim Americans into separate communities, perhaps as a practical concession to their incredible diversity. The isolation of Muslim Americans by nationality, ethnicity, and race creates the illusion of discrete ‘villages’ (Arabs in Dearborn, Iranians in Los Angeles, South Asians in Chicago, Senegalese in Harlem). This ‘village effect’ obscures the fluid and overlapping qualities of Muslim American communities, including their shared investments in distant Islamic places” (50).

This required me to define my field site in an alternative way. I was amazed by the prolific, active nature of IRO's. Despite the fact that many of these national organizations held their events in various cities across the country, membership would often travel great distances to attend these events. While regional IRO events (such as the ISNA Midwestern Zone Conference or the ISNA Diversity Forum, both of which I attended) primarily convened Muslims from nearby states, events like the annual ISNA or ICNA convention draw Muslims from across the country (and even many Canadians). The type of community that forms at these events is unique, and quite different from the space in a common area of a mosque, for instance. At IRO events, the celebrity status of speakers is paramount. Having names like Shaikh Hamza Yusuf, Imam
Zaid Shakir, or Dr. Ingrid Mattson in the program guaranteed large audiences.

While mosques/masajid are important places that convene Muslim American populations, I chose not to use mosques or mosque communities as my primary analytic unit for several reasons. First, masajid often serve the primary function of offering Muslims a place to pray in congregation. While the five daily prayers, when offered in a mosque, convene Muslims, they do not consistently generate the type of institutional discourse around Americanness and Islam that I was interested in. Second, offering prayer in congregation is (according to most orthodox interpretations) more incumbent upon males than females. Therefore, jummah⁴ and the five daily prayers often gather significantly larger male worshippers than females. Because men and women rarely pray in integrated spaces⁵, I would have limited access to dialogue among men or between men and women in mosque spaces. Furthermore, many mosques across the country cater to a specific ethnic or racial group. “That's a black mosque, here's a Pakistani mosque, there's an Arab mosque,” Linah told me during an interview in Detroit. “Rarely do you find mosques that are inclusive or even representative of the true diversity of Muslim Americans.”

Certainly, Sunni and Shi’a Muslims rarely convene in a mosque setting (due largely to theological differences that affect the ways prayer is performed). Because my investigation is around issues of “Muslim Americans,” any ethnically exclusive mosque community would fall short. Of course, I did regularly attend mosque functions as part of my fieldwork in the location of the IRO event at hand. Indeed, several smaller-scale IRO panels, town halls, and workshops are often held at community mosques.

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⁴ Friday prayers, compulsory for men to offer in congregation.

⁵ Amina Wadud sparked controversy across the nation when she led a mixed-gender prayer in New York City (Calderini 2008).
The 'slippery' nature of the term Muslim American figures prominently in the ways my methodology took shape. Part of my project examines the very construction of the concept “Muslim American,” a term that in reality is fraught with fractures of race, sect, class, immigration status, political orientation, and geography. My project aims to understand how, given the “multitude” present in the millions of Muslims that reside in America that these large organizations claim to represent, social difference figures in anti-Islamophobic strategies. I argue that the “Muslim American” construct is formed heavily through the workings of these large representative groups.

Because my project focuses on the politics of representation, I spent much time looking at media created by IRO's and their members. Magazines such as *Islamic Horizons* (the publication of ISNA), press releases by CAIR, and blog and Twitter activity by active IRO members and volunteers were all revealing for my project. Furthermore, I attended to the ways representations of Muslims in non-Muslim media (i.e. in mainstream news media, in Hollywood films, and on television) portrayed Muslims and Muslim reactions to these portrayals. The media analysis portion of my fieldwork is critical for understanding the project of positive hypervisibility. Not only are IRO's active in responding to negative media portrayals, they are agents in advocating for Islamophilic representations, such as those in *Mooz-lum, All American Muslim*, and *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.

Overview

In the chapter “Everything I do is being watched,” I examine the concept of hypervisibility in the age of Islamophobia. Taking 9/11 as a point of intensification for the AMEMSA population, I examine the ways in which this hypervisibility took shape and was
experienced. The abundance of cultural production, including films, literature, academic departments and course offerings, and art exhibits stood alongside the general anxiety in the U.S. social imaginary about its domestic Muslim population. I explore the ways Muslims involved with Islamic organizations experienced this hypervisibility. Additionally, this chapter explores the lingering 'invisibility' of being a Muslim American. Often included under the sweeping generalizations of the “model minority” stereotype, Asian Muslims' (including Arabs and South Asians) experiences of marginality, racism, and xenophobia are overlooked. Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) and Naber (2000) remark on the invisibility of Arab Americans due to the U.S. racial scheme, allowing distinct and constructed racial categories for identification. Furthermore, with Muslims configured discursively as a “foreign” threat, America's own Muslims face an interesting configuration of belonging and exclusion. At once quintessentially American – with several second- and third-generation Muslim American IRO members – the 'othering’ of Muslims through Islamophobia creates a Moebius strip of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. Muslims are at once of and in the U.S. and cast outside, alienated. Like Simmel's “stranger” (1950), Muslim Americans’ very presence in the U.S. creates their alienation. The invisibility of American Muslims, in spite of their hypervisibility, was evident in public perception of the drone attacks that killed Yemeni American cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki and his young son.

This paradox of hypervisibility and invisibility, I argue, positions America's Muslims as 'citizen outsiders,' an American minority population that at once is rendered hypervisible and simultaneously cast out of conventional understandings of U.S. race and difference. Arab Americans, for instance, have had an inconsistent relationship with 'whiteness' (Samhan 1999). I bring in ethnographic detail from my time in the field to explore how this hypervisibility figured
in the strategies put forth by IRO's. I also examine the conflicted, ambivalent ways IRO members and leaders have engaged with the massive surveillance apparatus that has emerged as part of the War on Terror. Here, I also explore the ways in which my fieldwork experience was shaped by awareness of surveillance. My presence in the field was repeatedly acknowledged as another possible form of surveillance – either as overt surveillance by government intelligence, or simply that academic curiosity about Muslim Americans served as an unofficial branch of the surveillance apparatus.

Chapter 3, “Even Thomas Jefferson Owned a Quran,” presents IRO strategies as a project of cultural citizenship. As Flores says, cultural citizenship is about claiming space, claiming rights, and forging community (2003). “Cultural citizenship,” says Rosaldo, “refers to the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense. It claims that, in a democracy, social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to make certain people less equal or inferior to others” (1994: 402). IRO's are deeply intertwined with these projects. While IRO members are often U.S. citizens, their cultural citizenship is in peril due to the alienating effects of Islamophobia. I argue here that Muslim Americans are struggling with the same issues of difference and marginality that several other racially marked and immigrant communities have experienced. Yet, the climate of the War on Terror adds a variable that distinguishes this particular experience. In light of Islamophobia, hypervisibility, and the War on Terror, Muslim American cultural citizenship takes a distinct form. IRO's use strategies such as interfaith dialogue, presenting Islam as uniquely “American” or compatible with “American” values, selecting quintessentially “American” leaders, and building strategic coalitions with other groups as part of this project of cultural citizenship. This process is affected by controversial political
decisions, including the efficacy of certain coalitions as opposed to others, the role of assimilation and cultural difference in this project of “Americanizing Islam,” and the possibilities for radical change within this project of cultural citizenship. On an official level, IRO's are ostensibly enmeshed in a project of mainstreaming Islam, a strategy that is expected to mitigate Islamophobia. Yet this mainstreaming process, my fieldwork reveals, reflects an alienation and ambiguity among IRO members regarding the efficacy of these projects to enact real change.

Race and whiteness figure centrally in this chapter.

Chapter 4, “We Have a Dream,” examines the interplay between Islamophilia and Islamophobia that has dominated the representational politics of U.S. Muslims since 9/11. Given the immense amount of support – cultural, political, and economic - behind the Islamophobia machine (Lean 2012), there has arisen a defense of U.S. Muslims that often characterizes them as peace-loving, “just like us,” and completely separate from heinous, violent acts of terror. This binaristic configuration is at the center of this chapter. I examine 'organizational Islamophilia' – good-Muslim strategies put forth by IRO's – and the ways Muslim Americans engage with this limited spectrum of representational possibilities. I consider the politics of representation and the ramifications of these politics for economically, ideologically, and culturally diverse Muslims in the U.S. who relate to these organizations in varying ways. Following Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009), I agree that “although the post-9/11 backlash against Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans spurred them to engage in claims making, the ultimate goal was integration” (236). However, I consider the tradeoffs made by making 'integration' and 'legitimacy' central goals.

Chapter 5, “It's Just Not the Right Time to Talk about That” I explore what I consider to be a result of the binary “good Muslim/bad Muslim” landscape that has emerged both in the U.S. social imaginary as well as among IRO contingents. Throughout my time in the field, I gleaned a
sense of 'impossibility' among IRO leaders and members, a feeling that the position of Muslim Americans was precarious enough to preclude certain geopolitical discourse. I look at the conflicted sense of engagement among those who see themselves as navigating a limited political discourse. It is here that temporality and hope (Crapanzano 2003) emerge as critical factors. While IRO members recognize a constrained possibility of dialogue, many of them suggest that another future is possible, that Muslim Americans must “wait until the time is right,” as Linah told me at last year's ISNA convention. “Right now,” one young ISNA member and CAIR volunteer told me, “our concern is safety and responding to the all the negative images of Muslims out there. It's not the right time to talk about our foreign policy concerns. That doesn't mean we don't care about them. It just means we might do more damage than good by advocating about these issues right now.”

In my Conclusion, I use my fieldwork as a starting point in connecting local multicultural politics and racial projects to a larger context of U.S. militarism, the War on Terror, and empire. I argue that 'domestic' Islamophobia and racial politics must be understood in relation to U.S. militarism and empire. In general, there must be an attentiveness to the ways racial difference and multiculturalism are connected to the U.S. role as a military superpower. Hardt and Negri suggest that empire works by recognizing and celebrating difference and managing difference (2000). By positioning themselves as allies in the War on Terror, for instance, by presenting images of the 'good Muslim', IRO's are not simply focused on tolerance within the United States. Their politics resonate in the context of a larger geopolitical order. According to Marable, “any expression of restraint or caution about the dangerous erosion of our civil liberties has been equated with treason” (2009: 8).
Reflections

Writing about Muslim Americans and Islamic organizations in the midst of the ongoing War on Terror has proved challenging on many fronts. I frequently felt overwhelmed by the continual change, ongoing upheavals, that would emerge in the field. It seemed that the civil and human rights concerns of Muslim Americans were transformed on a weekly basis, whether the PATRIOT Act Extension had just been signed, Osama bin Laden had been assassinated extrajudicially, or the NYPD's massive surveillance apparatus had just been revealed. Quite frequently, I found myself having to cut short investigations on a particular event and turn to the newest concern in U.S. Islamophobia. However, this marked instability in the field became constitutive of my project. Studying hypervisible subjects never yields a static moment.

Yet the social landscape was shifting outside my fieldsite as well, often times in ways seemingly unrelated to our Muslim American population. A few months into my fieldwork, Occupy Wall Street had commanded a national presence, coinciding with the 10 year anniversary of the September 11th attacks, bringing issues of neoliberalism, the concentration of wealth, and bank crimes into mainstream political discourse. I found myself at once enthusiastic about the visibility of this important movement and jaded by the marginalization within the movement -the silencing of people of color and queer folk. Yet I was inspired as I saw Cornel West, Noam Chomsky, and other public intellectuals engage with the movement. I found fuel for my fire as classmates and colleagues were arrested, as I saw riot police lining the city sidewalks, facing thousands of us head-on simply for gathering in our streets. I shifted from this activist energy to my inquisitive, equally politicized, role as a fieldworker. On a Sunday morning, I sat with Samina at a diner in midtown. She'd been introduced to me as a member of a Muslim professional networking organization by the group's founder.
“It's not about politics. We're all doing well financially. We'll have, like, a minor
correspondence about Occupy Wall Street. But all of us were in the same boat. Like, we are not the
people who need to be occupying Wall Street. The bankers and us, we are finance people.” She
pauses, laughs, and continues. “I think it's just, you know, it's too similar a group of people with
too similar backgrounds and that stuff. That's why we stay away from politics.” My heart sank.

My recent involvement with Occupy – and my exposure to socioeconomic justice activism in
New York city in the past – had led me to understand the issues at the core of Occupy activists as
inherently connected to issues Muslim Americans should care about. Didn't U.S. military
presence in the Arab and Muslim world bother this well-intentioned, highly educated young
Muslim woman sitting across from me?

This sense of dejectedness and frustration crept up on me in the field time and again. I
understood Islamophobia to be a global force, operating on institutional levels as the US waged
war globally and domestically against an ambiguous terrorist threat and on a cultural level, as
anxieties about President Obama's Muslim-ness and stereotypical portrayals of Arabs and
Muslims abounded. My teaching and reading focused on issues of race and imperialism, with
Islamophobia being the newest case of the U.S. acting as an exceptionalist empire. Naively, I
assumed this Other at home – the Muslim American – would use her experience of Islamophobia
to ally with undocumented immigrants, convicted felons, marginalized war veterans. I expected
the targets of Islamophobia to share my critique of U.S. empire.

This is not to say that the Muslims I met in the field weren't politicized. Quite the
contrary. Politics – electoral, cultural, and economic – subsumed many of the conversations I
had. Yet the shape of these conversations fell back, with a few exceptions, on (to me) hackneyed
notions of interfaith dialogue, inclusion, multiculturalism, and tolerance. In other words, my
frustrations in the field arose from a deep dissonance between my politics and theirs. To an outsider, my project seems to be autoethnography – I'm studying “my own.” Perhaps this is where my frustration was born. Yes, I was studying a community that my own family and childhood friends considered their own, individuals deeply invested in cultivating a “Muslim American” community. The conventions I now attended as a fieldworker, I had attended as a young Muslim teen in Chicago, at the time eager to sharpen my religious understanding and contribute to Islamic presence in the U.S.

Was I an insider? Was I doing autoethnography? If so, why did I feel so excluded, alienated, and jaded in the field? Last summer, I sat in my room in Dearborn, Michigan after attending ISNA's Diversity Forum and I felt despondent as I looked over my field notes. The same weekend this convention happened, the Allied Media Conference (AMC) was happening just a few miles away in Detroit. The AMC brought together many of my friends and activists, queer folks and people of color interested in economic and racial justice, people with a trenchant critique of law enforcement, immigration, and the corporate mainstream media. I wanted to be a part of these conversations, but instead spent the bulk of the weekend in Dearborn, talking to warm and welcoming Muslim Americans about the importance of unity across diversity for Muslims of different stripes. The whole experience felt schizophrenic. Here I was, in one of the largest Muslim communities in the US, feeling awkward in a headscarf I hadn't dawned (prior to entering the field) in years, feeling mutually alienated from the several hundred Muslim Americans here who, on paper, were “just like me.”

I had felt that way the previous summer at a large Islamic convention in Chicago, just beginning my fieldwork. The convention was held at the Rosemont Convention Center at O'Hare, and I was staying across the street in a hotel where, incidentally, the 2011 Socialism
Conference was being held the same weekend. I perused the socialist bookstore that was set up in the hotel, happy to see titles by Angela Davis, Ward Churchill, and Neil Smith. Why weren't the several thousand Muslims across the street, talking about “Pluralism” for Islam in America, stopping by and building alliances with these activists and socialists? Why were they so eager to invite a local assemblyman who'd hosted an iftar dinner during Ramadan, but not in the least interested in the panel on Palestine at the Socialism Conference?

I felt defeated, time and again, in the field. I couldn't do ethnography of Islamophobia when I spent much of my time being frustrated with what struck me as trite or elitist discourse being generated in the field. I couldn't do it without being disrespectful or dismissive of the people I'd met in the field, many of whom I had genuinely grown to respect. I certainly couldn't do it as a so-called 'insider,' given the extreme alienation I experienced in my 16 month fieldwork experience. My alienation is at the heart of my project. As I immersed myself in the field, traditional notions of site, informant, community, and ethnographer unraveled. Instead, I found myself engaged with questions of empire, our imperial homeland, and the silences it necessitates. The Muslim Americans who traveled to what I came to call “Islam in America” events – fundraisers, conferences, exhibitions, and workshops – unanimously expressed to me (behind closed doors) nuanced, sophisticated, at times radical notions of geopolitics, surveillance, and inclusion, ideas far more pithy than the ones often being generated from the very organizations of which they were proud members.

It is this gap that I explore here. This project is about the silences necessitated by empire, about the agentival capacity of those positioned at once inside the heart of our 'imperial homeland' and yet inherently alien to it. Ultimately, this is how I've come to terms with my sense of alienation in the field. In an age of rampant Islamophobia, unbridled xenophobia, and
colorblind racism within the borders of the U.S., wars and drone strikes echo our American nativism abroad. How can we not expect to feel alienation, ambiguity, and isolation?
CHAPTER 2: “EVERYTHING I DO IS BEING WATCHED”: HYPERVERSIBILITY AND THE ISLAMOSCOPIC REGIME

“This is the politically visible, that horizon of actors, objects, and events that constitute the worldview and circumscribed reality of the political emergency zone – the gathered and linked components of crises.” (Feldman 1997: 28)

“Repeat after me: Oh God, Ya Allah, Ya Allah, Ya Allah. Oh God, make light in my heart. Make light in my vision. Make light in my hearing. Make light to my right. Make light to my left. Make light before me. Make light behind me. Make light in my nerves, in my flesh, in my blood, in my hair, in my skin, on my tongue. Oh God, bless me with light. May we all be blessed with light and may we shine that light in our various ways in these dark and perplexing times.”

-Imam Zaid Shakir, 9/11 ten year memorial, Washington, D.C.

“There's no such thing as bad press,” Aadam told me as I joined him and his wife for lunch at an ISNA regional conference in Cincinnati. I had been conversing with the late-20s, South Asian American couple about the post-9/11 fascination with Muslims in U.S. culture. Aadam had finished describing to me how, after 9/11/2001, Qurans were sold out and backordered at bookstores, university classes about Islam were overenrolled, and “one news show or another had some segment trying to explain who Muslims were.” It was a trend that had been described to me by many IRO members before Aadam as well. People were keenly aware of the heightened interest in exactly who Muslims are, culturally, politically, ethnically. “To an
extent, it's like knowing Muslims – knowing Muslim culture – is a way to know why these terrible things happened,” he told me. His words echoed what Abu Lughod has called the “consistent resort to the cultural,” a peculiar sense that understanding Muslims as a cultural and religious group would expose the reasons behind Islamist terrorism (Abu-Lughod 2002: 784).

IRO members were ever-aware that the public curiosity about Muslim culture has become “more urgent than exploring the history of the development of repressive regimes in the region and the U.S. role in this history” (ibid). The IRO members I met were conscious of the intensified interest in Muslim culture and identity, often times even celebrating elements of this interest as a chance to promote a positive image of Islam to the general population.

It has become a commonplace in scholarship to understand the experiences of Arab Americans and Muslims since 9/11 as markedly hypervisible (Alsultany 2006). The presence of Muslims in the news and entertainment media, university curricula, literature, and visual art has undeniably increased alongside the rise of Islamophobia. There is overarching evidence that Muslim Americans are hypervisible subjects, victims (or, in some cases, beneficiaries) of excessive scrutiny resulting from exactly the type of cultural curiosity described by Abu-Lughod. This cultural hypervisibility does not stand alone; the massive surveillance apparatus that often selectively targets Muslims through the logics of 'terrorism prevention' intensifies Muslim hypervisibility. In this way, we might speak of Muslim American hypervisibility as reinforced on two different, yet connected levels: on the level of popular culture and social imaginary, and on a state-based, institutional level.

Foucault's essay on Panopticism encapsulates a specific way in which this hypervisibility is experienced (Foucault 1977). Panopticism allows a few to discreetly keep watch over many, much the way institutional Islamophobia has allowed surveillance of whole communities
by an elite cadre of viewers (in the NSA, FBI, or NYPD, for instance). Yet Panopticism alone
does not entirely describe the nature of the hypervisibility of those thought to be Muslim in the
U.S. Indeed, while a few have been called upon to monitor a large population of Muslims
(described in my discussion of surveillance below), there is a concurrent sense that the many are
watching the few. In other words, “America” at large has a watchful eye on a minority
population of Muslims (and those thought to be Muslim). Because of the cultural curiosity
described above, everyone is interested in Muslims. For instance, many IRO members from New
York City repeatedly referenced the MTA campaign urging citizens to report suspicious activity
(the infamous “If you see something, say something” posters that graced subway platforms and
bus stops) as a way in which the general population has been called upon to exercise a form of
surveillance, presumably over those thought to be Muslim. The abundance of mainstream
television shows featuring Muslims and Arabs, such as The West Wing or Homeland speak to
this generalized curiosity and fascination with Muslims. Thus, the hypervisibility of U.S.
Muslims is both Panoptic and synoptic. At once monitored by those specifically tasked to
investigate America’s Islamic presence and by those civilians who are curious or suspicious
about “the Muslim next door,” the spotlight on U.S. Muslims is inescapable.
TABLE 2: HYPERVERSIBILITITES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PANOPTIC</th>
<th>SYNOPTIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• NYPD surveillance on mosques and MSA’s</td>
<td>• Fiction literature about Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Warrantless wiretapping</td>
<td>• Incidents of airport discrimination; “flying while Muslim”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• FBI infiltration of mosques</td>
<td>• News programs about Islam and Muslims</td>
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That 9/11 was the moment that ushered in – or at least intensified—this this hypervisibility is no small coincidence, given the magnitude of the spectacular media event that Tuesday morning. The events that followed 9/11 have been equally spectacular. Recalling Debord, this spectacle was not simply a visual presentation, but a worldview and a presentation of social relationships (1977). In the years that followed 9/11, skeptics’ demands that we “view” the body of bin Laden, the photograph of Saddam Hussein defeated, stripped down to his underwear, the terrifying scenes of torture on the bodies of Iraqi men in Abu Ghraib: the logics of the aftermath of 9/11 have been inextricable from the traffic in widely-proliferated images, with the racially and sexually marked Muslim body front and center (Puar 2007). What Feldman has called a “scopic regime” (Feldman 1997) has dominated the post-9/11 obsession with locating the terrorist – domestically and abroad, synoptically and panoptically. In this regime, “power lies in the totalizing, engorged gaze over the politically prone body, and subjugation is encoded as exposure to this penetration” (29).

I attend here to the ways visibility figures prominently in the representational strategies assembled by IRO’s. I ask in this chapter, what is the nature of the scopic regime, both as it exists
on structural and institutional levels and as it is experienced in the embodied and representational practices of IRO members? I consider the role of hypervisibility both as it acts upon U.S. Muslims and the ways in which IRO's respond to this inescapable exposition. A singular focus on either the apparatus of surveillance of Muslims, the cultural curiosity about Muslims, or the reactions of Muslim Americans to their hypervisibility overlooks the important imbrications of each of these concerns. A scopic regime that lays bare, through a coexisting Panoptic and synoptic gaze over potential terrorists, is only a part of a larger picture. The modalities through which IRO members navigate their position by leveraging hypervisibility is in fact also part of the regime itself. The coexistence of the disciplinary gaze over Muslims and the responses assembled by Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians are part of this Islamoscopic regime.

The hypervisibility of Muslim Americans, I argue, is not simply the context for IRO strategies of representation. Instead, Muslim hypervisibility is a foundational concern that has given rise to a representational stance that capitalizes on this 'spotlight' through a particular project of respectability and Islamophilia. This is an embodied process in which race and gender figure centrally. I consider here the interplay between the intense, Janus-faced gaze of Islamophobia and Islamophilia and the consequent responses to hypervisibility. I also consider the ways in which the xenophobic othering of Muslims in the social imaginary renders Muslims invisible while hypervisible: IRO messaging has repeated the claim that Muslims remain an 'invisible' minority U.S. group, that their concerns around civil rights and exclusion do not figure in public discourse as prominently as those of other, more 'established' minority groups. In this way, IRO members shift between feeling ever-exposed, subject to academic, cultural, and political curiosity, and hidden, excluded from popular understandings of race and difference.

First, the chapter examines the interplay between the various forms of positive and
negative hypervisibility. Negative hypervisibility has intensified on a cultural level – that of media representations and social imaginary – as well as on a structural and institutional level – embedded into the very logics of the post-9/11 U.S. surveillance state. The chapter then looks at the ways positive hypervisibility has been a significant, and unexpected, consequence of the post-9/11 backlash. Curiosity about Islam and Muslims includes earnest, well-intentioned attempts to understand a group that has, through the logics of Islamophobia, been demonized. In this way, cultural production such as film and literature and multicultural efforts such as Ramadan solidarity-iftars and 'hijab'-days intensified the hypervisibility of Muslims in the decade following 9/11/2001. The section on positive hypervisibility also considers the ways IRO members seize upon the Islamophobic moment as a profound opportunity for self-representation. I use my fieldwork as a springboard for a discussion of the ways in which Muslim hypervisibility involves a constant negotiation between the Islamophobic milieu and the agentive capacity of those 'representatives' who use Islamophilia to enact positive hypervisibility.

Next, I turn to the gendered body as a specific site of Muslim hypervisibility. Because fear of terrorism is deployed in ways that are often deeply visual, the marked Muslim body is of central concern for both Islamophobes and Islamophiles. The Muslim body becomes a central vehicle both for marking the terrorist threat and for representing Muslim respectability and dignity. I consider IRO members' responses, as well as the specific ways the Muslim woman's body becomes an intensified locus of these embodied politics.

I then attend to the paradoxical nature of Muslim American hypervisibility. By considering the ways IRO members see themselves as outside of conventional U.S. understanding of race and difference, I suggest that Muslim hypervisibility exists alongside a tangible and enduring invisibility. The ways in which categories such as “Asian American,”
“African American,” or “Latino” are understood as prominent in discussions of race seemed often to frustrate IRO members, who do not see “South Asian,” “Arab American,” or “Muslim” equally integrated into mainstream racial discourse. In spite of – or perhaps because of – Muslim hypervisibility, IRO members articulate a feeling of exclusion from dialogues about multiculturalism and race.

The chapter ends with an exploration of the role of academia, the social sciences in particular, as another mechanism of surveillance of U.S. Muslims. IRO members repeatedly remarked that intellectual curiosity about U.S. Muslims was, even in its liberal/sympathetic forms, a part of the apparatus that observes, monitors, and exposes Muslims to the powers-that-be and the population at-large. Academia, then, is part of both the Panoptic and synoptic experience of U.S. Muslims. My presence in the field itself was often used as a deliberate exemplification of the role of academic curiosity as part of an overarching structure that renders Muslims open to examination. Indeed, several times an IRO member would say – in the middle of an otherwise pleasant conversation - “Who knows, maybe even you’re an FBI informant!”

The phrase “everything we do is being watched” was uttered with as much frequency as the other oft-mentioned chapter titles in this dissertation. The chapter that follows explores the ways in which rendering Muslim Americans ‘politically visible’ for the purposes of preventing terrorism is a multilayered process that invokes agency, racial formation, gender and sexuality, and the politics of the gaze. Hardly passive victims under these regimes of rendering visible, IRO members and leaders use the spotlight to create an image that, it is hoped, will shatter the very Islamophobic gaze upon which it seized. This process is not de-politicized. I begin, in the pages that follow, to explore the ways in which projecting a positive image is a fraught act, much the way the “politics of respectability” that have been espoused for African Americans inherently
rest upon problematic notions of responsibility, dignity, and class. What, I ask, are the stakes of the representational politics that IRO members use to subvert or reclaim the Islamophobic spotlight? Who, if anyone, benefits from leveraging positive hypervisibility?

Hypervisibilities and U.S. Muslims

IRO members were immediately aware of the ways the events of 9/11 would place an extra burden on U.S. Muslims to represent themselves favorably. The politics of Islamophilia described in Chapter 4 are a clear exemplification of this awareness. The IRO focus on self-representation and respectability described below is critical. It is at the nexus of an overpowering, often crippling, cultural and political apparatus of Islamophobia and the agentive capacity of select U.S. Muslims to respond to this Islamophobia. In this section, I consider the ways IRO members deliberately enact a representational politics that is a response to negative hypervisibility and an enactment of positive hypervisibility. I reflect here upon the ways a singular focus on “Islamophobia” erases the vibrant interplay between positive and negative hypervisibility.

By negative hypervisibility, I mean the ways in which Muslim populations have been thrust into physical visibility, placed under a magnifying glass, as potential terrorists and anti-American al-Qaeda sympathizers. According to the logics of Islamophobia, to locate the Muslim visually is to know the enemy. To mark Muslims in this way requires a process of spectacle, a voyeuristic, terrified fascination with “our” Muslim population. As such, Muslim hypervisibility mirrors the ways in which the attacks on the Twin Towers were heavily broadcast and circulated – images of them dominate visual imagery in news and entertainment media and fill the U.S. public with a sense of terror and dread, a rising fear that their homeland is at the cusp of a
permanent, destructive transformation. For Aretxaga, these visual elements bring terror to life: they embody an otherwise abstract notion of terror on movie screens and through news broadcasts (Aretxaga 2002). Speaking of the media coverage of the 9/11 attacks, she says that “the very familiarity of the scene, already seen in popular Hollywood disaster movies, made reality unreal and shocking. It was not that a terrorist attack on the U.S. was unimaginable; it had in fact been imaged to satiety in films like Independence Day. Not only had the imaginary of a disaster saturated public culture with apocalyptic anxieties during the last decade, but so too had filled the imagination of the United States Department of State” (140). Susan Buck-Morss describes the events of 9/11/2001 as a spectacle different from other global events of destruction, as it was “a mute act, played and replayed, before a global audience” (Buck-Morss 2003):23.

The ideological effects – perhaps the purpose – of the hypervisual rendering of 9/11 and its aftermath are undeniable. Color-coded terror alerts remind travelers of the potentiality of imminent violence, and the image of an unattended backpack on a train platform becomes a ubiquitous symbol for a terror plot. 9/11, says Corey Robin, has given rise to an entirely new mode of political fear (Corey 2004). Kumar describes the massive manipulation of public opinion that was enabled by rendering 9/11 one of the most-viewed spectacles in history (Kumar 2012). The mainstream news media stands alongside Hollywood and television as part of the apparatus contributing to the notion that Homeland Security and law enforcement protect America from barbarian hordes. Thus, the heavy trafficking in images mobilizes patriotism and compassion for American suffering, what Achcar calls a “compassionate narcissism” that results from the most-ever viewed broadcast event (Achcar 2002). The 9/11 media coverage was “overdramatized,” says Achcar, “the result of deliberate action by media” in a spectacular world described by Guy Debord (24). While images of anti-American Muslims cheering at the
spectacle of the collapse of the Twin Towers circulated heavily, American patriots could then
vengefully cheer at the spectacle of Afghani defeat (Achcar). This imagery is not neutral or
objective. In addition to the 1,000 words contained in a single photo are the myriad factors that
decide which images will be proliferated. While most Americans can easily recall images of the
“jumpers” of 9/11 – those who desperately leapt from the flaming towers – few can conjure the
image of a flag-draped soldier’s coffin returning from Iraq.

A permanent state of exception summoned by terror is constructed through a violent
spectacle, a kind of scene that is readily viewed and consumed by a captive U.S. audience.
Aretxaga’s compelling claim speaks to the overwhelming trafficking in images – images of the
Muslim body, specifically – that prop up both Islamophobia and Islamophilia. Ground Zero as a
scene and the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims as archetypal characters bring to life the apocalyptic
dread of terror using age-old media tropes as a foundation. This spotlight is distinctly politicized
and empowers the state in its project of Islamophobia. Thus, negative hypervisibility is not a
cultural phenomenon alone, nor is it isolated in representations in film or television. Instead, this
hypervisibility is part of a larger apparatus of legitimizing the institutional demonization of
Muslims. The images of Palestinian children allegedly celebrating the events of 9/11/2001 in the
streets were broadcast on U.S. media in the days following the attacks. The result, of course, was
a visual portrayal of the savagery and heartlessness of Palestinians (and by extension, Arabs and
Muslims), vivid evidence of the formidable brutality of the enemy at hand. Nearly a decade after
the images of Palestinians celebrating U.S. death had circulated widely, NPR news analyst Juan
Williams made the following remarks while appearing on The O’Reilly Factor, “Look, Bill, I’m
not a bigot. You know the kind of books I’ve written about the civil rights movement in this
country. But when I get on a plane, I got to tell you, if I see people who are in Muslim garb and I
think, you know, they are identifying themselves first and foremost as Muslims, I get worried. I get nervous.’’ It was clear – visual cues have become central to identifying the Muslim threat.

The politics of the gaze have been critical in locating potential threats to homeland security. Policing strategies since 9/11 have focused increasingly on the “homegrown” threat – the notion that the next major terrorist attack will come not from a foreign entity but from American Muslims (Aaronson 2013). Because the imagined-terrorist may be from among ‘us,’ the clear ideological demarcation of an identifiable enemy becomes critical. We may not know where the War on Terror is fought, but certainly we can picture against whom it is fought. As Maira points out, the state actually needs the “bad” Muslim to justify its assault on Muslim civil liberties and to justify foreign policy in the Muslim world. If these “bad” Muslims are “not visible, it [the state] must call them into being to prove the threat to national security” (Maira 2009: 640).

On an institutional level, the surveillance of Muslim communities has been an overarching dimension of negative hypervisibility. The USA PATRIOT Act, as Hing describes, allowed wiretaps and searches without the demonstration of probable criminal conduct if “the target is an agent of foreign power (Hing 2006: 198). This clause was reinforced by a 2002 ruling by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court of Review, which ruled that the PATRIOT Act granted to the Department of Justice authority to conduct wiretaps and other forms of surveillance on terrors suspects in the U.S. The PATRIOT Act also expanded surveillance powers by granting federal agents the power to clandestinely search private records, residences, and workplaces with minimal oversight or approval (Cainkar and Maira 2005). The “sneak and peek” provision of the PATRIOT Act rendered visible to intelligence agencies the private contents of Muslim homes. This clause allows law enforcement to clandestinely search private premises
without the occupant's knowledge or permission based upon 'suspicion,' a term that indicates vast
discretion on the part of authorities. At an IRO event in Queens, a civil rights lawyer warned
attendees that “suspicion” could include having a tapestry from Pakistan hanging on the wall or
having recordings of Quranic recitation. In 2011, revelations that the NYPD had been
systematically spying not only on mosques, but on Muslim bookstores, cafes, and restaurants
caught even mainstream media attention (Kumar 2012). With training from the CIA, the NYPD
“Demographics Unit” obtained information for a ‘human mapping program’ that was purported
to prevent another terrorist attack. That the NYPD had done this outside of its jurisdiction – for
instance, in Newark, New Jersey – led to concerns about the legal limits of “anti-terrorism”
measures. A somewhat public discussion was catalyzed nearly a decade after 9/11 about the
systemic violations of Muslim and Arab privacy.

The NYPD’s mapping program, revelatory though it was, was not the first such attempt
for law enforcement to involve itself in anti-terror measures and tracking Muslim populations.
The failed LAPD plan to physically map out Muslim enclaves epitomized the central role of the
visibility of Muslims. A veritable Panopticon, the LAPD’s 2007 proposed mapping plan would
help identify potentially radicalized individuals by locating where Pakistanis, Iranis, and
Chechens lived. This plan followed the logics of much of the terrorism-prevention measures
taken by the NYPD and FBI, identifying not current terrorists but those likely to become
radicalized (Aaronson 2013; Kumar 2012). Yet what was key about the LAPD plan was that it
sought to use mapping as its main method to identify these potential radical Islamic enclaves.
The plan would locate those Muslim communities that were isolated from “greater society” and
mark them as those potential sites of radicalization. Their isolation from the mainstream – to be
exposed through the mapping scheme – apparently labeled them as potential terrorists. This
visual marking of isolation as threat, then, explains the larger strategy of mainstreaming and proximity that IRO’s have adopted to combat accusations of radicalization. The above incident is part of a massive surveillance apparatus that has sought to mark the U.S. Muslim dissident. Feldman has argued that projects “of surveillance regulate movement between spaces and created a spatialized social life mediated by rigid and normative geographies (1997: 64). The LAPD example is one such way in which the politically exposed body of the suspected terrorist is regulated through a multilayered network of surveillance mechanisms. (It is no small coincidence that the notorious Islamophobe David Yerushalmi – a vocal opponent of the “Ground Zero mosque” – worked with David Gaubatz on a “Mapping Shari’a in America” campaign which has collected extensive data on U.S. mosques tying them to ‘Islamic racialism.’)

What Kumar calls preemptive prosecution – the use of agents provocateurs to incite Muslims to terrorists acts they may otherwise not commit – is a dominant strategy resting on the assumption of an innate Muslim proclivity for violence (2012). Aaronson describes this strategy in great depth in his Terror Factory (2013), which claims that the FBI uses paid informants to create terror plots it then uncovers, claiming them as victory in the war against terrorism. It is this strategy of surveillance and policing, both by intelligence and law enforcement agencies, that reminds IRO members that they are being watched. In the field, I was told time and again that whichever convention, conference, or fundraiser we were at had “at least one spy” present. Another circulating rumor was that the FBI had an official policy of having “at least one spy at every jummah” prayer in order to record the sermon.” Others told me they took clicks and interference on phone calls as evidence that their phones had been tapped. In a phone

6 Congregational Friday prayers.
conversation with Linah about an upcoming fundraiser by an organization called American Muslims for Palestine, she joked, “Oh, we said Palestine. I’m sure some recording device just clicked on.” The abundance of such jokes struck me as evidence of just how deeply aware of their surveillance IRO members are.

While the aforementioned institutional surveillance of Muslims encapsulates the Panoptic experience of Muslim hypervisibility, by which those in an official capacity are granted unchecked access to view American Muslims, the popular surveillance and curiosity about Muslim Americans constitutes the synoptic monitoring of Muslim Americans. In this configuration, anyone can be a hero in the fight against terrorism, and all are asked to be diligent in detecting suspicious activity. (Most notably, the 2010 attempted car-bombing of New York City was intercepted by a Muslim street vendor. Muslims celebrated this as evidence that Muslims themselves could be diligently tasked with keeping the country safe. Law enforcement and official discourse hailed this as evidence that Islamophobia had nothing to do with the “see something, say something” campaign.) Thus tasked, the general population internalizes its cues of what constitutes reasonable suspicion, hardly race-neutral. Muslim (and those mistakenly thought to be Muslim) bodies carry cues, through their skin color, garb, stature, gender expression, and posture that let the synoptic apparatus know whether or not they are dangerous. IRO members were familiar with the results of a 2006 Gallup Poll that recorded widespread discomfort in the U.S. toward Muslims as neighbors and airline passengers. Juan Williams’ comments about anxiety over Islamic-looking airplane passengers were less an anomaly and more a reflection of widespread sentiment about easily-identifiable Muslims. Terms like “flying while brown” or “flying while Muslim” crept into my fieldwork conversations with alarming frequency, signaling an exceptional awareness among IRO members that they were being
watched by airline officials, TSA employees, and fellow travelers all at once.

If the traffic in images is at the foundation of the Islamophobia apparatus, a similar leveraging of imagery guides IRO responses: Islamophilia is as spectacular as Islamophobia. What I call ‘positive hypervisibility’ is part of the Islamophilic response to Islamophobia and offers seemingly affirming representations of U.S. Muslims. The term refers to both popular representations, including art, news media, and entertainment, as well as Muslim cultural production in the context of IRO’s as well. Positive hypervisibility emanates from within Muslim advocacy groups and the mainstream media apparatus. To attend to negative hypervisibility of Muslims in the U.S. without considering the capacity of Muslims to respond overlooks a critical site in the contemporary multicultural landscape. The prominent display of American flags at mosques and at Muslim businesses and homes was one such response. “Amid all the flag-waving, the nationalist fervor, and the growing anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant sentiment, Arab, Muslim, and South Asian communities have engaged in a strategic adaptation, a cultural and political accommodation. Many of them have seized the American flag as their own, waving it more fervently, and indeed, preemptively, embracing the flag as a shield,” says Ahmad of the post-9/11 politics of representation (Ahmad 2002: 110).

In fact, IRO’s enjoy a remarkable space that has been opened up by the Islamoscopic regime. IRO members and leaders alike have used the cultural space that is now devoted to Muslims to project a positive image. This space was often described to me as a silver lining of Islamophobia, a chance to disrupt dominant narratives through active, deliberate self-representation. For IRO members, the terrifying hypervisibility of Islamophobia became an opportunity to make Islam a prominent, welcome presence in the U.S. As one conference attendee told me in the field, “If the spotlight is on us, that just means it's our time to shine.” This
attitude has given rise to myriad Islamophilic strategies that capitalize on the synoptic reality faced by Muslim Americans. If they are to be placed under a microscope for the American public, then they had certainly better be on their best behavior. In *The Muslims Are Coming!* (2013), a group of Muslim-American comedians tour middle America. Viewers laugh both at the jokes told by the comedians and at the relative ignorance or hostility of Americans in the South. In the film, John Stewart remarks upon the experience of Muslim hypervisibility as an opportunity, saying “What a great moment for Muslims, because everyone’s eyes are upon you. When eyes are upon you, that’s when people see you as human.”

I spoke at length with a young man who designed and silkscreened “Islamic” themed t-shirts which he then sold at IRO events. With phrases like “Frisk me, I'm Muslim,” “Make chai, not war,” and “Suspicious package” in bright colors and an eye-catching design aesthetic, Hijab-Man (the popular nickname he assumes at these conventions) told me that he felt these t-shirts pointed to the silliness of Islamophobia and showed the world that Muslims don't take themselves too seriously. Hijab-Man isn't the only one selling quirky t-shirts poking fun at Islamophobia or proudly (and humorously) proclaiming a Muslim identity. I saw one shirt that said “Jumma” (the word that denotes both Friday as well as the Muslim congregational Friday prayer) in the same logo as popular sportswear line “Puma” and another that said “Don’t Panic – I’m Muslim.” Spoofing the “keep calm and carry on” line was a “keep calm and avoid haraam” t-shirt. Another shirt had the letters “FBI” across the front, with the phrase “Forever a Believer in Islam” written underneath. One especially remarkable shirt had the image of an Israeli bulldozer on the front accompanied by the caption “You’d throw rocks, too.” I was struck, time and again, by how rapidly these shirts sold at several booths throughout the convention bazaar, especially to high school and college-age Muslim youth. While the expansive bazaar was always bustling,
there was a special energy around the successful t-shirt booths. One vendor would be taking orders standing atop a table yelling “Who's next? What size?”, while another (both usually young men) would handle the cash transactions. I talked to several customers at the t-shirt booths about the special appeal of these humorous or politicized t-shirts. I wondered why, in a sprawling bazaar selling terrific artwork, food, and apparel, the Islamic t-shirt booths seemed to always be a favorite, especially among young attendees. “I love wearing these t-shirts in public,” a member of Muslim Youth of North America told me. “They're hilarious and eye-catching. You see, everyone can already tell I'm a young Muslim woman because of my hijab. They probably are already looking at me extra close. Well, now at least I've given them something to laugh about.” Interestingly, one young Syrian woman with blonde hair and blue eyes who didn't wear a hijab offered a contrary explanation. “Don’t I just look like a white girl?” she joked. “Things like this allow me to signal to the world that I’m Muslim. They might not be able to tell otherwise.”

Similar sentiments prevailed about the potential for “good press” through manipulation of Muslim hypervisibility. A 28-year old Pakistani-American woman at a Chicago conference revealed to me that her reasons for deciding to wear a hijab had less to do with any theological compulsion and more to do with the sociopolitical positioning of U.S. Muslims. “I started wearing a hijab a year after 9/11,” she told me, “and it's something I had never expected to do before then. But I realized that – hey, I'm a good person. I'm polite and courteous. I've got strong family values. I'm an educator. If I put a hijab on my head, it signals to the rest of the country that Muslims can be these things, too.” One of the most common, oft-repeated slogans encapsulating positive hypervisibility went, “You might be the only Muslim someone ever

7 MYNA is a youth organization within ISNA, run by and serving Muslim youth between the ages of 12 and 18.
meets.” Hijab-Man put it most succinctly when he said that combating Islamophobia “is about the people you don’t know. The answer is engaging people, hanging out with people. Going to a soup kitchen. After 9/11, people started considering careers they wouldn’t have before, careers as filmmakers and artists. This is a chance to represent Islam favorably.”

At the time of this writing, Pharrell Williams' song, *Happy*, was a hit; communities were making viral videos and posting them on YouTube. One such video was called *Happy British Muslims*, and it featured Muslims of all stripes in England. Black, white, South Asians, men, women (hijab-clad and non-veiled) danced and sang along to the song. Muslims, the video suggested, are diverse, festive, and modern. Most importantly, they are happy.

The video went viral and sparked a mini-controversy among Muslims in the U.K. and the U.S. In a sermon, Mufti Abdur Rahman ibn Yusuf asked about the implications of this video: women, some of them not in hijab, dancing; dancing, which itself is deemed *haram* (forbidden) by most Islamic conventions. “They want to do something because they see a plight, they see a problem. They want to rectify it. But the best in action, is by who did the most correct action according to the shariah. It's not controversial. It's not in the grey area, and it's not haraam. And secondly, it's sincere…Any act that you do, that's for the sake of Islam, it needs to be sincere and it needs to be correct and valid. Jumping up and down, to music, how much happiness does it give somebody? How much happiness does it give you? Is the serious-minded really going to understand this as happiness? … This is what I see here. We are playing into the stereotype. The stereotype is that Muslims aren't happy because they don't jump around and have a good time…Is it like, you can't enjoy life if you don't do that *haraam* stuff?...It's perspective. What is this going to give us? What kind of beauty of Islam does this show? That we can jump around? Is this not the other extreme of terrorism? You've got some people going to the extreme to kill people in the
name of Islam? And then you have some people going to the opposite end of the spectrum to show the beauty of Islam? Is that just not a counter to extremism? I'm sure that's why it was done...There has been so much condemnation for this online. All you need is another dastardly act and this will all be washed out. We need to be providing positive, long-lasting dawah. One of those acts [of terrorism], and you think dancing is going to make a difference? This is just to make us think – how can this be halal? Dancing is not permissible” (Yusuf 2014). The sermon uses orthodox Islamic conventions in condemning the project of positive hypervisibility enacted in the video, but condemns it nevertheless.

“I had nothing to do with 9/11,” a middle-aged Bangladeshi American man said during a town-hall style “know your rights” workshop in Queens. “But the price I pay for being Muslim during this time is that I have to be extra polite, extra courteous. Even when I’m in a rush, you know, I hold the door for somebody. I offer my seat on the train. This is the price we must pay for being Muslim during this time.” I heard his argument time and again – that hypervisibility placed a burden upon Muslims to be on their best behavior, to be ambassadors for Islam.

Speaking with Sophia in Cincinnati at an ISNA event, I was reminded that projecting a positive image was tiring. “You know, sometimes, because I wear a hijab and am visibly Muslim, I am always, always conscious of how I’m behaving. If my son is throwing a tantrum at a mall, the way I react to it is being monitored by all the shoppers. They’re thinking – will she spank him? Will she allow him to throw this tantrum? And yes, I live in a Republican, probably racist, part of Ohio. I’m on watch. Sometimes, you know, it starts controlling parts of my life, having to show non-Muslims that we’re good people.” Samina told me after an ISNA event, “Everyone has to do

8 Calling people to Islam.
their own PR campaign. It’s really weird. I don’t know if this happens to you. But if I’m in a place where I have a choice to open a door for somebody or not, I’ll err toward opening the door. Not because I feel courteous but because I’m like, this white person is watching me. And if I open the door for them, it’s like one more point for Muslims. It’s weird to have to think that way. And in the back of my head, there’s this mental process. Little things, hold the elevator door or don’t hold it. Maybe if it’s a brown, Muslim person, I’d be like whatever. But if it’s a white person…you may be the Muslim person they see. Little things like that.”

The story of Rais Bhuiyan became ubiquitous at IRO events. Bhuiyan, a Bangladeshi-American Muslim man, was the victim of a hate crime in the aftermath of 9/11. After his shooter, Mark Stroman, received a death sentence in a Texas courtroom, Bhuiyan waged a tireless campaign to protect his attacker from the death penalty. Before his 2011 execution, Stroman vocally renounced his white supremacist beliefs and commended Bhuiyan's compassionate Islam. In a Dallas news op-ed, Bhuiyan wrote,

“I am requesting that Stroman’s death sentence be commuted to life in prison with no parole. There are three reasons I feel this way. The first is because of what I learned from my parents. They raised me with the religious principle that he is best who can forgive easily. The second is because of what I believe as a Muslim, that human lives are precious and that no one has the right to take another’s life.

9 Samina’s statement was curious to me, as it presumes Muslims to be non-white. Furthermore, it presumes that there’s a racial dimension to this hypervisibility: one must be on their best behavior for the watchful eyes of white Americans. Other racial groups did not figure in Samina’s statement, and before I could engage her on that topic, our conversation had moved on to another topic.
In my faith, forgiveness is the best policy, and Islam doesn’t allow for hate and killing. And, finally, I seek solace for the wives and children of Hasan and Patel [footnote], who are also victims in this tragedy. Executing Stroman is not what they want, either. They have already suffered so much; it will cause only more suffering if he is executed.

The other victims in this tragedy are Stroman’s children. Not only have the Hasan and Patel children lost their fathers, but, if Stroman is executed, his children will lose their father, as well.

I forgave Stroman many years ago. In fact, I have never hated him. I never hated America for what happened to me. I believe he was ignorant and not capable of distinguishing between right and wrong; otherwise, he wouldn’t have done what he did. I think about him waiting in a cell to be executed and can feel the pain of how ignorance can be driven by such hate and cause somebody like him to murder two innocent people.” (Bhuiyan 2011)

Bhuiyan’s campaign of forgiveness was celebrated and publicized by IRO leaders and members alike. “See, when you want revenge, you miss the point. We have a tremendous opportunity to forgive our oppressors' ignorance, like Bhuiyan did,” an IRO member told me in the bazaar in 2012.

A recurrent opportunity for positive visibility was that of career choice for young Muslims. There was a consensus that “traditional” fields such as medicine, business, and engineering would do less for the American ummah than careers in journalism, the arts, social sciences, and entertainment. Many of the IRO members I met were first- or second-generation
immigrants from Asia who had benefited from 1965 immigration legislation. Because professionals and scientists were favored through this reform, the resulting Asian American professional class included many medical professionals and engineers who would then be referred to through problematic tropes of “model minority.” Many of these immigrants would encourage their children to pursue similar careers. Zareena Grewal writes, “those of us in the second generation were largely geared toward two career fields: medicine and engineering (even law school was considered risky). Anthropology and the other social sciences (“the sciences that don’t raise you,” as my father-in-law dubbed them) are particularly suspect because they are dangerously close to philosophy” (2013: 13). As a result, there was a sense of urgency around going to medical school among many of the Arab- and South Asian Americans I met through IRO’s. Ambreen, a Pakistani-American recent college graduate attending an Islamic convention, told me that she had not received high enough scores on the MCAT exam to be admitted to a U.S. medical school. She planned, instead, to study medicine in the Caribbean and later become accredited to practice medicine in the U.S. “I have to become a doctor. Yes, I love science and would love to treat people. But also, you know, this is why my parents came here. When I was born, my grandfather held me in his hands and told my father, ‘Ambreen will be somebody.’ For my dad, that meant a career in medicine. And I’m more than happy to honor my grandfather in that way.”

Yet what surfaced during my time in the field was that these traditional career choices, though described as ‘lucrative’ or ‘stable,’ would not help the newly-marginalized Muslim community. After my conversation with Ambreen, a very sarcastic Fahad asked me if I thought what she’d just said was ridiculous. “Ambreen will be somebody. What is that?! You’re so desperate to have the MD title after your name you’ll go study in the Bahamas or something? I
am sick of these desi people cloaking their status-based desires with some kind of noble bullshit. You know what I admire? What you’re doing. You’ve been probably broke, I guess, just because you love anthropology and studying human culture. That’s admirable.” Later during that convention, I had just explained to Sajid, an Indian-American civil engineer and father of three young boys from New Jersey, what exactly anthropology is after he inquired about my studies. “Ah, anthropology! Hamza Yusuf\textsuperscript{10} talks about anthropology. He said we should encourage our children to become anthropologists and sociologists, not doctors, doctors, doctors. So they can be part of the expert population.” In a panel discussion in 2012, one speaker joked, “All you people want your kids to be MD’s, because that stands for Money Doctor. None of you want your kids to be PhD’s – Poor Hungry Doctors.”

The popular attentiveness to Muslim comedians is one instance in which the impact of a non-traditional, highly visible career option became clear. The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour, for instance, featured two Palestinian-American, one Irani-American, and one Egyptian-American comedian poking fun at American Islamophobia. Taking on the special burdens of airline travel for Middle Easterners since 9/11, the public fascination with suicide bombing and terror alerts, and popular stereotypes about Arabs, the four comedians’ Comedy Central tour was a popular topic during my time in the field.

Obeidallah says he never felt like a Middle Easterner until after the September 11, 2001, attacks. Now, he says, he does his comedy ”not just for me.”

\textsuperscript{10} Hamza Yusuf is a popular Muslim American IRO speaker and founder of the Zaytuna College. He is also a white convert to Islam. For more on Yusuf, see Chapter 3.
"It's for my cousins, it's for my friends, it's for other Arabs and other people who get dirty looks or looked at funny because they have an accent or are viewed as suspicious simply because of their heritage," he says.

"We don't want to be defined any longer by the worst examples in our community, and it's a very small amount of people. There are a few terrorists and they define all of us."

(Dougherty 2007)

"Those Axis of Evil guys have done more to fight Islamophobia than any of our organizations – CAIR, ISNA, MPAC – than any of those organizations have done. They made people laugh. I thought they were funny. We need more people like that out there," Fahad told me between sessions at a convention. “See, it’s like Dave Chapelle,” said Linah. “He can talk about white privilege and people will listen. They’ll listen even more than if, like, Cornel West does it. Because Dave Chapelle is using humor. That’s what the Axis of Evil folks did. They used humor to point at the absurdity of this all. I know this isn’t a popular thing with immigrant Muslims, but we need to encourage our kids to maybe go into show business. Maybe telling good jokes will save more lives than being a surgeon, in a weird way.”

To this end, a noteworthy IRO-celebrity was a man named Azhar Usman, a South Asian-American lawyer-turned-comedian who was a highly sought-after figure at IRO events. After several years of practicing law, the towering, boisterous Usman would begin his career as a stand-up comic the same year as the events of September 11th, 2001. Usman’s shows consisted of both poking fun at South Asians for their cultural idiosyncrasies and also pointing out the ludicrousness of American anti-Muslim xenophobia. (Interestingly, Usman is also one of the co-
founders of the Nawawi Foundation, an organization whose goal is to help Muslims foster a distinct “American” culture. For more on the Nawawi Foundation, see Chapter 3.) “That Azhar Usman is so funny! He was at our mosque fundraiser once and he did his jokes, you know, and people were just in hysterics. We raised so much money that night,” said Anwar as he cradled his infant grandson in the convention bazaar. “And he’s just an American, you know?” chimed in his wife. “You see him, he has his topi and this long beard and, you know, everyone jokes that he looks like a terrorist. But he’s just like you. He’s an American kid. He gave up an amazing career as a lawyer to tell jokes to the American public and make them recognize Islam beyond media stereotypes.” “Okay,” Anwar added, “he took a risk leaving his career in law. But come on, I’m sure he’s making so much more money as a comedian. He’s a celebrity now!”

Journalism was yet another field that held a high premium in IRO discussions about combating Islamophobia. “Everyone keeps complaining that the media is anti-Muslim, that it’s racist, and that it portrays Muslims as fanatics. The media, the media, the media. Yet all those people would die if their son or daughter went into journalism, and they are all happy to pay for their kids to go to medical school. You know, at the end of the day you have no one to blame but yourself. If you hate the way the media portrays you, become part of the media and represent yourself,” said Saleha over lunch at an event in Queens. Her concern was echoed by several young people I met in the field who were studying journalism or were recent journalism graduates. “You know, I faced some resistance from my parents before becoming a journalist. They were upset with me. Okay, that’s an understatement. They were pissed. They felt that they’d sacrificed so much in coming to this country so that we would have opportunities, you know, to make money, basically. And that I was throwing that away by going into a field that was so uncertain, in which I’d likely spend a long time struggling. Partially, I think the reason they
came around – and this is tough to admit it – but they came around because I’m a girl. And they probably assume my main source of income will be a husband someday anyway, so to an extent they can worry less about what I do.” She went on to tell me that being a young adult reflecting on career choices in the aftermath of 9/11 led her to choose journalism. “I’m easily identifiable as a Muslim. Because of my name and my hijab. At the same time, you know, I went to really a reputable university with an amazing journalism program, I have an American accent. I think if I do become a broadcast journalist, which I hope to do, you know – I’ll put a different face on Islam for the viewing public. It’s not like I have to be reporting on Palestine or Iraq. Even a Muslim reporting on sports will make a difference in changing the popular perspective…Not that I plan to be a sportscaster or anything,” she smiled.

During a regional conference in Cincinnati, speaker Ameena Jandali repeatedly urged attendees to “support Muslim media. Whether it’s Horizons or the other media for our community. Thankfully, we now have some young Muslim writers contributing to Huffington Post or Salon. We have so many talented young people who are breaking out of engineering or medicine…We need people on TV who can talk in soundbytes, because they will just cut and paste what you say…be an ambassador for Muslims wherever you go. You know, you may be the only Muslim the other person will ever see. What you do will leave a lasting impression on others.” At the same conference, ISNA President Mohamed Magid said, “I hear a lot of Muslims say the media is depressing, I don’t deal with TV and radio. But we have to. We have to know what’s going on…I want to suggest that if you do good work, be consistent. People will come to know about it sooner or later. You don’t have to wait until the media is there; the media will come.”

Another popular calling for those concerned with self-representation was filmmaking.
Hijab-Man told me, “Maybe after 9/11, a lot of people started considering different careers. A lot of my peers have become filmmakers and artists. This is our generation.” Annual ISNA conventions typically include screenings of films by and about Muslims, especially U.S. Muslims, which gave me a chance to engage with ISNA members about the role of directors, producers, and actors in the age of Islamophobia. The prevalence of anti-Muslim stereotypes in film and on television prompted many IRO members to argue that becoming agents in this representational matrix was the key to eliminating these archetypes. While I discuss All American Muslim in Chapter 4, it is important to note here that the TLC reality show captured attention for portraying Muslims simply living their day-to-day lives rather than in some exceptional circumstances involving terrorism or homeland security. The show was a classic example of how positive representations of Muslims must be offered in the mainstream entertainment industry.

As such, career choices were continually referred to in relation to Muslim hypervisibility. As described above, traditional middle-class ambitions like medicine were disparaged by those who favored careers in the arts, entertainment, politics, or journalism. Yet there was a notable backlash among those in the medical field that they were, in fact, doing noble work. “Yes, we want our children to be doctors because it will be good for them professionally. But think about it, if someone named Muhammad or Ali performs heart surgery on you, saves your life, how could you continue to hate Muslims?” said an Indian-American woman whose two sons were in medical school. “Our sons and their wives are obviously Muslim; they follow Islamic dress code and have Islamic names. In a hospital setting, they are sure to observe their five prayers and fast during Ramadan. But they are also diligent and hard-working. They will be wonderful doctors, and everyone will have to take note that Muslims are here in America to serve and help others.”
Regardless of where IRO members stood on the “MD debate”, the visibility of Muslims was intertwined with career choice.

In the field, I was reminded of multicultural initiatives – both from within Muslim communities and among allies and civil rights activists – that leveraged visibility in their projects of inclusion. The abundance of “allegiance with Muslims” events such as the “Wear a Hijab/Turban Day” in Fremont (Eck 2007) were a peculiar site of hypervisibility, in which “allies” (often times white) marked themselves in the same way Muslims are marked in a show of solidarity. These events, in which young women wear a hijab, for instance, to oppose anti-Muslim sentiment, subvert the typical Islamophobic gaze reserved for Muslims. The reactions to these solidarity initiatives varied among IRO members, with some applauding the efforts of well-intentioned liberals and others comparing them to a racist appropriation of a symbol of piety. (“Ugh, hijab solidarity. Do these people put on blackface during African American History Month, too?” one IRO member remarked sharply.) Many college-aged IRO members spoke to me about their university Muslim Student Associations (MSA’s) Islam Awareness Weeks (IAW’s) as a prime example of positive hypervisibility. During Islam Awareness Week, MSA’s host campus-wide events, including film screenings, community dinners, panel discussions, and town hall meetings aimed at spreading awareness about Islam. Often times, these events physically transform the campus space – the call to prayer may be performed over loudspeaker, a makeshift ‘mosque’ may be constructed, or an existing MSA office decorated and opened to the campus community.

IRO members were sensitive about negotiating positive hypervisibility. This was exemplified in the so-called “Ground Zero mosque controversy,” discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. Overwhelmingly, IRO members thought the controversy around the proposed Islamic
center was evidence of Islamophobia and that Muslims certainly had every right to build the Islamic center in downtown Manhattan. Yet a focus on rights alone would obscure a larger issue that IRO members were grappling with: was it sensitive and appropriate for Muslims to build the Islamic center downtown? This uneasiness, most apparent in the Democracy Now! discussion between Tariq Ramadan and Moustafa Bayoumi, is a critical illustration of the burden of hypervisibility (2010). While both agree that Muslims have the right to build the Islamic center, Ramadan argues that Muslims ought to use the controversy to demonstrate a sensitivity to American culture at large and thus cancel the project. “We have to think about the symbol,” Ramadan says. “And my position is, if this is possible, that Muslims should think about not being instrumentalized in the whole process by political forces, but, say, understanding the collective sensitivity…” Over coffee, Samina told me something similar. “I very strongly disagree with the people who are saying Muslims can’t build a mosque near Ground Zero. That’s just straight up Islamophobia. But there were all those protests happening there, and people on both sides were showing up to show support or opposition. And I felt like maybe I should go but, I don’t know. I wear a hijab. I feel sad about the people who lost their lives there. I don’t know if people are ready for Muslims to be showing up en masse at these protests.”

It is by putting into conversation with each other the Panoptic/synoptic regime that demonizes and marks Muslims and the responses to this regime that a revelatory social dynamic is revealed. What does it mean, for instance, that the Islamic center in downtown Manhattan was seen as a controversial space for Muslim visibility, while appearing on stage as stand-up comics and in programs at film festivals was unanimously celebrated and encouraged in IRO discourse? Indeed, in arguing that Muslim Americans should seize the opportunity for visibility requires the construction of a subject suitable for visibility.
In a conversation with Nasreen at a regional conference in Cincinnati, she pointed at her headscarf, which was covered in the signature Burberry print. “People love to talk about Muslims who decided to no longer wear their hijab after 9/11. That kind of misses the point,” she told me. “I’m sure there were those who decided to do that. But a lot of us, like me, well—we kept our hijabs on but we *blinged them out!* I love me a good designer hijab, you know, with the Fendi or Chanel logo. It tells people I’m Muslim, sure, but at the same time it lets people know that you know, Muslims aren’t backward or sloppy or anything.” She was right: IRO conventions were spectacular in their array of designer hijabs and handbags on display. The contours of class, respectability, and consumer power are made explicit in her statement. Nasreen’s remarks forced me to think about Muslim women in hijabs who do not choose, or more importantly cannot *afford*, to signal respectability in these ways. An acceptable hijabi, by this logic, necessitates exclusions along lines of class and aesthetics.

At the same Cincinnati conference, speaker Ameena Jandali spoke about the ways visibility needs to be carefully managed. “If you are involved in the media, be real. If you cannot speak well in front of a camera, do yourself a favor and get somebody else who can. We have so many talented young people who are breaking out of engineering or medicine. Get somebody else! We do more harm to our cause when we get on TV with a thick accent. I respect everybody, but we need to put the best people forward. We have those people.” A founder of the Islamic Network Group, Jandali speaks to the ways leveraging positive hypervisibility is anything but simple. Through an aversion to “thick accents,” for instance, the implicit xenophobia of the U.S. public is underscored. The Muslim that is suitable for the spotlight must be hand-picked in ways that are in line with acceptability. The liberal space for U.S. Muslim self-representation that has opened up in the wake of 9/11 requires U.S. Muslims to be deliberate in who is allowed in that
Thus, the politics of respectability are crucial in taking advantage of the silver lining that hypervisibility has offered IROs. On a lunch break at an Islamic convention in 2011 in Chicago, I was walking through a parking garage with Sarah, a young Indian-American lawyer who was, at the time, on maternity leave. “See the Mercedes and BMW’s?” she said, pointing to a row of cars in front of us. “If anyone wants to ask what we’ve contributed here, they just need to see the ISNA and ICNA bumper stickers on these cars. This is what American Islam looks like.” That American Islam “looks like” luxury cars and designer hijabs, or that these visuals can be leveraged in the creation of a “good Muslim” image, is not accidental. The politics of legitimizing Islam (described further in my chapter on Islamophilia) is not without its own exclusions.

That class hierarchies and xenophobia figured centrally in the negotiation of hypervisibility is critical in understanding the Islamoscopic regime. An overdetermining focus on only the negative media tropes and Islamophobic surveillance projects ignores the ways in which liberal discourses of inclusion and tolerance have been central to representational politics. My fieldwork was replete with examples of how IRO members feel they should manipulate the Islamophobic spotlight to promote a positive public image of Islam. The question arises: does leveraging positive hypervisibility eliminate Islamophobia? Or does it further entrench a good Muslim-bad Muslim binary, and deepen the impossibility of political critique?

The Gendered Body

As I explored the interplay between positive and negative hypervisibility, I came to understand the body as a central vehicle in the Islamoscopic regime. “I wear awesome underwear space.
when I travel,” Runna, a Palestinian-American from Michigan, told me. “You never know, that might be the time I get strip-searched. I gotta represent.” Runna's comical remarks are not unusual. The idea of *presentability* recurred in the field, with IRO members emphasizing fashion, hygiene, and weight as critical parts of fighting Islamophobia. Hypervisibility, then, is a deeply embodied experience – IRO members feel distinctly aware of their physical selves as both victims and agents in the Islamophobic milieu. Yet, once again, this process is two-sided: the Islamophobic apparatus itself has zeroed in on the body as a critical site in the war against terrorism. Feldman claims that the scopic regime “visually fixes and reduces its victims to manipulatable surfaces” and thus “can effectively derealize the body and the self” (48). It is noteworthy that this production of the body is an age-old Orientalist trope. The photographic documentation of the colonized body helps colonial powers generate a diseased colonial phantasm of the Orient (Alloula 1986). In Debord's spectacular society (1977), this documentation takes on a new scale and significance.

Specifically, as doubly ‘marked,’ the Muslim woman’s body carries an extra burden, functioning as an intensified locus of politics, as “women’s bodies are hyper-visual – focused on to be counted, battled over, and controlled” (Mohanty et al. 2008: 7). The “discourse of anti-terrorism,” Maira argues, “targets Muslim and Arab males but is also preoccupied with women’s bodies” (2009 632). As Puar notes, “the body must appear improperly racialized (outside the norms of multiculturalism) and perversely sexualized in order to materialize as the terrorist in the first place” (2007: 38). Between the cultural fascination (Puar cites a *South Park* episode) with Osama bin Laden's sexuality and the overwhelming obsession with the Muslim woman's veil, the gendered, sexualized marking of the Muslim body is part of the political and cultural marking of the body of the (non) terrorist. Puar and Rai demonstrate the ways in which “sexuality is central
to the creation of a certain knowledge of terrorism,” with dominant media representations inviting an “aggressive heterosexual patriotism” (2002: 117). Hirschkind and Mahmood consider 9/11 a turning point, after which the “burqa-clad body of the Afghan woman became the visible sign of an invisible enemy that threatens not only ‘us,’ citizens of the West, but our entire civilization” (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002: 341). They consider the fear of Islamic fundamentalism in the West as embedded in images: “women wearing headscarves (now, burqas) the cutting off of hands and heads, massive crowds praying in unison…” (348). That the fear of anti-Western embodied ways of being occur at the same time that Americans are told to be on watch for suspicious clues of terror, Hirschkind and Mahmood argue, is revelatory.

Hirschkind and Mahmood (2002) and Hamid Dabashi (2011) suggest that turning against Islam, particularly for Muslim women, fits within larger dynamics of inclusion and liberation. “A Muslim woman,” Hirschkind and Mahmood argue, “can either be one of two things, uncovered and therefore liberated, or veiled, and thus still, to some degree, subordinate” (353). Dabashi calls an intellectual class of former-Muslims “comprador intellectuals” and “native informers” who reassure the West that its project of military intervention is valid through demonstration of the oppression of women. Taking the place of the role formerly occupied by Western Orientalists, the native informers “have digested and internalized this language and now speak it with the authority of natives” (18).

Ayan Hirsi Ali, Azar Nafisi, and Irshad Manji are common examples cited in the work critiquing the role of these Muslim women apostates amidst the politics of empire (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002; Maira 2009; Dabashi 2011). Hirsi Ali, the Somali-Dutch feminist who openly criticizes Islam's gender dynamics and refers to Muhammad as pedophile, is vocally sympathetic to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and blames Islam for the backwardness of its
societies. In spite of having fabricated details about her life, including an alleged coercive arranged marriage, Ali has been celebrated in both Europe and the United States, where she now lives. A self-proclaimed advocate of free speech, Irshad Manji occupies a similar niche: critiquing traditional Islam publicly and lauding the West's progressiveness. Having appeared repeatedly on HBO, CNN, Fox, and the BBC, Manji is “paraded before [her] North American and Western European audiences” as a voice of dissent “against the innate and enduring barbarity of Islam” (Dabashi 2011: 17). “The testimonials of Muslim authors about salvation in the West also play a crucial, if less obvious, role in the politics of the US academy and contemporary culture wars” (Maira 2009: 649). The ensuing role of Muslim women in these dynamics of visibility rests upon notions of good and bad citizen, as Maira demonstrates, arguing that “classed imaginaries are often implicitly foregrounded in representations of Muslim women spokespersons in the media – often elite, generally elegant, and always portrayed as recognizable to American viewers – in contrast to the alien, sometimes bearded, often working-class Muslim and Arab immigrant men who speak in foreign accents and pose a threat to womanhood, there and here” (636).

This formulation advances a compelling claim in the politics of good and bad Muslim, arguing that the “good” Muslim is likely a liberated, unveiled woman who is capable of speaking out against the horrors of fundamentalist Islam. There is a special place, Kumar argues, for the “ex Muslim” in the politics of empire (2012). Yet my fieldwork adds a shade of nuance to this formulation, as IRO women considered themselves pious, often even orthodox, in their adherence to Islam. Additionally, many of them wore a hijab. My fieldwork, then, begs the question: what do we make of the “good” Muslim who has not been unveiled, but invokes her veil and piety as part of her claim to inclusion? My work suggests that we add to the good/bad
Muslim formulation a Muslim woman who is, perhaps, critical of the apostasy of Manji or Hirsi Ali yet not excluded from the problematic “good Muslim” category. Consider the example of Nasreen and her Burberry hijab. Hardly an apostate, and certainly quite proud of her decision to wear the hijab, she complicates the unveiled-liberated/veiled-oppressed binary. Instead, she uses her very veil to articulate a claim to inclusion.

What the veiled IRO member reveals is a space for a practicing Muslim woman as part of the U.S. landscape, an embodiment of the positive multicultural politics that exemplify U.S. exceptionalism. These multicultural politics must include religious diversity, giving space to the practicing Muslim. Given the central role of the image of the Muslim body in the Islamoscopic regime, IRO members leverage an equally spectacular image of a Muslim (woman's) body – appropriately pious and classed – in their representational politics. I was struck by the number of references in my field notes to impeccable dress and fashion among women at IRO events. This included women in hijabs (such as Nasreen) and modestly-dressed women who chose not to veil. At the 2011 convention in Chicago, I joined a small group of women for lunch who told me how much they enjoy being on a VIP shopper list at Nordstrom. Frequenting the upscale shopping mall in Oakbrook, Illinois, this group of women let me know that Nordstrom was the best place to buy “Islamic clothing” - designer scarves and tunics. Because of their loyalty as customers, Nordstrom invited them to special VIP events “and usually these events are overrun with Arabs and Muslims,” one young woman told me. In between sessions at Islamic conventions, young women in hijabs can be seen retouching perfect makeup in crowded restrooms. Several “hijabis” secure their headscarves with scarf-pins adorned with precious and semi-precious stones.

Certainly, this attentiveness can be chalked up to aesthetics, given the often elite immigrant backgrounds of many IRO members. Yet the way many of them articulated the
reasons behind their decisions around dress code included explicit reference to positive hypervisibility. There was a sense that presenting oneself in this way signaled respectability and would stand as a challenge to Islamophobia. These well-dressed women embodied a sense that one could be a consumer, a practicing Muslim, and a quintessential American all at once. While the critiques of the discourses of salvation described above focus a turn against traditional Islam, IRO politics, eschewing the stances of Manji or Ali, claim legitimacy in the U.S and adhere to a traditional Islam.

*Lingering Invisibility*

Ironically, the Islamoscopic regime exists alongside an enduring sense of difficulty around the classification of Muslims themselves, a difficulty Naber refers to the “politics of naming.” Certainly, an attempt to classify U.S. Muslims in any meaningful way will rest upon essentialist notions of Islam, as American Muslims include Latinos, African Americans, Arabs, whites, Asians, American-born and immigrant, and Shi’as and Sunnis. Yet, given the increasing salience of Islamophobia, some have argued that the category Muslim – in spite of the racial diversity of Muslim Americans – has become a racial one (Rana 2011; Clark 2011). Cainkar and Naber demonstrate the ways Muslim hypervisibility replaced a pre-existing “invisibility” of Muslims before 9/11. “No longer invisible,” as Cainkar argues, 9/11 shifted U.S. racial categories to accommodate a newly racialized group.

Yet the invisibility of Muslims lingered in interesting ways, at least in the perceptions of IRO members. While they certainly felt victimized by post-9/11 racial paranoia, they often articulated a sense that they could not access the same language of civil rights and racial equality that more “established” racial minorities in the U.S. could. In this way, IRO members articulated
a sense of racist exceptionalism – that the U.S. had an entrenched aversion to overt racism against black, Latino, and even Asian populations that did not extend to newly-racialized Muslims. In other words, in spite of their hypervisibility, Muslims were invisible in the popular understandings of racial difference in the U.S.

Frequently, when a noted Islamophobe (Ann Coulter or Pamela Geller, for instance) publicly said something hateful about Muslims, a common response in the field was that if the same remark had been made about African-Americans or another minority group, there would be a public outcry. Presidential candidate Herman Cain, in an interview in 2011, openly professed that he would never appoint a Muslim in his cabinet or as a judge. Maleeka, herself an African American Muslim woman and second generation African immigrant, and I discussed his remarks at length at an ISNA event. “This could never be said about another minority group. Can you imagine saying that about a black person? And oh, forget saying it about Jews! Herman Cain's career would screech to a halt. But for some reason, the Islamophobic climate has reached such fever pitch that this kind of stuff not only is acceptable, it’s preferable in a candidate.” The moderator at an event in D.C. on the ten-year anniversary of 9/11 remarked, “Islam-bashing has become a hobby for columnists, radio talk show hosts, and fundamentalist Christian leaders.” Newt Gingrich's assertions that government should restrict the construction of mosques and laws should be passed exempting Islam from American understandings of freedom of religion elicited similar reactions. “I don't understand this country. Some random comedian can say something racist against black people and he'll get attacked by all the liberals. He'll be fired, whatever. Nobody wants sports teams to use Native Americans as mascots. But Newt Gingrich can just be openly hateful of Muslims, and none of those civil rights groups will come to our defense. Why don't we get the same protections other minority groups get?” Naeem asked.
“Islamophobia is not racism,” said Haroon Moghul during a 2011 presentation in Queens. “If Islamophobia were a form of racism, we would easily be able to garner the support of civil rights groups, the same groups who go out in large numbers for anti-Black racism.” Moghul, a popular speaker at IRO events, makes a controversial claim in light of recent scholarship about Islamophobia as part of the changing U.S. racial landscape (Aidi 2009). Yet his claim echoes the sense that racism is unpalatable to the mainstream U.S. social imaginary, while Islamophobia is “allowed” on some level.

Whether or not these reactions are accurate (clearly, sports teams continue to use Native American mascots without mainstream censure), they are revelatory about Muslim perceptions of Islamophobia in relation to other forms of racism. “Although not quite white, Arab Americans enjoy certain racial privileges not accorded to blacks in neighboring Detroit, such as the privilege to be able to live and work in a predominantly white suburb such as Dearborn,” writes Grewal. “Yet Arab Muslims lack the social citizenship that blacks enjoy in a post-civil rights America, in which blacks are frequently represented as quintessentially American even as they continue to suffer the brutalities of American racism” (2013: 10-11). While much IRO messaging built connections between Muslims and other historically racially marginalized groups, there was an on-the-ground sense that Islamophobia was not as compelling a cause for anti-racists. That Islamophobia is an “acceptable” form of racism while others fell into the camp of political incorrectness speaks volumes to the ways in which Islamophobia is experienced. This speaks to a larger problem of racial formation in the U.S. As DeGenova argues, there is a hegemonic polarity of whiteness and blackness in the U.S., limiting the parameters for understanding the experiences of racialization of other groups such as Latinos, Asians, or Native Americans (DeGenova 2006). Lopez' work on naturalization cases suggests that the racial classification of Arabs and South
Asians has always been marked by ambivalence, which courts struggling to taxonomize groups given an enduring American black-white binary (Lopez 2006). What my fieldwork revealed is the palpable ambiguity of the racialization of Muslims. IRO members certainly did not feel recognized as a racial 'minority' in the U.S. in the way that they perceived other groups to be. As a result, they also did not perceive themselves as deserving of the protections that anti-racist civil rights discourse had afforded other groups.

Conclusion

It would be shortsighted to write a section on Muslim hypervisibility and omit the realm of the academic – the social sciences, specifically – as a site for the production of the Muslim ‘image.’ My presence at IRO events as an anthropologist and social scientist served as a constant reminder of the burden of hypervisibility. I was constantly reminded of Said’s claim that “to practice anthropology in the United States is therefore not just to be doing scholarly work investigating otherness and difference in a large country; it is to be discussing them in an enormously influential and powerful state whose global role is that of a superpower” (Said 1989: 213). As I began to conceive of this dissertation as one about the contours of U.S. imperialism “at home,” I struggled to situate my own project among these imperial dynamics.

IRO members were often quite aware of the academic construction of Muslim subjectivity. Indeed, at an event in Detroit, Sumaiya asked me, as if I were a representative of “academia” at large, “can you please tell me what is up with the academic obsession with Muslims? Muslim women, especially? It must be so easy for you to get funding for your project just because it has the word Muslim in it. Am I right?” She told me that she had toyed with the idea of going into academia, media studies or American studies more specifically, but had serious
reservations about becoming anyone’s “Muslim woman pet scholar.” “How do you resist that?” she asked me, turning the tables on any traditional researcher-informant relationship and bringing into sharp focus the problematic power dynamics of the anthropological encounter (Said 1989).

Sumaiya’s question makes apparent the critical role of intellectual curiosity in the larger context of Muslim hypervisibility. That the explosion in curiosity about Muslims has included an academic curiosity is critical for contextualizing my project. At an academic conference in 2013, I met another anthropologist, an American Muslim and IRO member with whom I spoke at length after each of us had presented on a panel. “You have a really interesting project,” he told me, “and hey, you’re airing some of our dirty laundry.” As we conversed, he and I agreed that to speak of a Muslim American experience in the age of Islamophobia is never depoliticized. As Muslim Americans studying Muslim communities, we felt aware of the conflicting, multilayered dynamics informing our work. Indeed, this writing is compelled by and a component of Muslim hypervisibility.
CHAPTER 3: “THOMAS JEFFERSON OWNED A QURAN”: CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP AND COUNTERNARRATIVES

“To quote Scarface, 'First you get the money, then you get the power, then you get the women.' [laughter] … We didn't just get any woman, we got THE woman. We nabbed Miss USA. We put a tiara on Rimah Fakhri. That was a huge success in the Muslim culture war. We have placed hummus and tahini in supermarkets and white hipsters eat it every day. Hipsters have also made the keffiyeh into a fashion statement. When hipsters fall at the feet of Muslim fashion, the world is next…We are now officially as American as apple pie and Snookie. To celebrate, I have parceled out the states. Haroon Moghul is the Caliph of New York. To show that he’s not a misogynist, he’s giving Linda Sarsour Brooklyn. And I guess I’d like to be the Caliph of 'Caliph'ornia.”


* * *

“These organizations always pick a convert to be the spokesperson. Usually an American, white woman. What are they trying to say about Islam? Is Islam acceptable if a white man is Muslim? A white woman? Then we can forget our fears? What is that? It seems that they're trying to humanize Islam by putting it in white face.”

-Hatem Islam, oppositional blog editor, fieldwork interview

In this chapter, I consider the ways in which Islamic representative organizations (IRO's) and their members have responded to Islamophobic exclusion through a specific project of...
cultural citizenship, a strategy that aims to “Americanize” Islam in order to battle the racism and xenophobia that U.S. Muslims face. I explore the ways cultural citizenship is a relevant analytic category for understanding post-9/11 U.S. Muslim experiences and the extent to which U.S. Muslims have been cast as “citizen outsiders.” From the Obama “birther” controversy to the messaging put forth by the Islamophobia industry (Lean 2012), the “Americanness” of Muslims is a central concern for vicious Islamophobes and concerned U.S. Muslims alike.

The IRO representatives I explore have taken a distinct approach to combatting this alienation by making strong, repeated claims that Islam is American, what Bilici calls the “naturalization” of Islam in America (2012). Not only do Muslims have an enduring historical presence in the U.S., IRO's argue, but they continue to make positive contributions that shape the social landscape. Furthermore, there is a persistent claim that the very principles at the heart of Islam are congruent with American ideals. Islam, in other words, is quintessentially American.

First, this chapter explores a narrative process, as IRO's are using history and storytelling to construct a new type of “America” that includes and highlights the presence and contributions of Muslims. In so doing, they hope to destroy the national social imaginary that alienates Muslims and replace it with one in which Muslims are not just included, but integral. Second, this chapter looks at a particular practice of representational politics that uses race and nativity as key factors in Americanizing Islam. This part of the chapter explores the way whiteness and Americanness are conflated in the representational politics of IRO leaders.

As Bhabha says, the nation is itself a narrative construction that emerges from

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11 I use “American” to denote not a geographically bounded space or a nation-state, but rather an ideological formation. I use “America” throughout this writing to refer to “a multicultural nation as well as a site of hierarchical racial and gendered formations” (Grewal 2005: 196).
interactions between contending cultural contingencies (1990). According to Stuart Hall, nations, like all proclaimed 'identities,' do not reflect a stable core, but rather a fractured, fragmented construction that arises from a sort of fictional narrativization (Hall 1996). Hall calls for an attentiveness to the histories of cultural identities and their ongoing transformations, pointing to official institutions as a site of these transformations (Hall 1990). For Hall, cultural identities are about becoming something that is *constructed* through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. In this sense, identity is less of an essence and more of a positioning. The nation itself is always contested, reformulated, and produced through the creation of what Bhatia and Ram call “counternarratives” (2001).

This chapter considers narrative a transformative practice and mode of cultural citizenship. IRO strategies against Islamophobia and xenophobia rely heavily on recreating the existing national narrative, one that is often seen as steeped in racial nativism (Roediger 2005; Sanchez 1997). The new narrative I explore emphasizes the historically invisible Muslim presence. By claiming this counternarrative space to tell the true or unknown story of Islam in America, IRO's attempt to impact and reformulate the existing narrative construction. In the case of IRO strategy, this construction is Janus-faced: it intends both to remake the “master narrative” that has cast America as white and European-descended (Takaki 1993) in the minds of the general U.S. population and to remake the self-perception of Muslims in the minds of predominantly immigrant IRO members.

Within the IROs, members and leaders struggle to present U.S. Muslims as rooted in the U.S., utilizing politics of race, immigration, and cultural belonging to bolster this claim. This, I argue, is a direct response to the Islamophobic fear that there is a “Muslim agenda,” that alien Muslims are attempting some sort of subversive takeover of American society. This process is
well underway by organizations in Europe, where Muslims have a longer and more entrenched experience with Western Islamophobia. For instance, in England, certain Muslim organizations are “defining a uniquely British conception of Islam, which has allowed a new generation of Muslim youth to feel increasingly comfortable exerting both their national and their religious identities” (Aslan 2009: 154). Bakalian and Bozorgmehr follow in their study of Muslim American organizations that are active in making Islam one of the core religions in America, pushing to change America's religious heritage from “Judeo Christian” to “Abrahamic” (2009: 2). One of the framing mechanisms they describe is demonstrating allegiance, through which U.S. Muslims show that they are rooted in the U.S. and committed to remaining here. For instance, I noticed the rise of the term “indigenous Muslim” at IRO events, used primarily in reference to white and black converts. The term, introduced by Sherman Jackson, is a way in which Americanness is being leveraged by Muslim Americans.

The U.S. IRO strategy, dubbed “integrationist” by Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009), is hardly seamless or uncontroversial. Instead, the appeal to Americanize Islam is fraught with tensions, many of which came to the surface during my time in the field. I argue that this project of cultural citizenship is uneven and ambiguous on controversial matters of race and whiteness, colorblindness, and assimilation. I suggest that the integrationist approach is partially a racial project in which whiteness and whitening figure centrally. Another important implication of my findings is that IRO’s are enmeshed in an explicitly spatial project of putting down Muslim roots in the U.S. While Olivier Roy suggests that global Muslim communities are deterritorialized, that “Islam is less and less ascribed to a specific territory and civilisational area” (2006: 18), my fieldwork reveals a deep territorialization of Islam as both in and of the U.S. Bowen's treatment of transnational Muslims suggests that Islam is the backbone of diasporic Muslims, as opposed
to the nation; the transnational public space of Islam is anchored not in local laws and conditions but in orthodox Islamic principles (2004). Both Roy and Bowen make compelling claims about global Islam as a diasporic condition, seeing the *ummah* as a social imaginary that is de-linked from any specific locality or region. Global Islam, they argue, is post-‘place.’ My work with IRO’s complicates the assumptions of both Roy and Bowen and looks at the notion of rootedness that is at the center of activist strategies. Instead, I am inclined to agree with Grewal, that “the religious imagination of American Muslims is a profoundly geographic one” (2013: 33). In this chapter, I explore what an “American Islam” is, how IRO's are enmeshed in a process of forging an “American Islam,” and the complicated politics that burden this project.

**Part One**

**Muslims: Citizen Outsiders**

Sumaiya, a Palestinian-American 29 year-old woman, teared up as she recounted what happened in her Arab-American Chicagoland neighborhood after the events of 9/11/2001. We sat across from each other in Detroit during a winter conference in 2012 on U.S. Muslim diversity.

“I don’t know if you remember this. Were you in Chicago when 9/11 happened?

Yeah, so you know, you had mobs of people going down 95th and Harlem in Bridgeview. They were attacking Arab-owned stores and going to the mosque and yelling things. The mayor actually told all the women who wear hijab to stay home. My mother and I were terrified. We just stayed home. In a way you can say I was spared the violence of that moment. But what I do remember was a car of young, white men in front of my house yelling “GO HOME!” I suppose I should
have felt lucky that we were not injured or vandalized, that we got off easy, but all I could remember was being so traumatized by the fact that these people didn’t think I was at home here. My mother was born in the U.S., and my dad came over at a young age. All of us, me and my brothers, were born here. And you’re going to tell us to go home? This is home. That hurt me most of all.”

By and large, Sumaiya's experience was an anomaly. Most Muslims did not experience assaults on their homes nor rioting in their neighborhoods. What occurred in Bridgeview, Illinois was a remarkable event in which a historic Arab-American community experienced immediate physical backlash. Speaking to Al-Jazeera, U.S.-based scholar and popular IRO speaker Sheikh Hamza Yusuf brackets the Islamophobic backlash in the immediate aftermath of 9/11: “In the United States, by and large, you have a population of civil people...I think the majority of American people acknowledge multiculturalism. America has always been a multicultural society...I think American Muslims need to acknowledge that there are still more hate crimes against the Jewish community, which is a profoundly enfranchised community in the U.S., than against the Muslim community. But what's troubling is a sentiment that's increasing. While there are not a lot of hate crimes against a community, there are [hate crimes]. Mosques are attacked, pigs heads left at mosques. But, by and large, Muslims have been protected in their houses and homes...”

The skyrocketing in reported hate crimes monitored by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) after 9/11 clearly suggests an increased experience of overt hostility. Certainly,
hate crimes against even those mistakenly taken to be Muslim (such as the Sikh man Balbir Singh Sodhi, who was murdered in 2001), point to a violent Islamophobic reality.

Yet, on a day-to-day level, most people I met in the field reported that, aside from the cultural and media campaign against Muslims, Islamophobia was not a significant factor in their lives. In other words, people told me they felt safe walking their city streets, wearing a hijab or long beard at work, or even setting down a prayer rug at an airport when the time for obligatory prayers came. “I work in a really diverse place. I have fasted openly at my office for three years now, and no one has said anything. I also am pretty easily able to board planes and travel frequently for work, so that hasn't been a problem for me,” said Naeem, a finance professional who was attending the 2011 ISNA Convention in Chicago. “You know, Islamophobia for me is really less about fearing for our safety as Muslims and more about what's being said on, you know, Fox News or by some fringe right wing Republicans in Congress.” This notion was echoed by young parents Amina and Aadam, who I lunched with at an ISNA Regional Conference in Cincinnati in 2011. “I think Islamophobia is real, but we experience it in different ways,” Amina told me. Aadam chimed in, “We don't watch Fox News. If I watch that for 5 or 10 minutes, I'm so disgusted. You know, if you read what people post online, Islamophobia is in the media, on the internet. You can ignore it if you choose to. Islamophobia is, to me, rhetoric. Hate speech. It's in people's words, not their actions.” A speaker at the 2012 convention in Washington, D.C. said in a panel about voting and political engagement, “if you begin to really think about how accepting this country is, and not just focus on the people that are on the margins that attack our faith, we Muslims have flourished and prospered for 1400 years and continue to grow as the fastest faith in this country. Someone like a Glen Beck or Rush Limbaugh, they are a pimple, a pimple in the grand scheme of things.”
The idea that Islamophobia is captured by an increasing *sentiment*, as Hamza Yusuf put it, rather than overt and abundant anti-Muslim *action*, was a general consensus in the field. It is a debatable point, as certainly the anti-Muslim witch-hunt is deeply intertwined with very palpable actions including detentions, deportations, and other sorts of structural and institutional violence, which I discuss in other chapters. Yet, throughout the course of my fieldwork, I became attuned to the puzzling nature of the experience of Islamophobia that most individuals reported to me. By and large, they feel safe and free to worship in this country. At the same time, they are hyper-aware of the cultural campaign that is being mobilized against Muslims. Because of this formulation, I began to think of U.S. Muslims as 'citizen outsiders,' sanctioned members of the U.S. yet ideologically cast as Other. The presence of a ‘citizen outsider’ is hardly new in the U.S. The example of Japanese-American internment during World War 2, for instance, serves as a handy parallel of a historically American community being suddenly cast as hostile or alien. This parallel between post-9/11 Islamophobia and Japanese American internment resurfaced in speeches at IRO events, bringing the long U.S. history of racial nativism into the consciousness of IRO members. In her treatment of Arab Americans, Naber uses the term “ambiguous insider” to describe the paradoxical experience of Arabs (2000). Using Naber's framework, Muslims (by extension) in the U.S. are *ambiguous* in their sense of belonging; the sense of safety and citizenship alongside an increased anti-Muslim climate couple to create an inconclusive type of “Americanness.” Simmel's “Stranger” is a useful comparison, a member of a group who is a unlikely to leave yet experiences social distance from the group at large (1908).

This ideological othering process – an Islamophobic *sentiment* – was ever-present in the awareness IRO members, who were sharply attuned to anti-Muslim rhetoric, conscious of a social imaginary that had cast them as un-American. The gap between legal citizenship and full
social citizenship was widely understood; one conference attendee remarked on Malcolm X's claim that “sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner” (Malcolm X 1964). While some thought this discourse emanated from a right-wing fringe, an anomaly in an otherwise inclusive environment, many thought the othering of Muslims was pervasive throughout the U.S.

Regardless, most understood American Muslims to be regarded as outsiders to some extent. IRO members were easily able to recall the results of surveys of the American public that demonstrated widespread anti-Muslim sentiment and used such data as evidence that they were not fully seen as belonging. The widespread sense that Muslims are welcome to pray in public spaces and practice their religion safely, then, coexists with an equally widespread understanding that Muslims are seen as outsiders. This contradictory understanding is (as I explore in other chapters) part of the overarching ambiguity and paradox of the experience for many U.S. Muslims.

Many felt that the controversy surrounding President Obama's religious identity was emblematic of a larger, underlying Islamophobia. Two college students I sat beside during a panel at the 2011 Chicago convention were discussing Obama's middle name and the so-called “birther” movement, which cast aspersions on Obama's legitimacy as president and demanded that he produce a birth certificate. “It's because his middle name is Muslim,” one of them joked. “If people didn't think he was a Muslim, they wouldn't care to imagine that he's foreign.”

Sumaiya said to me in Washington, D.C., several months after our first meeting in Detroit. “The more I think about it, the more I start to think that the birth certificate scandal was really about fears that he was a Muslim. It wasn't about fears that Obama was an outsider, or foreign. It wasn't about his blackness. If he'd been from a Catholic country or somewhere in Latin America or something, no one would have cared. But because people were already scared that he was
Muslim, the birther movement was able to gather steam.” The Obama controversies underscored this ideological othering of Muslims to which IRO’s were deeply attentive. While many race scholars pointed to anxieties about the President’s nativity as a form of muted racism, IRO members and leaders regarded it as evidence of deep Islamophobia. “Well, his middle name is Hussein and he doesn’t seem to care much for Palestine. Sounds like a Muslim world leader to me!” Azam joked with me at an event in Washington, D.C. A small group of us had gathered in the hallway after a lecture and were discussing the Obama presidency. “I wish he was Muslim. Maybe then he'd lighten up with all this surveillance on Muslim communities,” Saeeda said. She recollected the overt instances of Obama distancing himself from visibly Muslim women during his first presidential campaign12, suggesting that this was her primary inkling that the President would have to gingerly navigate his treatment of U.S. Muslims. “Every time one of these right-wing radio jerks wants to say something anti-Obama, they have to refer to him with his middle name. They know that the American public will agree if, on some level, they feel he's Muslim,” Saeeda continued. “Dropping the “H-bomb” - that's the “Hussein-bomb,” mind you - helps do just that. All of a sudden he's a dangerous Muslim foreigner.” The idea that anti-Obama xenophobia was rooted in Islamophobia was not only prevalent among IRO members, it was revealing of the ways IRO members perceive Islam to be regarded as un-American, making explicit the “citizen-outsider” trope.

The result of this anti-Muslim sentiment, then, is that Muslims are ideologically cast as anti-American. This is evident in the rhetoric of notorious Islamophobes such as Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, co-founders of the hate group Stop Islamization of America, which has been

12 The 2008 incident in which two women wearing hijabs were asked not to stand immediately behind then-candidate Obama during a speaking engagement became notorious.
vocal in its opposition to allowing shariah law in the U.S. and the construction of the Islamic center in downtown Manhattan. This discourse is less about terrorism or security, the assumed foundation of Islamophobia, and more about preservation of a pristine imagined homeland. With the understanding that U.S. Muslims are discursively Othered, I now turn to the agentival capacity of IRO members and leaders in responding to this marginalization.

“Islam in America”: A Cultural Citizenship Strategy

In the face of Muslims being cast as un-American, IRO's have developed several strategies to respond. Here, I explore the ways IRO's are deliberately “Americanizing” Islam. This is done in myriad ways: by underscoring and publicizing the historic presence of Muslims in the U.S., by highlighting significant contributions of U.S. Muslims, and by emphasizing the ways that “true” Islam is compatible with “American values.” Bakalian and Bozorgmehr in their study of Muslim advocacy organizations in the face of Islamophobia offer “integration” as the “ultimate goal” of advocacy after 9/11 (2009: 236). Yet “integration” may overlook the comprehensive efforts by IRO's to go well beyond integrating Muslims in the U.S. social landscape. My fieldwork revealed a comprehensive effort to prove – both to mainstream society and to U.S. Muslims – not that Islam can simply be “added on” to the U.S. social landscape, but that Islam is in fact constitutive of the social fabric of America. Islam, as Wajahat Ali jokes in the introductory quote to this chapter, is as American as apple pie.

Rosaldo's notion of cultural citizenship “refers to the right to be different and to belong in

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13 While IRO messaging suggests that “true” Islam is non-violent, compatible with American constitutional principles, and sensitive to social justice issues, it must be kept in mind that appeals to “true” Islam emanate from all points on political and theological spectra.
a participatory democratic sense. It claims that, in a democracy, social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to make certain people less equal or inferior to others” (1994: 402). Ong, on the other hand, defines cultural citizenship as “a process of self-making and being-made in relation to nation-states and transnational processes” (1996: 737). Ong and Rosaldo attend to different sides of the process of becoming ‘full’ citizens; Rosaldo is concerned with the agency of those diverse, marginalized subjects in articulating space for themselves, while Ong is attentive to the ways in which they are “subject to state power and other forms of regulation” (738). Race, class, religion, gender, and sexuality are some of the axes upon which ‘full’ citizenship – not just legalistic citizenship – hinges.

Drawing from Ong’s notion of cultural citizenship, which is a process of self-making and being-made (1996), IRO politics respond to the *being made* an outsider *through* these strategies of self-making. Following Hall’s notion that dominant discourses interpellelate us, putting us in place as particular social subjects (1990), Muslim cultural citizenship serves as a form of engagement that aims to shift the dominant discourse. In particular, the Islamophobic narrative that marginalizes and demonizes Muslims and the IRO narrative that constructs a positive U.S. Muslim presence are actively contentious parts of a process defining what can and cannot be “American.” In D’Alisera's work on Sierra Leonian Muslims in the U.S., she finds that there is an attempt (in spite of strong homeland ties) among Muslims to build ties with far-flung and diverse Muslim communities, an Americanizing process that is part of a larger global *ummah's* quest for identity (2004). Bilici names this quest “homeland insecurity,” and calls for a scholarly attentiveness to the “naturalization of Islam in America” (2012).

At an event in Washington, D.C. memorializing the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks,
Imam Zaid Shakir, an African-American convert to Islam and a leading IRO spokesperson, urged Muslims to see themselves as American. In his trademark oratorical style, with periodic crescendos interrupting a gentle and slow-paced rhythm, he spoke at length about the need for U.S. Muslims to embrace a sense of belonging. “We have to stop othering ourselves,” he said to an audience of several hundred. “Consider the convert, a person who's fully integrated in the society, friends, family, relatives. They become a Muslim and suddenly she's an Other. We have to stop that. We, as Muslims, have as many rights as anyone. We have to recognize this reality....We have certain rights we should not surrender. We have to stand up for who we are and, doing that assertively, we wouldn't be the first in U.S. history. We have to move beyond this and present a positive message, build alliances, strengthen ourselves spiritually. Be the truth we advocate for and represent that.” Shakir's remarks go on to mention the Chinese Exclusion Act and the internment of Japanese Americans. “This is old stuff in American politics,” he says, referring to racial nativism and xenophobia. “You find a weak marginal community, make them a scapegoat, and use it to whip up popular support for certain political groups.” After the session was done, I spoke with Naeem and his fiancée about Shakir's words. “I didn't know about the Chinese, what did he call it? Exclusion Act? I never knew that about American history. I suppose knowing the history of this country is really important if we're going to beat the Islamophobes. You can't know where you're going if you don't know where you came from.”

*Constructing a Muslim-American (Counter)Narrative*

The history of Islam in the U.S. was a recurrent theme, both in official panels and in my conversations and interviews with IRO members. This pressing desire to trace the presence of Muslims in the U.S. revealed a strong urge among IRO members to illuminate the fact that
Muslims, in fact, are not Other. It was also a part of a larger process of self-discovery, as I was told repeatedly in the field that Muslim Americans are having an “identity crisis,” (a notion I explore further in other chapters). Naeem’s claim that knowing one’s history is important was echoed by several individuals. To this end, IRO events repeatedly revisited Muslim American history, communicating to IRO members a specific narrative that centers on an entrenched Muslim presence in the U.S. “The triumphalism behind Muslims’ narratives of countercitizenship – the notion that Muslim Americans are more American than Americans – drives mainstreaming processes for many American Muslims across ethnic and racial lines...” (Grewal 2013: 156-157).

For instance, IRO spokespeople referred repeatedly in speeches and panels to the likelihood of a pre-Columbian presence of Muslims in the “New World.” “This is a debatable point,” said Hamza Yusuf at the 2012 convention in Washington, D.C. “But when we think of the U.S., we have to know that we are part of a story. The Muslims are part of this narrative, and have been a part of this narrative from the beginning. We have, and this is a debatable point, but we have probably been here before Columbus.”

I glanced around the large convention space as Yusuf spoke, estimating the audience at over three thousand attendees. Several sat in the front row, taking notes on paper or on a laptop. Throughout his talk, there were periodic bursts of applause when Yusuf made a particularly moving point. These audience members, immigrants and U.S.-born, were eagerly internalizing the narrative that Yusuf explicitly named. The sight of a white Californian, fluent in Arabic, able to switch between a West Coast accent and classical

Yusuf refers to the sparse scholarship on the possibility that Chinese Muslim explorers reached the shores of the “New World” decades before Columbus, as explored in Menzies’ 1421: The Year China Discovered America (2003)
Arabic, wearing an impeccable Nehru-collared jacket, speaking to a vast audience of IRO members, seemed almost surreal.

“Even the original inhabitants of the new world were immigrants,” Yusuf continued. “America is a story of immigrants, and you are part of that story. Those of you who came later, you must see yourselves as part of that story.” The desire to spread, among Muslims and the U.S. at large, an awareness that Muslims have likely been here even before European settlers has two significant dimensions. First, it speaks to a deliberate process of Americanizing Islam, of situating Muslims as anything but alien. Second, it aims to bring together far-flung, diverse Muslims by encouraging them to identify with this narrative. As Stuart Hall has suggested, creative power is at the heart of diasporic imaginaries, which “offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas (Hall 1990: 224). The narrative of Islam in the U.S. is meant to appeal to all Muslims, regardless of how deep their “American” roots go.

Similarly, the abundant references to Muslim presence in the U.S. through the slave trade served as an anchor for Islamic American history. I was surprised by just how many IRO members knew the detailed history of the life of Yarrow Mamout, a manumitted slave who lived in Georgetown and openly practiced Islam. Charles Wilson Peale's famous portrait of Mamout became a ubiquitous slideshow image at lectures on Muslim-American history at ISNA conventions. Hamza Yusuf, Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, and Zaid Shakir all made in-depth references to Mamout in speeches during my time in the field. “Muslims have been here,” Hamza Yusuf said in the speech referenced above. “Charles Wilson Peale, the same man who painted George Washington, painted Yarrow Mamout. This man was a Fulani who was brought to America as a slave and was noted for chanting Islamic prayers while walking around
Georgetown. And he was such a pleasant person that Peale, who had planned to paint him in a day, ended up spending many days with him.” Again, the image of a white convert lecturing about a black Muslim slave to a room largely filled with immigrant Muslim Arabs and South Asians struck me. The creation of an American Muslim ummah – a community of believers, diverse around race and national origin, with only their “American Muslimness” in common - was palpable. I found South Asian and Arab IRO members identifying strongly with Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, and other noteworthy U.S. Muslims, often overlooking serious sectarian or theological differences. The allegiance I reference here does not suggest that U.S. Muslims identify with the revolutionary project of Malcolm X, but that rather they claim him to demonstrate the diversity and potential Americanness of the Muslim experience. An Islamic Horizons issue detailed the contributions of W.D. Muhammad, son of Elijah Muhammad, upon his death. (I speak further of interracial coalition building in another chapter.) This seemed like what D’Alisera described as an Americanizing of Islam, reaching across differences to forge a unified American ummah (2004). Bilici’s tremendous work highlighting the shift of Muslim American organizations from “diasporic” to “American” points to the ways in which, currently, these organizations are calling upon their leaders and contingencies not only to speak without an “accent,” but to “think without an accent” (2012: 114), claiming that U.S. Muslims now see “America as the abode of Islam” (117).

Part of this counternarrative examines the lingering traces of Muslims of all origins in the U.S. IRO messaging underscores and emphasizes this presence; I heard repeatedly IRO speakers and members point to numerous cities named “Mecca” and “Medinah” in the U.S. as evidence

15 The official publication of ISNA
that Muslims had shaped the geography of this country. “The ice cream cone story! How many times have you been told the ice cream cone story?” Linah exclaimed to me in the sprawling bazaar at the annual convention in Chicago in 2011. I knew exactly what she meant. She was referencing the story of the Arab-American who rolled up a waffle to help out a nearby ice cream vendor, inventing the ice cream cone, at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis in 1904. The tale resurfaced time and again in speeches, panels, publications, and my own personal conversations with IRO members. It became a historical event with which Muslims, many of them not of Arab origin, identified. The ice cream cone story, as familiar to Linah as it was to me, is exemplary of the narrative process by which Muslims establish roots here, emphasize their contributions, and challenge the xenophobic othering that casts them as outsiders.

The title of this chapter refers to yet another soundbyte that was repeated by IRO speakers and members alike. That Thomas Jefferson allegedly owned a Quran was evidence that Islam has always been welcome and present in the U.S. Jefferson was also repeatedly credited for hosting the first Presidential iftar in 1805 when he hosted a Muslim Tunisian ambassador during the month of Ramadan. (Incidentally, White House iftars remain a presidential tradition, accompanied by a controversy I explore further in other chapters.) In a powerful speech by Hamza Yusuf, he reminded the audience that “Muslims fought in all of these wars in American history. We fought for this country in World War 2, in World War 1, in the Civil War. So this idea that we're alien is completely unacceptable.” The fact that IRO members were intimately familiar with these factoids, and that they continued to be repeated, are evidence of the transformative potential of these narratives. Gradually, the history of Muslims in the U.S. is being produced,

16 The evening meal at which one breaks fast
with institutional messaging from IRO's at the center of this process.

The sense that Islamic history could be used to transform, enhance, and enrich the U.S. was pervasive. While I address this in greater depth in my chapters on Islamophilia and positive hypervisibility, here I refer to the specific ways “America” as an ideological and social formation was invoked by IRO's in this process of Americanizing Islam. Appearing on Al-Jazeera, Hamza Yusuf spoke of the “shariah scare” in which several lawmakers considered passing legislation that would ban shariah law. Yusuf argues that Islamic finance would have protected the U.S. from the predatory lending and subprime crisis that plunged the U.S. into its current recession. Writing about Muslim finances, Maurer argues that Islamic banking options are often labeled by Muslims 'ethical' or 'socially responsible' finance (2004). Thus, Islam is configured as something that inherently enriches the U.S. At the Washington, D.C. event memorializing the 9/11 attacks, Imam Zaid Shakir said, “And it's our responsibility to our community and nation to begin to present a positive message, to begin to build positive alliances...We create a positive space where reconciliation, sharing, and compassion become the basis of our political action. Leave the Gingrich's of the world; let God deal with them. If we do that, there will be less who will serve as an audience for hatred and bigotry...because they'll say, those people gave me medical treatment at their free clinic. I love me some Moslems.” Laughter and applause broke out for Shakir's words. These instances suggest a distinct appeal to a “true” Islam, the claim that these fundamental Islamic principles can serve to enrich the cultural and political tapestry of the U.S.

Sumaiya echoed Shakir's urge for Muslims to do good here. “I remember when there was the earthquake in Pakistan and Kashmir several years ago, and Islamic Relief came and raised like $200,000 in one jumma. So, they care about that kind of stuff, but they didn't raise a similar amount for Katrina. You know what I'm saying? So they're still, their hearts are still home-bound,
which is so dangerous. This is one of the problems in terms of the immigrant Muslim
narrative before 9/11. Even to this day, immigrant Muslims just cannot see their story in the story
of African Americans. Latinos. Other immigrant communities. And of the working class in the
United States. They just cannot see their story in them.”

Sumaiya explicitly naming the “story of U.S. Muslims” as a narrative and identifying
9/11 as a turning point in this narrative was critical and spoke directly to my own observations in
the field. The storytelling process I describe here not only creates a counternarrative of
belonging, but contextualizes Muslim presence in a larger story of class struggle, migration, and
racialization.

The attempt to prove that “true” Islam is in harmony with “American values” is yet
another dimension in this project of cultural citizenship. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf's book What's
Right with Islam is What's Right with America (2004) stands as a perfect example of this process.
Abdul Rauf's book claims that liberty, equality, fraternity, and social justice are foundational for
all Abrahamic faiths, including Islam. Arguing that America best represents the values that are at
the heart of Islam (and vice versa), Abdul Rauf's book was a favorite in my conversations in the
field. The author, who gained notoreity as he spearheaded the so-called “Ground Zero mosque”
project in 2010, reflected a sentiment that was ever-present in the field: that Islam is
quintessentially American. (The use of “America” as not a geographically bounded space or
simple nation-state, but rather an ideological formation, is abundantly clear here.) Responding to
the anti-shariah scare, Hamza Yusuf told Al-Jazeera that part of shariah law is being a good
citizen and obeying the laws of one's homeland. Echoing Abdul Rauf, Yusuf points to the ways
Islam is, at its very core, oriented around notions of respectable citizenship.

“America might be more true to its values if it followed the example set by the Prophet
Muhammad's community,” Linah reminded me during our bazaar conversation. “He valued, may peace be upon him, notions of democracy. If you look at the sunnah, you see him consulting with his wife or companions on very important issues. He believed in tolerance. The way he treated non-Muslims is exemplary. He believed in peace and fair business transactions. He believed in all of the things modern-Americans say they believe in, yet all of us, his community, are considered anti-American.” Linah's poignant remarks were echoed throughout my time in the field, reinforcing the popular IRO suggestion that Islamic values are perfectly aligned with American ones.

**Americanizing Islam: The Nawawi Foundation**

One of the most fascinating attempts at Americanizing Islam was presented by IRO members who were familiar with the work of the Nawawi Foundation, whose mission is to “build a successful American Muslim cultural identity.” In my conversations, several IRO members referred to Nawawi as an admirable and significant organization in the Muslim fight against Islamophobia. Cloaked in language of assimilation and patriotism, the organization’s project opts for a cultural project of identity-formation. Nawawi has organized several international trips with a select group of travelers. In the past, destinations have included Morocco, Turkey, and China. The purpose of these trips is to explore the presence of Islam in these culturally varied settings in order to create understandings of the adaptability of Islam to a diverse range of geographic contexts. The organization also contributes more directly to scholarship related to its mission by sponsoring lectures and publishing articles that explore relevant topics.

Chair of the Board of Directors and Nawawi founder, as well as the main speaker at
Nawawi events, Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah is a white Muslim who converted to Islam in 1970 while studying at Cornell University. (I discuss his role in greater depth later in this chapter.) In a 2004 article entitled “Islam and the Cultural Imperative,” Dr. Abd-Allah suggests that Islam has a strong history of adaptability and assimilation. He says that Islam always “struck a balance between temporal beauty and ageless truth and fanned a brilliant peacock’s tail of unity in diversity from the heart of China to the shores of the Atlantic” (2004: 1). Yet Abd-Allah turns with disappointment to the current state of Muslims in the U.S. who are unable to maintain this assimilative capacity. He says that “Muslim immigrants to America remain attached to the lands they left behind, but hardly if ever bring with them the full pattern of the once healthy cultures of their past, which – if they had remained intact – would have reduced their incentive to emigrate in the first place” (2). Abd-Allah provides historical examples of Muslim communities in China and East Africa incorporating elements of local culture that did not explicitly conflict with Islamic principles as a sign of their strength, suggesting that American Muslims should do the same. He says that “our culture must address Islam’s transcendent and universal values, while constructing a broad national matrix that fits all like a master key, despite ethnic, class, and social background” (10).

In a travel log for the organization’s website, writer Ibrahim Abusharif documents the experiences of visiting Beijing, Lanzhou, and Guilen with Nawawi. In his reflections about the trip, he notes that the trip educated him on a vibrant cultural presence of Muslims in China. He distinguishes this from U.S. Muslims, who, he claims, suffer “a dearth of Muslim culture in the West” (Abd-Allah 2004). He notes that the reason Chinese Muslim culture survived and thrived was because Muslims maintained connections with the Chinese at large. In the 2004 trip to Turkey, nearly 200 travelers embarked on a trip of which one of the main emphases was that
Turks consider themselves at once Muslim and Western. In a travel log, Intisar Rabb points out that the trip featured a visit to a small and unobtrusive mosque. Rabb uses this example to encourage Muslims “to build something that seeks not to recreate Muslim pasts and foreign cultures, but seeks to continue Islamic tradition by building upon your own cultural foundations for an American skyline that will reflect present ideals build on solid, shared foundations” (Rabb 2004). Metcalf has described the ways diasporic Muslims use the creation of “Islamic space” to signal their presence in a new host-land, constructing domes and minarets and performing the call to prayer over loudspeakers (1996). The Nawawi Foundation's mission and messaging is in stark contrast to Metcalf’s observation, calling instead on Muslims to dissolve inconspicuously into their new U.S. homeland.

I bristled at the thought that U.S. Muslims were being encouraged to adapt and make Islam acceptable to the West, to shed relics of a “foreign” or “dated” culture that would clash with the cultural landscape in the U.S. It summoned up Fabian's suggestion that the other exists non-contemporaneously (2002). Furthermore, the role of culture in the formulation extended by Nawawi is a strikingly problematic one. As mentioned above, Muslim culture is commended by Nawawi as being rich and vibrant in China or Morocco, while American Muslims are said to suffer a putative lack of culture. Additionally, cultural factors, rather than political and economic ones, are deemed by Abd-Allah the cause of migration of Muslims toward the West. By isolating and reifying this notion of ‘culture,’ the material and political contexts of what is dubbed culture are dismissed by the Nawawi Foundation. Moreover, the conception of foreign cultures as potentially clashing with the West reifies and freezes what comprises “American” culture. After hearing IRO members describe Nawawi’s work, I immediately revisited Vijay Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk*, where he asks, “Can one merely do “cultural” work? Isn't all “cultural”
activity also in some ways political?” (2000: 147). That Nawawi's cultural work appealed to so many IRO members speaks to a larger context described by Palumbo-Liu. Palumbo-Liu critiques mainstream multiculturalism, and instead says multiculturalism must be critical and focus on historical productions of difference rather than taking culture to be a ready-made thing.

By encouraging Muslims to construct a “broad national matrix,” solidarity is conflated with cultural homogeneity. Essentially, the groundwork is laid for a unified Muslim community that has abandoned racial, ethnic, or homeland allegiances. Nawawi’s identity-based model is focused on cultural behavior and reconfiguration of the role of tradition. In Nawawi’s 2004 publication, Abd-Allah says that “in the absence of an integrated and dynamic Muslim American culture, to speak of ourselves as constituting a true community – despite our immense individual talent and large growing numbers – our being able to someday play a role in civic life or politics is little more than rhetoric or wishful thinking” (2004: 3). Such approaches are critiqued by Inderpal Grewal, who argues that if a notion of collective identity “is applied to those who are termed ‘minorities’ in the United States, specificities and differences are elided” (2005: 239). Grewal suggests that “it is not the resolution of identity that is necessary for political action, but oppositional and coalitional…practices” (251). In other words, a nebulous concept like “identity” is neither the cause nor the solution to anti-Muslim terrain in the U.S. What struck me about the Nawawi example was the eagerness with which most IRO members who mentioned it agreed with its mission of forging an American Muslim culture. Those who were able to formulate somewhat pithy critiques of imperialism and hegemony were also, interestingly, enthusiastic about Nawawi’s cultural mission.

**Political Engagement as Cultural Citizenship**

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Finally, political engagement by Muslims was clearly another dimension of the project of cultural citizenship espoused by IRO discourse. At a 2011 workshop on political engagement, IRO leaders Haris Tarin and Sami al Mansour led a session on Muslim activism through contacting elected officials. Returning to a theological appeal, Tarin reminded the 45 or 50 attendees that they “should be agents of change individually and socially. This is what the message of the Quran is. The 30th section of the Quran, yes, it's about the hereafter. But it's also about social issues. The Quran was revealed because of social challenges.” Tarin's appeal to adherence to the Quran served as a segue into the ensuing workshop on how to write effective letters to local representatives and how to appear on ballots. During a town-hall style discussion after the workshop, one attendee said he appreciated the letter-writing exercise. “This makes our elected officials know that people with our kinds of names – Hasan, Kausar, Muhammad – that we are part of their voting base. If they see our names on letters we've written to them – it doesn't matter whether the letter is about Palestine or about a local issue – they will know that the Hasans and Muhammads are also part of America.”

Nowhere was this sentiment about political engagement as a form of cultural citizenship more evident than in the year leading up to the second presidential election of Barack Obama, which coincided with my time in the field. Voting, of course, is most conventionally understood as a component of legal citizenship in a democracy. It certainly is. Yet, I understand voting as more than a civic duty. In a sociopolitical configuration in which Muslims are citizen outsiders, voting can be understood as a more subjective, engaged process rather than simply a right of citizenship. By configuring themselves as politically engaged voters, Muslim Americans have used a legal right as doubly one of cultural citizenship. As I explore here, voting becomes a way in which individuals assert themselves as impactful, concerned, active, and patriotic citizens.
The sense that the candidate “didn’t matter” is critical to my larger point of voting as an act of cultural citizenship. In the 2012 elections, while overall enthusiasm around Obama’s presidency had waned, there was still a sense that voting was a way for Muslim Americans to exercise an important civic duty and combat Islamophobia. (I discuss Muslim American ambivalence about the Obama presidency in a Chapter 5.) Political engagement was underscored as a critical way for Muslim Americans to have their needs met, a way to become a vital and contributing part of our nation, and at times, even a religious duty. In a conversation with an ISNA member and principal of an Islamic elementary school, I was told that voting was less a way to get a candidate in office and more about “Americanizing” Islam. Zahid told me, “We have to vote. It’s not so much about who we vote for. It’s about becoming active, important citizens. I’m visibly Muslim. I have a long beard, and my wife wears a hijab. When people see us at the polling place, they’re going to know that we are here; we are invested in this nation. We are not immigrants that came here to make money, but we are Americans who are committed to making this the greatest nation in the world.”

In a panel on voting at the 2012 convention in Washington, D.C., the necessity to vote as a practice of cultural citizenship emerged yet again. The Executive Director of an Islamic civil rights group and a panelist said, “We have to embrace the society around us. We have to tell our own narrative by living our own narrative. We have to be engaged not only with Muslim organizations and mosques, but to the public around us. We have to give back. To put the human face of Muslims by us doing it individually. And that is the positive mark that we can leave on our society. The political action is important, but it is not conclusive. We have a lot to give and give back to this great society and Islam is a wonderful contribution to America.”
Part Two

IRO Leadership: “Homegrown” Representatives and Whiteness

The prominence of white IRO speakers was a peculiar topic, as the actual proportion of white Muslim converts is a tiny fraction of the U.S. Muslim population. Why was it that white converts commanded such a large following among IRO members? Why were so many of the most charismatic and popular IRO speakers white? How did large populations of color relate to these white converts as leaders and spokespeople? How does the white Muslim figure in the context of the increasing racialization of Muslims as a group (Rana 2011; Stubbs 2003)? What is the role of white leadership for various American Muslim community organizations? How is race talked about – and muted (Davis 2007) – in discursive representations of these leaders?

I address these questions by examining white speakers who commanded an awesome presence at IRO events. In this section, I question the prominence of white leaders in relation to an overarching U.S. climate of post-racialism and colorblindness. This augments my assertion that “Americanizing” Islam has been at the center of IRO strategies, reinforcing the claim that whiteness is a critical dimension of Americanness. It should be noted that these figures are not identical in their theological or political orientations, nor are they static in their messaging. I do not examine them to put forward a uniform, essentialized image of a white Muslim leader. Rather, my exploration considers the ways race is articulated in their roles, whether explicitly or (as it often is) in an unmarked fashion.

The Prominence of White IRO Leaders

On May 15th, 2009, Yusuf Islam appeared on the Colbert Show on Comedy Central. Yusuf Islam, the pop singer formerly known as Cat Stevens, left his mainstream musical career
for decades to pursue his work as a leader in the British (and international) Muslim community. It was in 2006 that he returned to the music world under the name “Yusuf.” The following is an excerpt of the transcript from the show.

**Colbert**: There’s a thing that, frankly, scares me about you. Because I get my news from Western news sources – the best news sources in the world – and I am taught that Muslims are dangerous, scary people. Okay? And I, I don’t find you dangerous or scary. And that scares me. Is this nice guy image the latest threat? Because you know, you know we’re frightened of Muslims in the West.

**Yusuf**: You know one of the first things I learned as a Muslim, and so many people don’t even know this. But it’s so simple. The first thing you learn as a Muslim is to say ‘peace.’ In Arabic it’s ‘salaam.’ So every Muslim is going around the world actually, if you actually listen to what they’re saying, they’re saying ‘peace, peace, peace, peace.’ You know? And the problem is, there has been obviously a, a blip…

**Colbert**: A blip? A little louder than a blip!

**Yusuf**: In the understanding of that great message which the religion has. And you know, it’s unfortunate but I’m here to educate. (Islam, 2009)

Ingrid Mattson is a slight woman. Each time I saw her speak, she wore a patterned hijab and long skirts with loose-fitting tops. I learned that she is a Christian-born Canadian who converted to Islam in the late 1980’s after reading and being inspired by the Quran. In 1999, she earned a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. She continues to be a professor of Islamic Studies and prominent IRO spokesperson. Her speeches always began with a supplication in Arabic before beginning a measured talk in a level tone.
Unlike many of the featured IRO speakers, Mattson has a trademark style that is calm, deliberate, and academic. By the time I began fieldwork, her term as president of ISNA had ended, but she remained an active ISNA spokesperson. Mattson has the ability to draw large crowds, as do many of the featured IRO spokespeople. I spoke with Yasmeen, an IRO member and middle-aged mother of three, about why she admired Mattson so much. “She's got such calming effect,” Yasmeen told me. “She can be talking about something very intense and still bring a level head to the topic. She's very neutral, objective. She's also clearly very intelligent. Have you heard her recite in Arabic? It puts us to shame.”

Shaikh Hamza Yusuf, also a white convert to Islam, has a markedly different style than Mattson. His speeches have an unmistakable zeal. Yusuf combines wit, pop culture references, theology, radical politics, and humor, coming across as a charismatic and charming leader. His name before his conversion to Islam was Mark Hanson, and he, like Mattson, found Islam after reading the Quran. Yusuf credits a near-death experience with prompting him to read the Quran. Having studied Islam extensively in the Middle East, Yusuf, too, speaks impeccable fus’ha (classical) Arabic. One of Yusuf’s trademarks is his ability to take a concept or word from the Quran or sunnah and break down the original Arabic into its triliteral roots in order to show its conceptual connection to a seemingly different word. Yusuf has chiseled features and a closely-trimmed goatee. He usually wears a suit, paired with one of his many ornate hats from across the Muslim world. In my opinion, Yusuf seemed to be the leader among the handful of headlining IRO speakers, a celebrity among celebrities. Having Hamza Yusuf on a panel guaranteed the success of the event; he frequently sold out shows at smaller venues. Many people told me they drove or flew to conventions because Yusuf was on the list. Yusuf's commitment to Islam manifests in an interesting engagement with political topics ranging from the War on Terror to
pornography and ethical food consumption. Yusuf co-founded the first liberal arts Muslim college in the U.S., the Zaytuna Institute. He's been described as a theological pop star; the description is fitting.

Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, whom I discuss in greater detail below, is a white convert and a scholar of Islamic studies. He converted to Islam in the 1970’s (citing inspiration by *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*), and earned his doctorate at the University of Chicago. He founded the Nawawwi Foundation in Chicago, tasked with scholarship and travel in order to build a vibrant Muslim American culture. He wrote a book entitled *The Story of Alexander Russell Webb*, a biography of one of the earliest known white American converts to Islam. Webb became Muslim in the 1800's and closely studied the Quran and Arabic. Oft-referenced in IRO speeches, I consider this publication part of the counternarrative construction, reformulating the imagination of who the American Muslim is.

Suhaib Webb, born William Webb in 1973 in Oklahoma, dresses in traditional Islamic (Arab-style or South Asian) attire as often as he wears suits and blazers paired with a Muslim skull cap. Webb sports a humble, trimmed beard. He converted to Islam at the age of 20, and he often recalls reflecting upon the majesty and mysteries of the skies (combined with a delinquent gang background) as leading him ultimately to Islam. While his Arabic fluency is not at the level of Hamza Yusuf, Webb is fluent and his pronunciation is strong. He has an especially large following among IRO members who are young adults, and though he was in the Middle East during much of my fieldwork, I noticed his speeches were referenced and praised by young audiences who purchased CD's or watched the speaker on YouTube. The ISNA website advertises Webb, saying he “strongly advocates for an articulation of an American Islam that is authentic and has leaders that are acutely aware of the issues facing Muslim Americans” (ISNA
website). Other white converts who commonly spoke at IRO events included Susan Douglass, Michael Wolfe, and many more.

John Esposito was another white IRO speaker who commanded a great following. Professor of International Affairs and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, Esposito is often regarded as one of the foremost “Islamic studies” scholars in the country. His accessible, historical, and comprehensive books are required readings in “Introduction to Islam” courses across the country. Interestingly, Esposito is not a Muslim; he is a practicing Catholic. Yet, he is frequently featured in IRO event programming and, much like Hamza Yusuf, commands a serious following. Because Esposito's writings have defended the diverse traditions of global Muslims and debunked the assumptions of Islamophobes, he is a favorite among IRO members. Several times, I found Esposito (often a keynote speaker or a speaker on a plenary alongside Mattson and Yusuf) joking about his own tendentious relationship with Islam – a staunch ally of IRO's, yet himself a practicing Catholic. “Aww, Espo's so cute,” Linah joked with me once in the minutes before one of his speeches began. “I really hope he converts already.”

After my fieldwork, many people I spoke to about the abundance of white IRO leaders expressed surprise. However for IRO members, the presence of these white leaders was a given. I was constantly reassured that Islam’s force was powerful enough to capture the heart of anyone who was truly listening with an open mind. White IRO leaders were accepted, by and large, as validating the cultural projects of these organizations, as evidence that Islam was compatible with a multi-racial American population.

*Whiteness, Leadership, and IRO Strategy*

The age of racial colorblindness brings with it the push to look beyond racial categories,
arguing that racism no longer carries the significance it once did. “The color-blind or race neutral perspective holds that in an environment where institutional racism and discrimination have been replaced by equal opportunity, one’s qualifications, not one’s color or ethnicity, should be the mechanism by which upward mobility is achieved” (Gallagher 2003: 3). Bonilla-Silva (2010), Gallagher (2003), and Baker (2001), among others, have offered strong critiques of colorblindness, arguing that it reinforces racism by privileging or normalizing whiteness. The faulty assumption that we live in a post-racial world prohibits people of color, especially black individuals, from referring to historic and ongoing instances of racial disadvantage. Part of the colorblind milieu is that whiteness becomes “unmarked” (Frankenburg 2008). In imagining America to be post-racial, white privilege is reinforced.

That America has historically been imagined as ‘white’ serves as a backdrop to all U.S. racial projects. From the one-drop rule that served to protect the purity of America’s white race or the naturalization laws that explicitly linked citizenship to race, whiteness has often institutionally been cast as foundational to Americanness. Takaki has suggested that the U.S. master narrative ideologically frames the nation as normatively white and European-descended (1993), mirroring Gilroy's suggestion that Britain is also supposedly white and Christian (1991). Frankenburg points to dominant discourses which have “shaped the construction of Americanness in the narratives as similarly normative/empty, and as excluding of communities of color and so-called white ethnic groups” (1994: 64).

My struggle was to situate a multi-racial, predominantly non-white Muslim population into this theoretical framing of post-racialism and colorblindness. Rana argues that anti-Muslim “racism and Islamophobia are central to the narrative of modern nations – and modernity itself – because they emerged in the contact between the old world and new world” (2011: 28). Yet, the
white convert complicates this assumption, as she is racially unmarked. McAlister's claim that Islamophobia acts both within and across vectors of race is a compelling claim, as the “race” of Muslims is at once homogenized and rendered invisible. Ong's treatment of Asian American populations as a constructed racial group is compelling (2003) for my work. In order to gain equal citizenship, Ong argues, Asian Americans must organize under a banner of shared oppression. The “the politics of compulsion” allow Ong's subjects to self-script an ethnic- or race-based identity to both attract political recognition and regulate those citizens who attempt to claim Asian Americanness. Ong uses this discussion to conclude that Asian Americans are caught up in whitening or becoming close to white in their quest for legitimacy. Lopez's work on race and naturalization explicitly documents the ways Arab and Asian immigrants sought classification as white, as opposed to black, in their quest for full citizenship (2006).

Given this racial backdrop, the white convert occupies an interesting position. With a “new racism” (Bonilla-Silva 2003) shaping the social landscape and an abundance of racist Islamophobic rhetoric, the role of white Muslim leaders is worthy of examination. If racialized and immigrant bodies are imagined as burdened with culture and tradition, while the essentialized West is the champion of rational modernity, where in this formulation does a white convert with an assumed Islamic name (and often garb) fit? What does the white leader do to racist anti-Muslim attitudes?

Mattson’s role as the President of ISNA commanded much attention from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. As a woman, a convert, a non-immigrant, and a white woman, she was the “first” in many regards. Mattson herself writes that “in electing a woman for the first time to head their bi-national religious organization, many considered ISNA members to be making a powerful statement about gender equality in Islam” (Mattson, 2006: 10). It is noteworthy that in
the aforementioned inaugural article, she focuses largely on her identity as a woman; her racial identity is not mentioned at all – an epitome of unmarked whiteness. In fact, in another interview, Mattson goes so far as to say that her election is a “symbol for something bigger” (Mattson 2008). Mattson says that the leadership of the Muslim community should reflect the community; Mattson might be the right person because she is a “native English speaker.” That native tongue is a crucial dimension of identity, while racial representation gets no mention, is noteworthy. It reflects the numerous ways whiteness becomes unmarked, race is muted, and identity politics are configured in ways that reflect processes of articulation. According to Mattson, “we should be having institutions and leadership that is homegrown and that is embedded and relevant to this society.”

Mattson says that American Muslims have a particularly important role because “we have the freedom to talk about these issues. And the reality is that most Muslims in the world live in environments where they don’t have that freedom because their political rights are suppressed, their freedom of speech is very limited. They may not have access to the resources that we have.” She says that American Muslims should figure out “how we can be a bridge of understanding between the United States, our policies, and Muslims in other countries…Muslims in other parts of the world look at us as Americans as well as Muslims, so they want us to do something about American foreign policy that…negatively impacts them. Whether they understand the intricacies of that policy or not is another issue.” Here, Mattson takes a somewhat rare, apologetic stance on U.S. foreign policy, and makes vague statements about the role of American Muslims as a “bridge,” never condemning U.S. foreign policy against the Muslim world.

17 While I do not think Mattson is a supporter of U.S. foreign policy, her statement about global Muslims not understanding the “intricacies” of U.S. foreign policy is noteworthy.
Newsweek points out that the role of white Muslims is pivotal in a time when extremist Muslims (assumed, of course, to be people of color) are terrorizing the world. Pointing to her presidency, one article tells us that “Mattson is the first woman, the first nonimmigrant, and the first Muslim convert to be elected to head the largest Islamic group for social outreach and education in North America. Her election comes at a critical time in the history of Islam. As violent extremists threaten to obliterate the voice of moderate Islam worldwide, Muslims in Western countries, isolated by rising discrimination, struggle to find their place” (Childress 2007: 71). Mattson, the article tells us, “sees herself as uniquely positioned to change the way the world views Muslims—and how they view themselves.” Ingrid Mattson, then, plays the role of a white moderator, able to lead the country’s Muslims during a time when it is threatened by extremists.

Hamza Yusuf Hanson “teaches an Islam of moderation that is the true Islam” (Perlez 2007: 4). Newsweek Magazine describes him as follows:

Born Mark Hanson, the son of California intellectuals, Yusuf was baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church and raised on a ’70s diet of surfing and spiritual eclecticism. At 18, having narrowly survived a car crash, he started reading intently about Islamic spirituality. Over the next 10 years, he studied classical Islamic law and theology in Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco. Today he is as comfortable speaking Arabic on Al-Jazeera as he is expounding on American TV. His dazzling dexterity with Qur’anic knowledge and thinkers from Aristophanes to Mark Twain has made him a great popularizer of the faith (Power 2002).

The article goes on to highlight Yusuf’s appeal to Muslims and non-Muslims alike; he serves as a bridge between both groups. He carefully condemns the terrorist
attacks of September 11th, 2001, while also critiquing the Afghan war and U.S. foreign policy. He “wants Westerners to reform their relationship with the Islamic world, and Muslims to reform their own society.” Much like Mattson, he speaks to and on behalf of both America and the Muslim world, simultaneously shifting between and combining the affiliations. It is quite noteworthy that this Newsweek article never once refers to him as white, much like Mattson’s whiteness goes unmentioned. “When an ex-surfer from the Bay Area can become a Muslim authority, it’s a sign that the West is now part of the Muslim world, too” (ibid). This statement suggests that Yusuf’s conversion can be thought of as symbolic of the erasure or amelioration of larger sociopolitical processes, such as the War on Terror, the Afghan War, or other political issues configured as the traditional clash of civilizations. (I quickly learned about the controversy surrounding Yusuf: many felt he had “sold out” after 9/11 for visiting the White House to speak with Bush in an amicable meeting, earning him the nickname “Hamza Useless.” 9/11 brought about a marked shift in Yusuf’s tone; while he was still deeply critical, there was a sense that he had 'softened' a bit, accommodating “America” in ways he previously had not.)

Yusuf’s speeches are a spectacle to behold. Seats are always filled to capacity, and the audience is emotional and enthusiastic to hear him. Consider the excerpt from his 2006 ICNA talk below:

“This country cannot win a war with Islam, I swear to God! [thunderous applause] I swear to God! We are the people that need to explain this to the American people…The only reason militants have come to America is that militant Americans have gone to the Muslim world. [applause, cheers] If militant America had not gone to the Muslim world,
we would not have militant Muslims coming to America…I don’t want to see militant Islam, I want to see the Islam of peace, but there has to be mutual respect. The Palestinian people have to be respected! [applause] The Kashmiri people have to be respected! [applause] I’m not even speaking as a Muslim right now, I’m speaking as a human being…There are people asking why the Muslims are angry. If you’re not angry about the current social condition, you’re not alive! [applause]”

Though clearly a more enraged and politicized excerpt than Mattson’s interview and Abd-Allah’s scholarship noted above, Yusuf still occupies a role very similar to the others’. “As a professor at the Zaytuna Institute,” Newsweek tells us, “his San Francisco Bay Area madrasa, he has stressed a classical Islam, one stripped of the cultural baggage and prejudices that have crept in over the centuries. He wants Westerners “to reform their relationship with the Islamic world, and Muslims to reform their own society” (2002). His “culture-less” Islam resonates strongly with the cultural dearth and aspirations articulated by Abd-Allah’s Nawawi Foundation.

White Muslim leaders seem to occupy remarkable social spaces, spaces finely imbricated with U.S. racial hierarchies. It seems, from the discussion above, that race is muted and whiteness unmarked, both in the leaders’ own dialogues and in external representations of their roles. Yusuf the “surfer” and Mattson the “native English speaker” are muted race-speak terms for their white identity. “Homegrown” comes to stand in for white. To address race directly rather than use such code words might be to acknowledge power dynamics, a hierarchy, and disjuncture among American Muslims. While these speakers are addressing the need for a cohesive, unified Muslim American
community, to acknowledge these sensitive cleavages might be catastrophic for their visions.

I was alarmed to discover that white privilege and racial hierarchies were irrelevant among many IRO members' reception of these leaders. “I know that Hamza Yusuf is partially popular because he's white,” said Linah, whose critique of racial politics in the U.S. was usually quite nuanced, “but part of that is because we non-white Muslims could learn a thing or two about being a real Muslim from him. How many of us sacrifice our conventional professions to instead go study classical Islam in the Middle East? In a way, these white converts are better than us at our own game. It's not even our game anymore.” “Islam is colorblind,” Sumaiya told me. “That's why I'm not concerned about race among these Muslim leaders. The Prophet envisioned a colorblind community where race didn't matter anymore. When I see an African American man like Zaid Shakir alongside a white man like Hamza Yusuf, and they are all working on the same issue – how to be a better Muslim, how to build a better America – it no longer matters to me what color their skin is.” An appeal to a colorblind Islam envisioned by Prophet Muhammad repeatedly surfaced in the field. This appeal to religion as colorblind imagines the *ummah* as truly post-racial. As a result, the speakers above can claim a Muslim identity by way of conversion, and along with it claim the sociopolitical realities of global Muslims that may or may not be experienced by white American Muslims.

Hassan points out that John Walker Lindh, a white convert to Islam, and Yasser Hamdi, were both detained as footsoldiers to the Taliban (2002). Yet their disparate treatment, Hassan postulates, was likely due to race. Aidi points at the black and Puerto Rican Muslims in the U.S. who were found to have links to ‘terror plots’ (Aidi 2002).
Thus, while white Muslim leaders are celebrated and politically neutralized in popular media, dark-skinned Muslims are criminalized and serve as fodder for Islamophobia. While I attend to racial hierarchies in another chapter in greater depth, it is important to note that IRO members unproblematically accepted white IRO leaders and were generally enthusiastic about the “culture-less” Islam they proposed. Yet in other instances, the need to eradicate anti-black racism and ethnocentrism among Muslims was emphasized.

Though Islam's prophetic vision may be a pristine, egalitarian one, a racially unequal reality forms the backdrop for U.S. Islam. A BusinessWeek article reinforces this separation, pointing out that “college-educated white converts whose interest in New Age concepts leads them to the spiritual Sufi branch of Islam do not resemble poor black prison inmates who embrace Muslim beliefs behind bars as a source of discipline and solace” (They're Muslims, and Yankees Too, 2007). The racial implication here is clear; white Muslims embrace Islam out of spirituality and reflection, while black Muslims seek a source of much-needed discipline.

Such racialized representations build a divisive binary among Muslims. While white Muslims are seen as potential moderators between the danger of radical (assumed to be non-white) Islam, the historical significance and transformative potential of black Islam in the U.S. is at once demonized and erased. The numerous Arab and South Asian American Muslims that are lauded in popular representations as ‘good’ Muslims (discussed in a different chapter), then, embody a version of Islam that is closer to a white and whitened Islam, an Islam compatible with Western power structures (unlike the revolutionary black Islam which opposed them). This, of course, is not to say that the work to be done by white American Muslims is apolitical. For
instance, Hamza Yusuf’s vocal anger about the injustice done to Palestinians is an example of the transformative potential enabled by leveraging of white privilege. However, in this chapter I have focused on the ways that whiteness is invisibilized, yet remains at work, in the fracturing of Muslim communities into “good” and “bad.”

It seems apparent that white Muslim leaders are critical voices in separating out the good Muslims from the bad ones, in prescribing a positive, tolerable version of Islamic practice for American Muslims to practice in the U.S. and around the world. That white Muslims can serve as bridges between “us” and “them” tells us something important about racialized and xenophobic attitudes toward “them.” While we are quick to clamor and shout about the injustices done to Muslims by the West, there are important processes unfolding at the very border between the “West” and “Islam” (incommensurable units to begin with!) which must be examined.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has engaged with some of the most difficult components of my fieldwork, dealing explicitly with troubling notions of “America,” race, and culture. While talking to people in the field whom I often found to have profound critiques of U.S. empire, racism, and militarism, I discovered a simultaneous eagerness to support a project of cultural citizenship that relied on essentialized notions of Americanness and that reinforced the notion of America as white. However, what I perceived as an inconsistency is constitutive of the politics of Islamophilia my dissertation unearths. There is no uniform, linear orientation to IRO politics or strategies. At once oppositional *and* assimilative, they reflect an interesting ambiguity.

The section on white leaders proved especially difficult to write, as there is a tangible sense of admiration and esteem associated with this representatives among IRO members of
color. If race is a factor, and colorblindness is indeed as dangerous as race scholars have concluded, then these white leaders are hardly representatives at all, as normative whiteness and racial privilege set them apart. Much the way whiteness is neutralized, the white-led calls for Muslim Americans to abandon burdensome homeland culture also neutralizes what underlies assumptions about U.S. culture. It is abundantly clear that Bakalian and Bozorgmehr are correct in their assertion that Muslim advocacy groups embrace an integrationist approach (2009). Yet my work illustrates the ways this approach does work around notions of race and culture. The project of cultural citizenship is deeply politicized, as Prashad claims all cultural projects are (2000).

In this chapter, I have dealt with the “story” of Islam in America that is produced through the representational choices of IRO’s. Perhaps a counternarrative challenging racial nativism, or perhaps an integrationist attempt at getting Muslims a seat at the table, these narratives are nonetheless powerful. Narratives are concerned with ordering the world in particular ways, ways which are expected to be transformative. This storytelling “process illustrates how segments of a hegemonic worldview maybe adopted, even as they are subverted, reinterpreted, and recombined in unorthodox ways” (Malkki 1995:103). This chapter looks at this narrativizing process epistemologically: how are they being produced? What are the sociocultural contexts of this production? “Narratives,” writes Trouillot, “are necessarily emplotted in a way that life is not” (2012: 6). Here, I am asking both what the age-old nativist narrative has done by excluding Muslims, casting them as citizen outsiders, and how this new counternarrative emerging from an elite subset of Muslim voices decides upon which history to construct.
CHAPTER 4: “WE HAVE A DREAM”: Islamophilia and Representational Practices

Within a week of the attacks of September 11th, 2001, George W. Bush delivered a speech at a Washington mosque proclaiming the value of American Muslims in the US socioeconomic landscape. “America counts millions of Muslims among our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country,” he said. “Muslims are doctors, lawyers, shopkeepers, moms and dads, and they need to be treated with respect.” Bush’s response was clearly directed at the undeniable wave of Islamophobia that was ushered in almost immediately after the events of 9/11/2001. This speech came shortly after his infamous proclamation after the attacks that the world would decide whether it was with “us” or with the terrorists, establishing an ideological binary that would inform the political and discursive possibilities for the post-9/11 world. It is remarkable that Bush himself, considered by many Muslims to be chief architect for contemporary institutional Islamophobia, publicly proclaimed sympathy for the American Muslims who deserved respect and inclusion. John Ashcroft declared on September 13th, 2001, that “any threats of violence or discrimination against Arab or Muslim Americans or Americans of South Asian descent are not just wrong and un-American, but also are unlawful and will be treated as such” (John Ashcroft, U.S. Department of Justice Memorandum 01/468, September 13, 2001.) On September 17th, 2001, President Bush proclaimed that “Muslims love America as much as I do.” Several years later, Barack Obama’s “New Beginning” speech in Cairo spoke would continue in a similar tone the official conversation on the potential for inclusion and acceptance of global Muslims, even while Obama ostensibly intensified U.S. military presence in Muslim-majority countries.
Indeed, it would be difficult to overlook the abundance of cultural and political messaging that has offered the public a positive view of Muslims. In the U.S., this messaging has suggested that Muslims are quintessentially American, deserving of sympathy, and part of a multicultural U.S. In a 2007 cover story entitled “American Dreamers,” *Newsweek* offered a snapshot of U.S. Muslims. Their lives embody a bold blend of Islamic tradition and assimilation to life in the U.S. The article presents us with Ferdous Sajdeeen, the owner of a lucrative pharmacy business in New York, the successful cardiologist Maher Hathout, and the entrepreneur Fareed Siddiq. These success stories show us Muslims who are hard workers and potential consumers, active contributors to US capitalism.

In this chapter, I consider the abundance of seemingly positive representations of U.S. Muslims that, I argue, are inseparable from the undeniable presence of Islamophobia. These sympathetic representations of American Muslims since 9/11 offer a glimpse into a classificatory process, one that demarcates the boundary between “us” and “them.” I focus on the interplay between Islamophobia and Islamophilia that has dominated the representational politics of IRO’s. By Islamophilia, I refer to the construction of a “good Muslim” archetype – one that characterizes Muslims as peace-loving, patriotic, and fiercely opposed to terrorism. Rather than seeing Islamophilia as the opposite of Islamophobia, I consider the unique ways in which the good Muslim construct is part of an Islamophobic milieu. As Shryock writes, “phobic” and “philic” lenses are shaping Muslim American religious sensibilities (2010). The “generalized affection for Islam and Muslims” (9) described by Shryock is less about a pro-Muslim, inclusive, or multiracial structural reordering. Rather, as Bayoumi describes, it is about converting a treacherous, hostile, or foreign Islam into a benign and palatable Western force (Bayoumi 2010).

“By accepting collective responsibility for terrorism on behalf of Muslims in general and
Muslim Americans in particular, Muslim American leaders-turned-spokespeople affirm their positive identification with the US as good, flag-waving citizens, identifying Islam in terms of normative definitions of a good religion and claiming a space in the cultural mainstream through the disavowal and identification of bad Muslims and bad Islam,” says Grewal in *Islam is a Foreign Country* (2013:302). It is this process that I explore here; I ask what the contours are of a ‘good’ Islam or ‘good’ Muslims. Who is the incommensurable ‘bad’ Muslim, and what markers of legitimacy are necessary for good Muslim status? After considering representational Islamophilia, I discuss Islamophilia as a form of neoliberal multiculturalism, one which “rhetorically privileges Arab Americans in order to discriminate against – and to obscure discrimination of – Arabs, Muslims, or South Asians in the United States who cannot or do not claim to be American in a nationalist or idealist sense” (Melamed 2006: 8). In other words, Islamophilia uses a defense of certain Muslims that ends up reinforcing Islamophobia against other Muslims (and non-Muslims). I then discuss the sociopolitical costs of using Islamophilic strategy to combat Islamophobia.

*Islamophilia*

Many of my conversations in the field revolved around memories of 9/11 and the immediate aftermath. While a few people were able to recount horrific incidents of Islamophobia – ranging from their children’s Islamic schools receiving bomb threats, their mosques being vandalized, or hearing racial slurs in shopping malls – many recollections included gestures of support, such as mosques receiving flowers from church groups. One Somali-American woman who wears a hijab told me that white women in particular would approach her (at the grocery store or at the public library, for instance) and offer words of support. Another Pakistani-
American IT professional told me that he received emails from several co-workers expressing solidarity in the aftermath of the attacks, that people told him to be safe, to disregard the terrible anti-Muslim things that were being said. Sympathy for America’s Muslims was evident in efforts such as “Hijab Solidarity Day,” an internationally-observed day on which non-Muslim women may also cover their hair to demonstrate an alliance with Muslim women. I attended a workshop in Queens shortly after beginning fieldwork at which a Jewish woman from New York spoke of the support group she formed where Muslim women could come and spend time with other Jewish women in an inclusive and supportive space. That these acts of solidarity and compassion were central in people’s memories is striking. We must begin to contemplate, given the overwhelming attention to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim violence, what it means that these sympathetic gestures have accompanied the rise of Islamophobia. It is important to understand that Islamophilia operates on many levels: it at once acts upon Muslim communities (as the example of the political speeches or the Jewish-Muslim support group) and from within them (as in, for example, when one IRO member told me she chose to go to business school because the world needed to see more successful Muslim women entrepreneurs). There are forces constructing the good Muslim category simultaneously from sympathetic, liberal non-Muslims and from Muslim individuals and advocacy groups.

Islamophilia: Class and Legitimacy

It was my fascination with representations of “good Muslims” that had led me to my dissertation topic several years before. For quite some time, I had observed a remarkable number of popular media pieces that used class- and race-coded language to depict Muslims as achievers of the American Dream. Class, for instance, was an unmarked vector of legitimacy for the
hypervisible good Muslim. An entire BusinessWeek piece entitled “They’re Muslims and Yankees, Too” provides numerous examples of upwardly mobile, successful American Muslims. The “Yankees” featured in the article are influential lawyers, bankers, and publishing executives, all success stories in a meritocratic social landscape. In the “American Dreamers” piece in Newsweek, the comparison is made explicit: these American Muslims stand in contrast to the unassimilated or ghettoized European Muslims. The implication that America’s Muslims are faring better than Europe’s is an undeniable component of Islamophilia. 

Thus, American Muslims are less violent and less extremist than their European counterparts because of the success story offered by the American Dream. American Muslims, the media story goes, are able to assimilate, educate themselves, and secure professional employment, thus escaping the violent and poverty-stricken life that European Muslims have fallen into. The implication, of course, is that class is a key vector in predicting terror, violence, or extremism. Indeed, the fear of a lurking Muslim underclass highlights the central role of socioeconomic class in the process of legitimacy. Says Hisham Aidi, “…terrorism experts and columnists have been warning of the ‘Islamic threat’ in the American underclass, and alerting the public that the ghetto and the prison system could very well supply a fifth column to Osama bin Laden and his ilk” (2002: 36). Aidi writes of the sensationalized fear of an Islamic threat brewing in US ghettos, focusing on the fear of Latino and black converts to Islam, the popularity of Islam among incarcerated populations, and Islamic influence on political hip-hop. This “urban” or “ghetto” Islam, says Aidi, makes for a general paranoia about an Islam that may destabilize America from below. It is in contrast to this fear that the “good Muslim” trope emphasizes an upwardly-mobile professional class of Muslim Americans.

Part of U.S. Islamophilia, I argue, is the claim that Muslims constitute a fertile niche
market, that U.S. Muslims have wealth and purchasing power. This claim is evident in discourse produced by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The increased attention to the profitability of making products “Muslim-friendly” is one such example. *The Economist* points out, in an August 2007 piece entitled “Marketing to Muslims,” that the education and income level of American Muslims make them a worthwhile niche market. The article points to the profitability of selling halal Chicken McNuggets at a London McDonald’s. “The firm is treading carefully: the new offerings are not advertised beyond the walls of the restaurant. Yet demand is strong, sales are increasing, and McDonald’s is thinking about extending the experiment.” *Forbes* pointed out that Nestlé’s compliance with halal food requirements has paid off in billions for the corporation. “Nestlé has become the biggest food manufacturer in the halal sector, with more than $3 billion in annual sales in Islamic countries and with 75 of its 481 factories worldwide producing halal food.” Halal food is not the only profitable venture for corporations; U.S. News & World Report pointed out in 2007 that American businesspeople will soon be floating Islamic bonds to investors. In the same year, *Forbes* pointed out that financial institutions such as UBS, Deutsche Bank, and Morgan Stanley were “rushing sharia-compliant financial products to market.”

In 2007, the Pew Research Center issued a report that active IRO members seemed to know inside and out. The report, entitled *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*, opens with the statement, “A comprehensive nationwide survey of Muslim Americans finds them to be largely assimilated, happy with their lives, and moderate with respect to many of the issues that have divided Muslims and Westerners around the world…Overwhelmingly, they believe hard work pays off in this society. This belief is reflected in Muslim American income and education levels, which generally mirror those of the general
IRO members by and large hailed the Pew Report (a self-proclaimed non-partisan “fact” report) as a milestone study that would benefit Muslims.

At an event in Washington, D.C., Mubarak spoke to a room of several hundred attendees. “Of all global Muslims,” he said, “we are in the best position to speak out. In terms of wealth, in terms of freedom. Especially political freedom. Let us not forget that Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala has bestowed us with a great ni’mah (blessing). It would be a pity to squander this blessing and not speak up.” In this speech, Mubarak urges American Muslims to leverage their privilege to make a change in the world. He uses a particular type of privilege – political freedoms and wealth – that he names as uniquely American, to paint a picture of an ideal Muslim type, summoning Grewal’s notion of the “exceptional” Muslim American ummah (2013). The idea that Muslims both had already made it as economic success stories and yet had enormous future potential for upward mobility are a critical part of the story of internalized Islamophilia. “Think about it,” Hasan told me as his wife attended to their toddler. “We talk about Islamophobia, but the Jews had it really, really bad in this country when they arrived as immigrants. I mean, probably much worse than Muslims have it. That might not be a popular thing to say at ISNA, but I’ve read the history. I know anti-Semitism was real. But now, look at America. Are Jews a disenfranchised minority group? No. They are high-up in Hollywood, in academia, in finance. How did they do that? They stuck together, and they made climbing up the ladder a priority. Who’s to say Muslims can’t do the same thing?” Grewal writes of the AlMaghrib institute, a revivalist group in the U.S. founded in the years following 9/11 (2013). Part of the Salafi movement, AlMaghrib is committed to a “traditionalist” pedagogical method. The organization’s founders have named Orthodox Jews as embodying a model for U.S. Muslims. AlMaghrib commends Hasidic Americans as embodying “commensurable American difference” (332) –
adhering to an orthodox faith, yet squarely “American.” AlMaghrib’s orientation is decidedly more rigid in its theological orientation than the IRO events I attended, but the unique relationship to Jewish Americans is remarkable among both.

“You find Muslims complaining about how powerless we are to deal with the issue of Palestine in this country,” Hasan continued. (For more on IRO members’ relationship to pro-Palestine activism, see Chapter 5.) “But why are we powerless? It’s because there’s such a powerful Israeli and Jewish lobby in Washington. Those are the people who shape policy. And how do the lobbies get all this power? Wealth, money. Well Muslims have money, too. I know a Syrian physician. He’s a remarkable man. His labs are very successful. You must know him; he’s very active in the community. Were you at the health fair? He had a bunch of his doctors doing free health screenings, blood pressure and cholesterol, et cetera. But see, with all his philanthropy and all his donations to mosques, why isn’t he forming some kind of coalition with other wealthy Muslims about Palestine? He cares about the issue, but not enough to influence policy. Why is that? We have the power here to use our wealth to bring about the change we desire. If Jewish Americans could defeat anti-Semitism, then Muslim Americans can defeat Islamophobia.” Haris Tarin, a key IRO spokesperson, spoke in a similar vein at an event in Queens in 2011. “All I could hear about from Muslims a couple years ago was the attack on Gaza. You know, Muslims were outraged, and rightfully so; they should have been. But I had a meeting with some elected officials, Congresspeople. And you know what I found? They got over 1500 calls that were pro-Israeli. Very, very few people called in from a pro-Palestinian perspective.” It was remarkable how often Jewish Americans were invoked as the minority group to emulate.

I observed IRO members engaging with the class-specific element of the “good” Muslim
trope in interesting ways. They repeated with pride statistics that revealed US Muslims to have higher per-capita income and higher levels of education than the population at large. This was presented in defense of Muslim communities; their class status and educational attainment were credentials in their quest for legitimacy. Yet, at the same time, IRO leaders and members took pride in the fact that Islam could bring “structure” and “discipline” to the lives of poor or incarcerated Americans of color. The Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) is a well-regarded IRO that works around issues of social justice in urban communities. Responding largely to issues of inner-city poverty and urban blight, IMAN is a group of Muslim organizers and volunteers who strive to “foster a dynamic and vibrant space for Muslims in Urban America by inspiring the larger community toward critical civic engagement exemplifying prophetic compassion in the work for social justice and human dignity” (IMAN website). Every summer, IMAN sponsors a huge concert called “Takin' It to the Streets,” in which major hip-hop artists (i.e. Talib Kweli, Mos Def/Yasin Bey, or Lupe Fiasco) perform in free concerts in inner-city Chicago. Interestingly, ISNA members – many of them finance professionals, bankers, physicians, and lawyers who live in gentrified neighborhoods of Chicago or suburbia – eagerly attend Takin’ It to the Streets, arguing that Islam can have a positive influence on the lives of urban people of color. One attendee told me, “This is the best way to show America what Islam has to offer. For ages, policymakers have been trying to solve the problems of the inner cities: drugs, gangs. But no one will do it the way Muslims do.”

The engagement of IRO members with Takin’ it To The Streets revealed a tension around politics of race and class. It seemed, at times, that IRO members, who were enthusiastic about IMAN’s work, wanted less to engage with inner-city residents to bring about an alliance that would transform a deeply stratified society and more that they were engaged in a project of
salvation, by which Islam could uplift the socioeconomic troubles of the inner-city. While event organizers revealed a deep understanding of structural racism and stratification, many Takin’ It to the Streets attendees celebrated the ways in which exposure to Islamic principles would be able to save those in the throes or urban poverty. Many of these IRO members were second-generation immigrants, Arabs and South Asians, whose parents had entered the U.S. as a result of 1965 immigration legislation that favored immigration by a particular, technical and highly educated Asian workforce. Socioeconomically, they have little in common with an urban underclass – which includes Muslims and non-Muslims – they identify as the beneficiary of IMAN’s work.

This work points once again to the impossibility of speaking of a Muslim ummah or community; rather, the demographic “Muslim American” may conceal more than it reveals. Take, for instance, Hammad, a 27 year-old Pakistani American man in New York City, where he moved in 2001 after graduating from an Ivy League university. He lives in midtown Manhattan and works long hours at a hedge fund. Hammad is a member of an organization called Muslim Urban Professionals, composed of Muslim Americans employed mainly in finance or law. Hammad identifies very strongly as a Muslim, observing his daily prayers even when he is at work. Is Hammad the Muslim we think of when we imagine the oppression faced by American Muslims? Try to insert an individual like Hammad into the *Jihad vs. McWorld* framework Benjamin Barber proposes (1995). According to Barber, the “narrowly conceived” faith of Islam stands in stark contrast to the homogenizing force of capital. Barber’s framework gained prominence over the past 20 years, contributing to the popular sense that Islam (“jihad,” for Barber) is tribalistic and opposed to the globalizing universality of capitalism. Yet for Hammad, a self-proclaimed “firm believer in capitalism,” there is no conflict between his identity as a
global (and pious) Muslim and a hedge fund employee. Indeed, in our conversation he mentioned that success in finance capital might be one way that Muslims can integrate themselves into American society. American Muslims are considered “good” Muslims, worthy of incorporation in the social fabric of the nation, based upon their compatibility with capitalism. In this sense, it is a type of corporate multiculturalism that is invoked in these efforts to positively represent U.S. Muslims.

Speaking critically of this brand of multiculturalism, the Chicago Cultural Studies group points out that “Multiculturalism may … prove to be a poor slogan. Those who use it … seem to think that it intrinsically challenges established cultural norms. But multiculturalism is proving to be fluid enough to describe very different styles of cultural relations, and corporate multiculturalism is proving that the concept need not have any critical content” (1992). What corporate multiculturalism offers, then, is a depoliticized picture of diversity. “Instead of emphasizing moral and legal imperatives, the proponents of diversity argue that the management of diversity is an important business issue affecting white America and its corporations in their struggle to gain and maintain competitive advantage in a changing domestic and global marketplace” (Baker: 140). Diversity and multiculturalism become profitable ventures, in which structural and material inequalities are ignored, overlooked, or deemed irrelevant. The historical and ongoing creation of inequality and the very role of capital in this process are ultimately ignored by corporate multiculturalism. As Angela Davis says, “a multiculturalism that does not acknowledge the political character of culture will not, I am sure, lead toward the dismantling of racist, sexist, homophobic, and economically exploitative institutions” (1996: 47).

That IRO’s are at once the spokespeople for a fabricated “Muslim community” and comprised of a socioeconomically elite subset of the U.S. Muslim population produces peculiar
results. The pro-Muslim, anti-Islamophobia messaging from these organizations reflects the privilege and upward mobility of a select group, yet simultaneously claims to represent a quintessential Muslim American aspiration. At IRO events, I very rarely heard the issues of undocumented immigration, poverty, labor exploitation in the service sector, or increased use of police force in communities of color. Yet I frequently attended panels on workplace diversity, electoral politics, and representation in media. Certainly, the former set of concerns are critical for U.S. Muslims, given the burgeoning working-class and undocumented Muslim population and the concentration of Islam among inner-city communities of color (Aidi). Islamophilia, I argue, eschews (or at best, marginalizes) these concerns in favor of these representational strategies of inclusion and legitimacy.

The irony of class serving as a marker of good Muslim status in the age of Islamophobia becomes apparent after a historical analysis of the roots of terror. Osama bin Laden is the emblem of terror and anti-Americanism, yet himself hails from a background of both considerable wealth and political legitimacy. In fact, one of the biggest inaccuracies in public discourse about terror is that Islamism is anti-modern and a product of poverty. On the contrary, the work of Deepa Kumar (2012), John Esposito (2003), and Reza Aslan (2010) shows the ways in which political Islam is a quintessentially modern condition – the exceptional by-product of a complex configuration of Cold War politics, the oil industry, and post-colonialism. In Kumar’s work, we see how Islamism is the product of a failure of secular nationalism, a destabilized Left, and crises of capitalism (2013).

The major figures in the story of Islamism have not been sheltered, uneducated, impoverished Third Worlders, nor have they been the parochial tribalists described by Benjamin Barber. Quite the contrary: individuals with engineering degrees from western institutions and
urban middle class backgrounds populate the field of notorious “bad” Muslims. The “typical” Islamist has an engineering degree, strong Western educational credentials, and a solid middle class background (Kumar 2012; Achcar 2002). For example, Ayman al Zawahiri was a skilled surgeon who, disillusioned by the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, joined Islamic Jihad (Esposito 2003). Sayyid Qutb called for holy war against the West after a visit to the United States demonstrated American racism and sexual immorality. Most notoriously, Anwar al-Awlaki was the son of a Fulbright Scholar and was educated in Colorado and San Diego before his return to Yemen and subsequent turn to political Islam (Scahill 2013). Deepa Kumar documents the history of Western finance capital and support for Islamist movements, highlighting support by prominent financial institutions and banks for groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood (2012).

Given this genealogy, it is significant that IRO members regard high educational status as an indicator of good Muslim status. This speaks to a larger process of the social imaginary about terror, Americanism, and minority status. IRO members understand the consequence of claiming high levels of education or wealth as a form of social capital. The same claim is deployed in defense of Asian Americans as a so-called “model minority,” a trope that paints Asian immigrants in this country as uniquely upwardly mobile, highly educated, and unaffected by the racism, criminalization, and ghettoization that other groups of color face. The model minority stereotype has been used both to flatten and homogenize the radical socioeconomic diversity that actually exists among Asian American populations and to castigate black and Latino Americans in comparison to the “success” experienced by Asian Americans. It is used to prove the meritocratic potential of the American Dream. What the model minority trope ignores, however, is the geopolitical history of the Asian American professional class. Post-1965 immigration policy favored technically skilled workers from places like India and China as part of the
competition between the US and the Soviet Union. This professional class of immigrants – many of them Muslim – came to study and work in the US, some intending to return to their home countries after acquiring a U.S. education. This history is erased through the seemingly positive model minority trope, one that individualizes the successes and failures of groups of color rather than situating them in their larger historical contexts. Certainly, for Muslim populations in the U.S., there is a segment – doctors, engineers, and finance professionals – who comply with the demographics of the model minority stereotype. At the same time, we see the decades after doors were open to highly-educated professional Muslim class leading to a bifurcated Muslim population through chain migration and undocumented immigration. Taking Islamophilia as a close parallel to the model minority stereotype, we can see the “good Muslim” trope invisibilizing the bifurcation of the US Muslim population. Indeed, the use of the term “Muslim” again loses any analytic coherence; speaking of a ‘well educated’ population of Muslim Americans with ‘above-average per capita incomes’ has distinct ramifications for inner city Muslim converts, many black and Latino, who are not represented by this success story.

The eagerness to lay claim to model minority status betrays an understanding among IRO members that the model minority myth carries neoliberal aspirational undertones that applaud those who succeeded at the American Dream. Certainly, claiming this type of privilege reflects a larger politics of alignment among Asian immigrants, a process that is played out in the context of overarching racial dynamics (Prashad 2000). When it comes to representing Muslim Americans, the politics of naming (Naber) become especially critical. IRO’s are caught in the tricky act of representing a group that does not have socioeconomic, racial, or geographical unity. For believing Muslims, the concept of the “ummah” – a community of people who believe
in the Quran and the sunnah\textsuperscript{18} - is expected to be free of divisions along lines of race and class. Yet when transposed to the racial context of the U.S., invoking the concept of “ummah” takes on many of the features of colorblindness or racialism that preclude earnest engagement with stratification.

\textit{Islamophilia and Production of the Moderate Muslim}

At a regional IRO event in Dearborn, Michigan, Sumaiya spoke to me at length about the recent abundance of “positive” media representations of US Muslims. She referenced \textit{MOOZ-lum}, the 2010 film starring Danny Glover about an African American Muslim man’s experience of 9/11. We also discussed \textit{All-American Muslim}, a reality show on TLC that featured a number of Muslim families (interestingly, also living in Dearborn). “Wasn’t that show terrible?” Sumaiya laughed, her eyes sparkling. Sumaiya was one of my closest contacts among IRO members. She and I were seated in the lobby area of a large mosque where the ISNA event was being held. She frequently made me laugh; when she started poking fun at these Muslim American cultural pieces it was no exception. “See, here’s the problem. These works are not concerned with telling a story…it seems they’re more concerned with telling \textit{the} story. The story of being Muslim in America. Well, there is no such thing! That story doesn’t exist! So why are they trying to do this? It’s all part of these, I guess what you’re studying, “Good Muslim” politics. Muslim cultural production is so focused on portraying Muslims as good, instead of producing good works of literature or film.”

The controversy that surrounded \textit{All-American Muslim} was revelatory of the logic of

\textsuperscript{18} The example set by the life of Prophet Muhammad, to be emulated by all Muslims
Islamophobia. The show ran for one season on TLC, following a handful of Arab-American families in Michigan and exposing the day-to-day lives of moderate Muslims. David Caton, the born-again Christian founder of the Florida Family Association, began reaching out to sponsors and encouraging them to withdraw support for the program. The home-improvement store Lowe’s (along with a handful of other sponsors) notoriously pulled their sponsorship for the show, leading to a boycott of Lowe’s and accusations of Islamophobia. With Russell Simmons, Kal Penn, and Mia Farrow all speaking out on the issue, All-American Muslim gained more publicity through the surrounding controversy than for the dynamics of the show itself, which was canceled after one season due to low ratings. Upon its cancelation, cast member Suehaila Amen remarked that the show had paved the way for representation of moderate Muslims in the mainstream media (Stelter 2012). “The reason the Islamophobes didn’t like the show was because it showed Muslims as moderate. Actually, if you watch the show, you see a diversity of Muslims,” Linah told me at a convention in Washington, D.C. “The whole line of the Islamophobia industry is that there is no moderate Muslim, that we are all given to extremism. And what bugged them about this show is that it painted a very different picture. It’s important to know that it’s not the representation of Muslims that bothered the Islamophobes, it’s the portrayal of moderate Muslims.” IRO spokesperson Wajahat Ali wrote in an op-ed about the controversy surrounding the show. “Pamela Geller, founder of the shrill Atlas Shrugs blog and co-founder with blogger Robert Spencer of Stop Islamization of America, is convinced that the show ‘is an attempt to manipulate Americans into ignoring the threat of jihad.’” Ali points to the ways in which the show disturbed Islamophobes in its attempt to normalize something, Islam, that is akin to Nazism. In other words, what bothered the Islamophobes about the show was the façade that Muslims could be moderate. “If Geller, Spencer, and Horowitz were producing their
version of American Muslim reality,” Ali writes, “the episodes would focus on the families’ radical stealth jihad plots. Through eight episodes, they would attempt to turn McDonald’s golden arches into minarets, transform California into Caliph-ornia, place a burqa over the Statue of Liberty, creep sharia into the Denny’s breakfast menu and spike the elementary school eggnog with sumac and lentils.”

IRO members expressed have mixed feelings about Islamophilic cultural production and the “moderate” Muslim trope. The Kite Runner, for instance, served as a point of contention in its transformative potential. The acclaimed novel is the story of a man who leaves Afghanistan to live in the United States, fleeing an exceptionally racist and fundamentalist environment for the security and success offered in the West. He shudders to think of the atrocities committed by the Taliban and stands apart from the brutality, sexism, and racism of a radical Islamic regime, using his moderate Islamic affiliations to tell a story that is palatable to its supposedly Western audience. Some IRO members adored the novel, suggesting that stories like this would help Americans understand that Muslims are not all aligned with extremism and fundamentalism. Yet others felt that the protagonist made orthodox Muslims look bad; his “moderate” version of Islam, indicated by his consumption of alcohol, equated pious Muslims with political violence.

The moderate Muslim occupies a unique niche in Islamophilic representational politics. Grewal writes that American journalists “have offered various kinds of good Muslim citizens as solutions to Islam’s crises: Sufi intellectuals, feminists, blacks, and even ultraconservative (but pacifist) ‘fundamentalists.’ These diverse American Muslim spokespeople have initiated energetic programs to found Islamic pedagogical institutions in the US, promoting an emergent Muslim American moral geography with the US at its core…” (2013: 305). Extremism, orthodoxy, and violence are equated in the logics of both Islamophobia and Islamophilia. The
“moderate” Muslim embodies the palatable type of Muslim who is incorporated into a multicultural United States as evidence of its pluralism.

The 2007 attempt in Los Angeles to map Muslim communities, for instance, was officially represented as an issue of moderate versus extreme Islam. *The Los Angeles Times* provided coverage of the mapping plan to better deal with local terror threats. Comparing them to their European counterparts, the article revealed American Muslims’ relative religious moderation. “American Muslims differ from their European co-religionists in several other respects. A Pew survey of 1,050 adult American Muslims nationwide found them to be "largely assimilated, happy with their lives and moderate." Although two-thirds are immigrants, most respondents said Muslims should integrate into U.S. society rather than isolate themselves. California resident Mohammed Abdul Aleem, quoted in the article, opposes the LAPD’s plan to map the city’s Muslim communities, saying “It’s making it harder and harder for moderate Muslims.” This incident highlights the critical role of the so-called ‘moderate’ Muslim. Moderate Muslims are not just seen as the less dangerous alternative to the extremist Muslim; they are in fact key allies in the fight against extremist Islam. *The Washington Times* reported in October 2002 that “because the need for moderate Muslim voices is more important today than ever before, we should be pulling in moderate Arabic speakers to assist our intelligence community at home and abroad.”

The binary of being with “us” or with the terrorist, then, invokes notions of moderation in religious practice. The moderate Muslim is a sympathetic figure in liberal imaginaries, threatened on the one side by extremist Islam and on the other by anti-Muslim right wing Islamophobia. This sympathetic figure is in contrast to the (often) foreign-born, pious extremist. In “American Dreamers,” the article expresses concern over the importing of foreign imams to
mosques in the US. Favoring homegrown, “American” imams, the article shuns those who bring with them a “warped version” of “extremist ideology” which they would then transfer to American Muslim teenagers. Consider a Time article that tells a story of a U.S. imam who is “fighting his own war against radicals trying to hijack his religion” (Waller 2005: 61). Quite literally, the “good” and “bad” Muslim are pitted against one another.

When Forbes tells the story of halal-compliant Nestle products, the executive that spearheaded the initiative in Malaysia is referred to as “clean shaven.” The article tells us that “for centuries the men who decided whether food was halal were bearded and worked in mosques.” The clean-shaven Othman Yusoff, then, uses his “clean shaven” Islam to bridge corporate interests with multicultural inclusion of Muslims. Newsweek points out that the role of white Muslims is pivotal in a time when extremist Muslims (assumed, of course, to be people of color) are terrorizing the world. Pointing to the then-president of the Islamic Society of North America, an article tells us that “Mattson is the first woman, the first nonimmigrant, and the first Muslim convert to be elected to head the largest Islamic group for social outreach and education in North America. Her election comes at a critical time in the history of Islam. As violent extremists threaten to obliterate the voice of moderate Islam worldwide, Muslims in Western countries, isolated by rising discrimination, struggle to find their place” (Childress, 2007: 71).

Mattson, the article tells us, “sees herself as uniquely positioned to change the way the world views Muslims—and how they view themselves.” Ingrid Mattson, then, plays the role of a white moderator, able to lead the country’s Muslims during a time when it is threatened by extremists. Yet is she a moderate Muslim? Her hijabs and floor-length, loose-fitting dresses betray a piety and orthodoxy that we do not typically associate with “moderation.” In listening to Mattson’s speeches during my time in the field, it was clear that she was hardly waving a banner of reform
and she certainly espoused adherence to fundamental Islamic principles. In labeling her ‘moderate,’ it seems that religious practice is of less concern than a sort of national palatability – in this case, inflected by racial and ethnic markers.

It was a fear of lack of moderation among U.S. Muslims that lay beneath the screening of the controversial NYPD training video, *The Third Jihad: Radical Islam’s Vision for America*. The film promoted the idea that there is an inherent radicalization of most – or all – Muslim communities, raising concern among civil rights activists about strained relations between the NYPD and New York City’s Muslims. In spite of an attempted cover-up by NYPD officials, Freedom of Information Requests revealed that the film had been shown repeatedly to a startling number of new recruits. The film claims that Muslims of all stripes are waging a modern jihad in the US and that the notion that American Muslims are moderate is a deceptive propaganda tactic. Clearly, this incident reveals that there are policy-level stakes in the concept of ‘moderation,’ a term that itself has shifting and inconsistent significations. What, exactly, is a “moderate” Muslim? Does it mean one who only loosely identifies with the faith? Can a moderate Muslim wear a hijab, or practice gender segregation? Do moderate Muslims believe in gay marriage? Must a moderate Muslim eschew anti-Americanism or political violence? Does “moderate” refer to a level of religiosity, a level of cultural assimilation, or both?

The question of the ‘moderate’ good Muslim is especially complicated given the data I collected in my work with IRO members. I struggled with the assumption that IRO members, representing that professional class of highly-assimilated American Muslims that the Pew Report describes, are “moderate.” Indeed, many of them eschew distinctions between orthodoxy and moderation. In critiques of liberal modalities of multiculturalism, it has become somewhat of a commonplace to acknowledge secularism and moderation as hallmarks of the “good” Muslim.
Yet the IRO members include *hafiz*\(^\text{19}\) of the Quran, women who wear hijabs (and even some who wear a naqab – the face covering), and many who believe that the Quran and sunnah must be interpreted and applied as literally as possible. These are individuals who are also enmeshed in the project of legitimacy for U.S. Muslims. They are not the uniformly secularized, clean-shaven, assimilated subjects presented by liberal discourse on Muslim Americans. Indeed, a remarkable range of pieties is on display among those Muslims seeking inclusion and legitimacy.

What my work reveals is the way IRO members are calling themselves at once orthodox and proper U.S. citizens. Like Grewal’s case study on Al Maghrib (2013), the IRO members I study use the concept of orthodoxy in interesting and non-linear ways, perhaps due to the incommensurability of concepts such as moderation, orthodoxy, or secularism to begin with. For IRO members, their piety is not counter to their American Dream success story, but an integral part of it. I sat with three college students for lunch during an Islamic convention in Chicago. The young women were talking to me about their various choices to wear hijab. While Amina donned the hijab largely because of family tradition and expectation (“All the women in my family wear a hijab”), Samina started wearing it after a protracted argument with her father, who opposed her decision to observe Islamic dress code. Regardless, all three women expressed to me their firm observance of hijab – one of them described in detail the ways she at once manages to run in marathons in hot weather and still observe Islamic dress code. In another conversation, Amina’s sister would describe to me the ways she is careful to avoid any type of financial

\(^{19}\) A person who has memorized the entire Quran, word for word. These are highly-respected individuals who devote intensive study to both learning and retaining the Quran. Because Muslims believe that the Quran is the direct and literal word of Allah, its preservation is of prime importance. As one Hafiza (female Hafiz) told me in the field, “Even if our enemies were to burn every single copy of the Quran, I have a copy right here” and pointed at her heart.
transactions that involve interest, indicating a level of literalism in her interpretation of Quranic prohibitions on usury. Certainly, the overwhelming majority of IRO members carefully observe the month of Ramadan, avoid alcohol and pork, and many do not miss a single one of the five daily prayers. Clearly, the invocation of “moderate” Islam conceals more than it reveals; if these very pious Muslims lay claim to moderation in self-defense against Islamophobia, the puzzling nature of the term moderate itself becomes clear. My discussion of the concept of the moderate Muslim is meant to reveal the (il)logics behind the Islamophilic milieu. If Islamophilia names the “good Muslim” allies against terrorism and extremism, then the criteria by which one is designated a “good Muslim” is tremendously unclear.

*Neoliberal Multiculturalism and New Forms of Privilege*

The remarkable condemnation of bigotry against Muslims from both sides of the political aisle stands in stark contrast to an intense, “fringe” Islamophobia from key players in cultural and political life. In the field, IRO speakers were quick to remind members that Islamophobia was an extremist pocket of America, not at all representative of the majority of Americans, who espoused ideals of inclusion and tolerance. A handful of individuals like Daniel Pipes, David Yerushalmi, and Robert Spencer comprise what IRO’s call an Islamophobia “network,” a small group of right-wing spokespeople that generates an abundance information about Islam. A documentary called *Fear, Inc.* reveals the astonishing amount of funding this relatively small network uses to disseminate its messaging about a Muslim takeover of American society and the idea that mosques harbor future terrorists. Tens of millions of dollars have been spent by this network in order to influence media coverage and key elected officials on matters relating to Islam in the U.S. Most notoriously, these crucial players in the Islamophobia network were cited
in the ‘manifesto’ left behind by Anders Breivik, the Norwegian nativist who engaged in a lethal act of terror in 2011.

IRO’s credited the Islamophobia network with the public outcry about the construction of an Islamic center in lower Manhattan near the Ground Zero site. “Initially, when the plans were announced, there was relatively little opposition. Officials in New York City and general public took to it quite well. Really, it was a non-issue,” Sumaiya told me as we spoke at a convention in Detroit. “But then, all of a sudden, there was this explosion of debate – is this appropriate, is this sensitive, whatever. Even Muslims were chiming in saying maybe we shouldn’t build this mosque – or Islamic center, whatever they were calling it. How did that debate happen all of a sudden where there had been no controversy before? What sparked it? Well, if you look closely, you see these Pamela Gellers and Robert Spencers suddenly mobilizing, and all of their blogs and foundations popularizing what was actually really a radical right-wing sentiment. Then all of a sudden it became a mainstream issue for people to chime in on. This is an Islamophobia cottage industry. They’re dedicated to…well, I don’t know what their end goal is, to be honest. I think it’s to silence Muslims and cut short Muslim advancement in America. And by advancement, you know, I mean just the development of a community, a community that is a driving force in morality, ethics, innovation. This small little industry is working against Muslims.”

Alongside the awareness of the powerful, wealthy anti-Muslim fringe was an understanding among IRO members that multiculturalism and diversity are hallmarks of Americanism. At a 2012 Islamic convention, IRO speaker Hamza Yusuf spoke at length to several thousand attendees about the history of multiculturalism in the U.S. “Muslims fought in all of these wars in American history. Fought for this country. In World War 2, in World War 1, in
the Civil War. So this idea that we're alien is completely unacceptable. … America has always had accents. There is no part of American history where Americans don't have accents. When Tammany Hall was at its height, many politicians spoke with an Irish drawl. And they were part of America. They were embraced sometimes, and other times they were not. And they had to duke it out in the streets, until they had their place at the table.” At another panel at the same convention, one speaker remarked, “in a state like Louisiana, which is a difficult state for any minority to win a seat, Bobby Jindal won. I don't agree with any of Bobby Jindal's political views, but they elected him in the most right-wing state in the country. So if you begin to really think about how accepting this country is, and not just focus in on the narrow people that are on the margins that attack our faith, we have flourished and prospered for 1400 years and continue to grow as the fastest faith in this country. Someone like a Glen Beck or Rush Limbaugh – they are a pimple, a pimple in the grand scheme of things.”

Pluralism, diversity, and inclusion dominated the themes at the conventions I attended. Convention titles themselves explicitly referenced pluralism across difference, unity through diversity, and multiculturalism. One panel I attended in Washington, D.C., “We Have a Dream,” assessed Martin Luther King, Jr.’s mission of unity in relation to the current struggles faced by American Muslims. Several conventions featured inter-faith panels, usually limited to Jewish and Christian speakers (though at times “interfaith” included Hindus or Sikhs). The theme of racial diversity within Muslim communities was of paramount concern, especially the topic of anti-black racism among immigrant Muslim communities.

That the contours of representational IRO politics depended heavily on the celebration of a historically multicultural America is remarkable for the post-9/11 environment. In the past, multiculturalism has been heralded as one of the prime reasons for America’s exceptionalism.
The convergence of the Cold War and Civil Rights movement held the U.S. accountable on a global stage for its treatment of people of color domestically. In the collection of post-9/11 apocalyptic Hollywood films, for instance, presidents and leads are routinely played by people of color, a subtle nod to US supremacy in matters of race relations. In the logics of the War on Terror, multiculturalism has become a banner under which U.S. exceptionalism is conveyed (Grewal 2005; Engle 2004). In the War on Terror, intolerance and bigotry are their problem, not ours. This is why the figure of the ‘good’ Muslim is so critical. “…individuals thought to occupy the category of Muslim or Arab are not automatically placed into the bad category. United States policy recognizes that citizens of nation states it considers its friends are not always safe, Muslim aliens are not always unassimilable, and Muslim citizens are not always un-American. Thus, the war on terrorism is not simply a war on Muslims, and it is not a holy war. To the contrary, it largely attains legitimacy by presuming and relying on the existence of a category of good Muslims, both within the United States and abroad. The United States of the twenty-first century maintains an identity as a multicultural, (neo)liberal and tolerant state…Perhaps more importantly, the good Muslim category provides a means for Muslims both inside and outside of the United States to support the United States’ internal as well as external attempts to fight the war on terrorism, thus reinforcing the war’s legitimacy” (Engle 2004: 62).

An American exceptionalism was critical in creating consent for the War on Terror, an exceptionalism that required imagining the American nation as inclusive and diverse. Much the way the Cold War required the U.S. to contend with the Civil Rights movement domestically in order to preserve its image abroad, and the Nazi Holocaust during WWII corresponded with the demise of the U.S. eugenics movement, the War on Terror requires painting the enemies as intolerant, parochial, and narrow. In contrast, the U.S. is portrayed as commendable in its
integrated, multi-racial, multiethnic national body. This exceptionalism suggests that the U.S. is a world leader in feminism (Abu Lughod 2002), gay rights (Puar 2007), and race relations. In this way, multiculturalism becomes an ally of the War on Terror. “It is revulsion for anti-Muslim sentiment that allows us to be horrified by the torture scandals at Abu Ghraib and yet relatively unmoved by the horrors resulting from our involvement in Iraq” (Puar 2005).

This use of multiculturalism draws our attention to the strategic deployment of racial and ethnic difference in a geopolitical context, a concern I focus on more in my chapter on empire and race. Žižek is also interested in how “multiculturalist ideological poetry” is built into global capitalism (1997). Globalization, according to Žižek, “involves its own hegemonic fiction (or even ideal) of multiculturalist tolerance, respect, and protection of human rights, democracy, and so forth…” (41). In America, our very Americanness is predicated upon our ethnic difference, and the fact that we can be American without dropping our specific ethnic roots. Žižek asserts that “…the ideal form of ideology of this global capitalism is multiculturalism, the attitude which, from a kind of empty global position, treats each local culture the way the colonizer treats the colonized people…” (44). For the purpose of this discussion, I point to the concept of ‘neoliberal multiculturalism,’ a type of multiculturalism that does not aim to subvert or challenge practices of capital accumulation or white privilege. Instead, neoliberal multiculturalism resonates with existing structural hierarchies, both domestically and globally. Certainly, the “good” Muslim is as important as the “bad” Muslim in maintaining the U.S. reputation as inclusive and tolerant; the bigotry of the “Islamophobia network” is less desirable for American exceptionalism. This is precisely the work that Islamophilia – from both Muslims and non-Muslims – performs: proving that Islamic identity is irrelevant to being a good American consumer, worker, and patriot.
Melamed notes that neoliberal multiculturalism means new types of privilege are activated. “Privileged and stigmatized racial formations no longer mesh perfectly with a color line. Instead, new categories of privilege and stigma determined by ideological, economic, and cultural criteria overlay older, conventional racial categories, so that traditionally recognized racial identities – black, Asian, white, or Arab/Muslim – can now occupy both sides of the privilege/stigma position” (2-3). “The PATRIOT Act is another example of neoliberal multiculturalism’s revision of racialized privilege and stigma,” Melamed continues. “It rhetorically privileges Arab Americans in order to discriminate against – and to obscure discrimination of – Arabs, Muslims, or South Asians in the United States who cannot or do not claim to be American in a nationalist or idealist sense. The act begins with a lengthy section titled “Sense of Congress Condemning Discrimination against Arab and Muslim Americans.” This multiculturalist gesture of protection for patriotic “Arab Americans,” “Muslim Americans,” and “Americans from South Asia” rhetorically excuses the racializing violence that the act enables – namely, the stripping of civil and human rights from non-patriotic or non-American Arabs, Muslims and South Asians” (Melamed 2006: 8)

Conclusion

The tendency to applaud any effort that combats Islamophobia by favorably portraying Muslims in the U.S. is complicated by my discussion of Islamophilia. By understanding the “good Muslim” as a key player in current geopolitics, positive representations of Muslims seem a facile solution to the problem of Islamophobia. This was exemplified best in the recent Gap advertisement featuring a Sikh man. In late 2013, the apparel company Gap featured actor and jeweler Waris Ahluwalia, a Sikh man with a full beard and a turban, in a series of multiracial
billboard ads. One billboard was defaced with racial slurs, calling the model a terrorist and taxi driver. The response was remarkable: there was public outcry against the bigoted defacing of the Gap ad, with commentators remarking on the sad state of affairs in which advertisers are not free to feature diverse models in their ads. In response to the vandalism, Gap changed its profile picture on Twitter to the image of Ahluwalia and released a statement that claimed “Gap is a brand that celebrates inclusion and diversity.” Several IRO leaders and members celebrated this move. A Twitter hashtag “ThankYouGap” appeared in which people applauded the apparel company.

One piece of journalism, however, caught my eye during the Gap maelstrom. In a piece in *The Islamic Monthly*, Waleed Shahid wrote, “Gap’s inclusion of a Sikh South Asian American man in the company’s winter marketing campaign comes at a time when the company faces massive global criticism for its labor practices, especially in Bangladesh. By drawing our attention toward a single advertisement, Gap has brownwashed their own labor practices, obscuring the brown people and places from where their clothing originates… if solidarity simply means changing a Twitter background, then we have not only failed in some fundamental way in understanding the politics of that term, but we have also relegated our identity to merely that of a consumer” (Shahid 2014). Shahid highlights exactly those contours of neoliberal multiculturalism that Islamophilia encapsulates: the relative freedom of expression and diversity, while underlying socioeconomic process remain unaffected.

I can recall the celebratory reaction among IRO members during the first Obama campaign in 2008 when he carefully pronounced the word “Pakistan.” “Yes, no more butchering the names of our countries,” an enthusiastic Obama supporter told me. Another woman interjected, “Who cares how he pronounces it? How is he going to treat Pakistan is the question,
not how is he going to pronounce it. You can say ‘nu-cu-ler’ all you want as long as you don’t use nuclear power.” This celebration of cosmopolitanism is a critical site of neoliberalism, and the origin of the Islamophilic politics I explore above.
CHAPTER 5: “IT’S JUST NOT THE RIGHT TIME TO TALK ABOUT THAT”: Silence, Hope, and Imaginative Possibilities

Just a few months into fieldwork in the summer of 2011, I attended a large Islamic convention in Chicago. In an unexpected coincidence, the Socialism 2011 Conference was being held that very weekend, also in Chicago. In fact, the Socialism conference was just across the street from, which was being held in the expansive Rosemont Convention Center. As I browsed their bookstore and program in the lobby shortly after my arrival in Chicago before heading to the convention, I noticed several volumes for sale on the topics of Islamophobia, the War on Terror, the use of espionage against Muslim communities, the unconstitutionality of the USA PATRIOT Act, and more. The program featured speakers addressing US warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, and the curtailment of US civil rights during the “terror decade” (the ten years following 9/11). In short, the Socialism conference featured a number of issues I already knew (from my initial time spent in the field) to be of central concern to many IRO members.

After registering for the convention moments later, I sat down with the thick program and noticed that the roster featured a US Congresswoman, a few prominent national and local journalists, law enforcement officials, and the usual list of “celebrity” IRO spokespeople such as Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir. There were some sections devoted to foreign policy and the War on Terror, but by and large the conference program remained faithful to the agreeable theme, “Loving God, Loving Neighbor, Living in Harmony.” Panels at the conference had such titles as “Islam, Pluralism, and Social Harmony,” “Creating a Wholesome Community,” “The Entrepreneurial Mindset,” and “Inclusive Mosques in the 21st Century.” Yet over the course of
my weekend in Chicago, I would discover that many attendees would reveal concerns that were hardly as mild as the printed program would suggest. The very highly-charged, deeply politicized themes that were central to the Socialists across the street seemed equally important to the Muslims across the street. Palestine, the loss of civil rights during the terror decade, and US military presence in the Muslim world were inescapable topics of conversation at this and other IRO events.

A month before attending the 2011 convention, I had spoken with Hatem, an editor of the oppositional blog Ikhras. At Ikhras, Arab-American contributors write pieces holding accountable Muslim and Arab spokespeople who, as Hatem says, “kowtow to the US establishment.” Ikhras “throws the proverbial shoe” at “House Arabs and Muslims.” Hatem, in his reference to shoe-throwing, summons the memory of the notorious 2007 incident in which Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zaidi threw his shoe at President George W. Bush during a press conference in Baghdad. The difference between al-Zaidi and the Ikhras contributors, Hatem explained to me, is that Ikhras “honors” (in its presentation of a sarcastic “Shoe Thrower Award”) a “House” Arab or Muslim who has distinguished herself in pandering, referencing the distinction Malcolm X famously made between the House Negro and the Field Negro.

There were two kinds of slaves. There was the house Negro and the field Negro. The house Negroes – they lived in the house with master, they dressed pretty good, they ate good ’cause they ate his food — what he left. They lived in the attic or the basement, but still they lived near the master; and they loved their master more than the master loved himself. They would give their life to save the master’s house quicker than the master would. The house Negro, if the master said, “We got a good house here,” the house Negro would say, “Yeah, we got a good house here.”
Whenever the master said “we,” he said “we.” That’s how you can tell a house Negro.

If the master’s house caught on fire, the house Negro would fight harder to put the blaze out than the master would. If the master got sick, the house Negro would say, “What’s the matter, boss, we sick?” We sick! He identified himself with his master more than his master identified with himself. And if you came to the house Negro and said, “Let’s run away, let’s escape, let’s separate,” the house Negro would look at you and say, “Man, you crazy. What you mean, separate? Where is there a better house than this? Where can I wear better clothes than this? Where can I eat better food than this?” That was that house Negro…

On that same plantation, there was the field Negro. The field Negro — those were the masses. There were always more Negroes in the field than there was Negroes in the house. The Negro in the field caught hell. He ate leftovers. In the house they ate high up on the hog. The Negro in the field didn’t get nothing but what was left of the insides of the hog…The field Negro was beaten from morning to night. He lived in a shack, in a hut; He wore old, castoff clothes. He hated his master. I say he hated his master. He was intelligent. That house Negro loved his master. But that field Negro — remember, they were in the majority, and they hated the master. When the house caught on fire, he didn’t try and put it out; that field Negro prayed for a wind, for a breeze. When the master got sick, the field Negro prayed that he’d die. If someone come to the field Negro and said, “Let’s separate, let’s run,” he didn’t say “Where we going?” He’d say, “Any place is better than here.”
Just as the slavemaster of that day used Tom, the house Negro, to keep the field Negroes in check, the same old slavemaster today has Negroes who are nothing but modern Uncle Toms, 20th century Uncle Toms, to keep you and me in check, keep us under control, keep us passive and peaceful and nonviolent.

Evoking Malcolm X for the purpose of critiquing Arab- and Muslim-American multicultural strategy, Hatem and his co-bloggers highlight the tension and resentment reserved for IRO leaders who use mainstreaming rather than critique and activism as central strategies. Of course, I would come to find that the very IRO members against whom Hatem leveled his biting critique also claiming the legacy of Malcolm X, a concern I explore further in other chapters.

In my conversation with Hatem, just a month before I found myself at the convention in Chicago, I told him about my plans to attend the annual convention. “We are very disturbed by these groups,” he told me. “Again, they are trying to prove that they are the good Muslim. They had this program whereby they were advocating creating field trips for Palestinian Muslims to go visit the Holocaust museum. Why do they want Muslims to visit the Holocaust museum? Because the Zionist lobby and US media is saying that Muslims are anti-Semitic who want to kill all the Jews. So these Muslims groups come along and wants to combat this stereotype and they want to get together high school kids to prove they're not anti-Semitic. They will never talk about what's happening to the Palestinians. What happened in Gaza. What the U.S. is doing in Afghanistan. Ask them,” he told me, “ask them when you’re there next month. Ask them why they can, in good conscience, invite George W. Bush to a mosque event. He’s slaughtering Muslims in Iraq. Ask them! The people you’ll be interviewing now have a stake in America, they
have their house in the suburbs and cars and vacations. Kids in private schools. So why should they be concerned about American drone attacks in Pakistan?"

My conversation with Hatem replayed itself time and again in the back of my mind in Chicago as I walked past the socialists in my hotel to my destination across the street. In a conversation with Linah, a Palestinian-American mother of two and convention volunteer, I took Hatem’s advice and “asked her” about the silences Ikhras critiqued. “You know, Linah, I spoke with Hatem a few weeks back and he feels that here, the hard-hitting, deeply political issues are sidestepped. What do you make of this?” A self-identified feminist, Linah’s is married to a top orthopedic surgeon and they live in a large suburban home. Their children attend a private Islamic school. From my conversations with Linah, I understood her to be deeply committed to certain social justice issues, especially regarding the right to return for Palestinians and the end of Israeli apartheid. Her passion for justice in Palestine had more recently led her to discover connections between US racism and Israeli state-sanctioned violence against Palestinians. Linah and I would form an enduring friendship, and I’ve noticed her growing politicization over the years since we first met.

“You know, I think he’s kind of right. I think most of us here, we do want to be more vocal, to use stronger language. But look, Obama says he’s not Muslim every chance he gets. He does photo-ops at churches, and the crazy right wingers still want to say he’s a Muslim. So I think if we use stronger language, make bigger critiques, you know...We would be seen as supporting something extremist. I’m aware of his criticism. I know that people would like to see this change, you know, for us to be more representative of what we feel behind closed doors. But this is not the time. When will it ever be time? Maybe never… Maybe we have to go forward and not worry about the repercussions, just say what we believe, or maybe we do have to wait it out.
I myself don't know what I think is the better way to go.” This, notably, was one of the few times I noticed Linah waver or express uncertainty about a course of action.

I told her about the Socialist Conference happening across the street. She told me she knew about it, that she’d seen enough “kids with tattoo sleeves” and figured it out. “Yeah, the socialists are always at the rallies I attend for Palestine, Libya, Syria. There are always socialists there. It’s just too taboo, you know, to talk to them, to associate with them. We are still afraid to get involved with certain things. We have to be very careful with what we say and who we ally with.”

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This impulse to deliberately remain silent on certain issues carries an implicit hope that these silences will bear fruit for Muslims seeking full cultural citizenship. Linah's utterance that it's “not the right time to talk about this” was a sentiment that was articulated to me many times in the field. IRO members echoed Linah's understanding of Muslim Americans' position as precarious enough to preclude earnest geopolitical critique. In this chapter, I reveal IRO members' perception of the narrowly demarcated field of political possibilities, and the ways temporality, waiting, and hope are central to their discursive choices. IRO members suggest that caution and silence are necessary for their political project of inclusion. At once, they reveal a deep faith in the political process and a simultaneous cynicism about transformative potential in the US. Here, I explore what exactly it is IRO members aspire to: do they aim to be included in an existing system through gaining legitimacy and recognition, or do they seek to reconfigure, through counter-hegemonic practices, what they deem an inherently unjust social order? Second, I consider the realm of possibilities – and the realm of the ‘impossible’ – expressed by IRO
members. By making only what they call “reasonable demands,” Muslim Americans point to a narrowly defined spectrum of engagement. To expect certain outcomes is considered at once idealistic and a threat to the project of inclusion. At the same time, these deliberate silences are expected to give way to a different type of future for Muslims in the U.S. Is the hopefulness – the faith that a better time will come – expressed by IRO members a by-product of the paralysis they feel due to the inevitability and permanence of an unequal structure? Do they truly believe another future is imminent, or is it necessary to believe that in order to continue living in an age of Islamophobia? If it is “just not the right time to talk about that,” when will the right time come, and what will it look like?

Deliberate Silences

While I have no comprehensive data on the political affiliations of IRO members, most are allied with the Democratic Party, several are Republicans, and a very small number officially reject both parties, voting independently or with the Green Party. Yet, in spite of this spread, a consistent sentiment among the IRO members I spoke with was a fierce condemnation of U.S. foreign policy and the role of anti-terrorism measures in homeland security in the years following 9/11. By and large, IRO members revealed a nuanced awareness of US foreign policy, especially in Muslim-majority countries, and regarded such policy as excessively militarized and imperialistic. The fact that Afghanistan had been a site of so-called low-intensity conflict for the US during the Cold War, that the Reagan administration had regarded the mujahideen as “freedom fighters” just decades before those very mujahideen would top the list of US enemies (Mamdani 2005), was commonplace to IRO members. That atrocities against Muslims continued
unabated at Guantanamo Bay, regardless of the party affiliation of the current US president, was seen as a contemporary component to enduring global Islamophobia.

There was a strong, repeated sense at IRO events that Muslim terrorism must have some connections to violence perpetrated by the US and Israel. Palestine was undoubtedly the most distressing global concern for IRO members, above and beyond the drone program or military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. “There remains today no more potent symbol of injustice in the Muslim imagination than the suffering of Palestinians under Israeli occupation,” argues Aslan (2010). Indeed, regardless of the “mainstreaming” (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009) approach advocated by most IRO members, the issue of Palestine was non-negotiable. Marable writes that “millions of moderate and progressive Muslims who sincerely denounce terrorism are nevertheless frustrated by the extensive clientage relationship between the United States and Israel, financed by more than $3 billion in annual subsidies” (Marable 2003: 13). IRO members – and at times, prominent speakers – were unapologetic in their condemnation of the military, cultural, and media campaign against Palestinians. The ire reserved for Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu was matched only by the criticism of the immense power of lobbies such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, AIPAC, which was regarded by many as exercising massive control over US Middle East policy. Otherwise removed from protest movements and rallies, a handful of college students I met in the field had recently made a trip from Chicago to Washington, D.C. to attend a rally in protest of AIPAC. They told me they frequently attend such rallies across the country.

I spoke with Saeed early in my fieldwork. Currently an anesthesiologist in Rhode Island, he had been closely involved with the Muslim Student Association (MSA, the group that eventually led to the creation of ISNA – I discuss MSA in greater depth in my introduction)
during his years as an undergraduate at Columbia University. In fact, Saeed was at Columbia while I was working on a Master’s there, and I recalled vividly the events he described. “I was there when the Joseph Massad controversy broke, when the *Columbia Unbecoming* film came out. Have you seen it? Were you around then?” “Yeah, I was,” I told him. (Saeed refers to the 2004 controversy when several students produced a documentary accusing professors in the Department of Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures – MEALAC – of delegitimizing Israel. The film was a catalyst for a wide-reaching debate regarding the limits of academic freedom, hinging on the assumption that MEALAC professors made the classroom inhospitable for pro-Israel students.) “So, you know, the whole thing had a really chilling effect. People weren’t comfortable talking about it. The MSA didn’t want to do anything. We wanted to avoid the subject altogether. Mostly it was MEALAC students and SIPA students, not any organization representing Muslims, that took a stand. There was a sense among the MSA that nothing could be done about it. If you took a wrong stand, you’d get smashed. It was an 800 pound gorilla looking to smash things. The MSA didn’t want to cause trouble.” Saeed poignantly summed up the dilemma faced by IRO leaders: to take a stand, especially on the issue of Palestine, is to jeopardize the already-delicate position of Muslim Americans.

Yet the conversation with Saeed then turned to the moment the MSA *did* decide to take action on the issue of Palestine, with the MEALAC controversy pushing them to speak up. “Some people in the MSA eventually decided that the silence needed to be broken, and that we’d hold an event on Palestine. So basically, we invited Norman Finkelstein to campus.” Finkelstein, a Jewish American political scientist, controversially has written on the exploitation of the concept of “Jewish suffering” to leverage support for Israel, calling the Holocaust (which his parents survived) an ideological tool. Finkelstein has been branded an anti-Semite and accused of
being a Holocaust denier, but drew quite a following from pro-Palestine groups (until his 2012 critique of the BDS\textsuperscript{20} movement) for his bold accusations of Israeli state-sanctioned violence.

“We got a lot of shit for that,” Saeed continued. “From all sides. You know, within the MSA there was this thought that inviting him was aggressive, counterproductive, that it would alienate our Jewish student allies and we shouldn’t have handled it. You were at the event?” I nodded. “So we were literally sitting in a room watching the Chomsky-Dershowitz debate, and Chomsky gave a nod to Finkelstein. We knew Finkelstein was from New York. Maybe he could come here and break the silence. So some of the MSA leadership was like, we need you to come to Columbia and fix this. The event, wow, was much bigger than anticipated…A lot of groups co-sponsored: the Organization of Pakistani Students, the United Students of Color Council. We convinced them that this was a student of color issue. The Socialists, the campus anti-war group. But then, you know, there was a member of the socialist organization who was a Zionist, and she leaked it to the other side. They found out about it, you know, and the College Democrats and College Republicans wrote a piece criticizing us for planning this event. It ran in the Spectator and all hell broke loose. The University even got involved, telling us we couldn’t have the event for reasons of security being understaffed. But we agreed, we got donations, and said we’d pay for the security ourselves. Part of this was that the Zionist protesters were going to cause trouble and the University needed more security to work the event. But part of it, I suspect, was an intimidation tactic – the University pressuring us to cancel this controversial event…Because of the Zionists, you know, this event got really hyped up. We didn’t even have to advertise the event,” he said, and both of us laughed. “They did the PR for us. 400 or 600 people who were

\textsuperscript{20} A global campaign using economic and political pressure on Israel to end its occupation of Arab land and grant Palestinian refugees the right to return.
protesting the event showed up! But we did our thing – we had a guest list, we met every concern
that University Security had. The speech itself was not controversial. He said that Palestinians
deserve their own state, and that Hezbollah is a native resistance force, not a bunch of terrorists.
Nothing he hasn’t said before; he’s said more wrathful stuff elsewhere. Their problem was that
Finkelstein was there, period. But the event, the way it was written up, was cited as one of the
most divisive events ever on campus. Since the event, I think MSA has pulled out of that scene
altogether.”

Indeed, the bi-lateral op-ed in the Columbia Spectator skewered the event planners in a
piece entitled “Hate Comes to Columbia.” Finkelstein was labeled anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, and a
terrorist sympathizer. Within months of the Finkelstein event, Jewish student groups invited Alan
Dershowitz to a speaking engagement on campus. These reactions indicate that the climate
experienced by those who attempt to speak out about Palestine in earnest is a hostile one. The
event at Columbia University epitomizes the difficulties faced by Arab and Muslim Americans
who attempt to be vocal about their objections to U.S. support of Israel. An overwhelming
feeling that the media is immensely biased against Palestinians, that critique of Israeli policy is
equated with anti-Semitism, and that the Israel issue is an exceptional violation of principles of
free speech were commonly-held assumptions by IRO members, even those with scant
knowledge of the history of Palestine and Israel. In Cincinnati, Amina remarked to me that even
otherwise “liberal” media such as the New York Times unabashedly took the side of Israel,
uniformly casting Palestinians as terrorists or militants. IRO members were readily aware of the
David Project or Campus Watch, both of which monitor and censure universities’ pro-Palestine
professors in an attempt to improve campus opinions on Israel.
Because of this landscape, a broad-based organization like ISNA treads carefully. In 2010, ISNA encouraged a delegation of Palestinian youth visiting the US from the occupied Gaza Strip to visit the US Holocaust Museum, as “this museum, in particular, has tremendous educational value and helps visitors appreciate the historical result of unbridled hate and human manipulation” (Shamir 2010). The endorsement of the visit met with tense responses from many I spoke with, several of them ISNA members. While many members applauded the decision both as a strategic move for improving the image of Muslims in the US, most asserted that it was simply “the right thing to do” from the point of view of understanding various histories of oppression. Yet a few conversations were especially revelatory. “This is a defensive move,” one ISNA volunteer told me in 2011. “It anticipates all the accusations Muslims get of being anti-Semitic. See, in America, to speak about the rights of Palestinians is basically the same as anti-Semitism. So to fight off these accusations, our organizations have to do things like this Holocaust Museum visit. It makes me sad. With all the freedom of speech we celebrate, we really are only so free to speak when it comes to certain things.”

A similar tension between the official, organizational messaging and intimate, “behind-closed-doors” sentiments surfaced regarding the assassination of Osama bin Laden. His assassination took place just after I had begun my fieldwork in 2011. Because he was killed on the spot in spite of being unarmed, legal groups (such as Amnesty International) took issue with the extrajudicial nature of this assassination. While it was met with general support and celebration by the American public, many legal scholars questioned the use of vengeance as a proxy for justice. Yet unanimously, IRO’s applauded the assassination in their official communications. Below, in its entirety, is the ISNA press release following the assassination.

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) joins all Americans in thanking
President Obama for fulfilling his promise to bring Osama Bin Laden, leader of al-Qaeda, and perpetrator of the 9/11 attacks, to justice.

We hope his death will bring some relief to all the families, of every faith and walk of life, who lost loved ones on 9/11 and in every other terrorist attack orchestrated at the hands of Osama Bin Laden.

Over the past decade, ISNA has stood firm on our stance that ISNA and Muslims in America condemn the actions of Bin Laden on 9/11 and all acts of terror at the hands of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and all others who spread fear and hate through violence. We have repeatedly condemned the calls of Bin Laden and others like him for mass bloodshed and the attacking of innocent lives across the world.

As the President pointed out in his address to the nation, the ideology of Bin Laden is incompatible with Islam: "Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed, al Qaeda has slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries, including our own. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity."

President Obama marked his hope that today, Americans will "think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11" and remember that "on that day, no matter what God we prayed to, we were united as one American family."

"ISNA joins President Obama and prays that as the nation continues to heal from the devastation inflicted upon them at the hands of Bin Laden, we will turn to each other today, united, and emerge tomorrow with an even stronger resolve to take every action necessary to protect the precious ideals of our nation that Bin
Laden attempted to destroy on 9/11: peace, tolerance, respect, and freedom for all," said ISNA President Imam Magid.

I spoke at length with Linah about this press release. She had posted remarks on Facebook immediately after the assassination that she worried about the extrajudicial nature of the killing, arguing that it intensified the role of the U.S. as a superpower, above the jurisdiction of international law. How, I asked, did Linah feel about this press release? “I know for a fact that 99% of the people behind these press releases want to be more vocal, use strong language, condemn the US’s actions. But I don’t think we can do that without being seen as supporting terror. You know, people do want to see us being more representative of what we are like behind closed doors. But it’s not the right time,” she said (a phrase that surfaced repeatedly in our conversation.) “As an individual, yes, you can say these things. But as an organization that represents so many people, you are endangering more than just yourself by saying these things. Is it worth it? You know, when we took a stand on the Peter King hearings21, ISNA was positioned as too radical, not pandering to the mainstream. So what are we to do?” Interestingly, Peter King notoriously claimed that most US mosques have extremist leadership and most US Muslims are unwilling to cooperate with law enforcement “after hearing Muslims criticize the imbalance in US foreign policy” (Bayoumi 2004: 39). If speaking earnestly means a congressional anti-Muslim witch hunt, the politics of speaking and silencing take on an urgency of a different scale altogether.

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21 In 2011, as head of the House Homeland Security Committee, Rep. King spearheaded hearings on the radicalization of US Muslims, alleging that mosques in the country were encouraging extremism among their constituents.
Linah captured a sense of being discursively trapped that points to a disciplinary practice of regulation at work among Muslim Americans. The disconnect between the political feelings of individuals and the messaging from “representative” organizations points to the “eclipse of internal differences through the representation of the whole population by a hegemonic group, race, or class,” write Hardt and Negri (2000:1 104). “Disciplinary power,” they claim, “rules in effect by structuring the parameters and limits of thought and practice, sanctioning and prescribing normal and/or deviant behaviors” (23). The “behind closed doors” reactions to organizational responses around issues of Palestine or the bin Laden assassination make clear that these parameters are clearly demarcated in the minds of IRO members who understand that, as individuals vying for complete social citizenship [see chapter on citizenship], silences are imperative. While they hold on earnestly to their geopolitical critiques, articulating them would jeopardize this effort.

The deliberate caution and silences I highlight here illuminate the tense landscape IRO members navigate. Demonized in a xenophobic Islamic milieu, they must carefully oppose this Islamophobia in ways that will not intensify this demonization. In his discussion of race politics in Race Rebels, Robin Kelly considers the ways in which wearing a mask creates an “inner pain generated by having to choke back one’s feelings” (1996: 7). This IRO “masking” strategy is a deliberate means to an end: full inclusion for U.S. Muslims asks individuals to choke back righteous indignation, to be ever-aware of what is at stake in the project of legitimacy.

Uncertain Aspirations

The sense that something is at stake for Muslims who speak up begs the question: what exactly are the aspirations and hopes of IRO members? Do they strive for inclusion and
legitimacy in a multicultural America, or do they wish to dismantle what many described to me as violent US hegemony and empire? I struggled to articulate what “type” of politics I discovered, as both goals were expressed to me without a sense of contradiction. I discovered an abundance of radical politics and hard-hitting critique. At the same time, I also came across with great frequency hackneyed notions of inclusion, tolerance, and the American Dream. Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir, both American converts to Islam (the former white American, the latter black) and celebrity IRO spokespeople, encapsulate this tension.

In Washington D.C., several thousand attendees listened as Zaid Shakir spoke. “This issue of the othering of Muslims…We have to move beyond this and present a positive image, build alliances to strengthen ourselves. Be the truth we advocate for and represent that truth. It’s our responsibility to our community and our nation to present a positive image, to begin to envision politics not based on race-baiting and xenophobia. Where reconciliation and compassion are the basis of our political action. In the Prophet SAW’s time, he said leave those people – let God deal with them. Let us leave the Gingrich’s of the world. Let God deal with them. If we do that, there will be less who serve as an audience for bigotry. Instead, they’ll say – hey, those people gave me free medical treatment. ‘Ah love me some Moslems,’ they’ll say.” While Shakir himself does not pull any punches – I document in other chapters his vociferous critiques of US foreign policy, settler colonialism, and an enduring history of racism – here, he puts forth the suggestion that modeling good citizenship is the key to political transformation for Muslims.

Consider the following speech by Hamza Yusuf. Within minutes of an impassioned plea for justice in Palestine, Hamza Yusuf reminded a sprawling audience that “You don’t get angry, you get even. We need more Muslims righting wrongs. And you don’t write a wrong far away.
Emerson said, I was tired of my neighbor going on about the slaves in Barbados while he was beating his wife. Change your local community. Alleviate suffering around you and your state will change…Muslims are engaged in pointing their finger, the blame game. But the devil is the one who loves to blame. The devil is the blamer in the Qur’an. Aadam is one of our exemplars, and he said, ‘I wronged myself.’ Aadam was willing to look into himself and not blame others.”

In another speech, Hamza Yusuf had just finished talking about the magnitude of the U.S. economic crisis when he appealed to his audience to commit to social service. “Muslims have over 30,000 doctors in the United States. If each one of those doctors gave one day of the week to serve the poor people, we would solve a great deal of the problems in medicine in this country. Maybe it’s asking too much, but I don’t think it is... We can do this.” This is the same Hamza Yusuf, perhaps the most popular IRO spokesperson, who reminded an audience that “we have allowed certain aspects in the Muslim world to continue for so long: the promotion of despotic governments to sustain the national interests of Britain, the US, France. And now, changing horses, suddenly the Arabs are being told –we’re going to bring you democracy. Well, Native Americans have a saying: “White man speaks with forked tongue.” And this is part of the problem. The hypocrisy has been so great in the past that people have lost any sense of credibility. This is how the Muslim world views us. The West has failed to appreciate the degree to which Muslims feel the West is responsible for so many of their problems.”

Does “white man” speak with forked tongue, as Hamza Yusuf suggests? Has the US acted hypocritically toward the Muslim world? Is the problem an oppressive and violent history of imperialism, militarism, and anti-democratic engagement by the U.S. hegemon? Or is the

22 Aadam, the first prophet of Islam and the first human creation, according to Islam.
problem that Muslims are not doing enough to model good citizenship, and hence allowing Islamophobia to continue unabated? My fieldwork revealed a simultaneous engagement with radical geopolitical critique and mainstream multicultural politics of inclusion and tolerance, a difficult coexistence that reveals the troubled representational politics at work.

At times, IRO members seemed committed to gaining legitimacy by accepting the US as a tolerant, multicultural nation. Social citizenship could be achieved by being model citizens, carefully crafting self-representations, and articulating an inherent harmony between Islam and America (as I describe in another chapter). In Backlash 9/11, Bakalian and Bozorgmehr argue that Muslim advocacy groups have been focused on civic engagement, political integration, and reinforcement of the fact that Islam is an Abrahamic faith. They call this a process of mainstreaming, a “determination to sink deep roots in America” (2009: 2). What I refer to here as the careful crafting of discourse that involves deliberate silences, Bakalian and Bozorgmehr call “framing” in such a way that the mainstream will grant the group approval. The “integrationist” strategy they describe was certainly evident in my work with IRO’s, as claiming a rightful space in the existing social landscape surfaced as a primary concern.

As Zaid Shakir said, “This is nothing new in American politics. It happened with the Irish. With the Japanese during World War 2.” As it passed for those groups, I assumed, Muslims could expect it to pass for them. Returning to Linah’s aforementioned statement that “the time was not right” to speak about certain issues, I found myself repeatedly jotting notes to myself about whether the Muslims I was speaking with genuinely understood another/better US to be possible or imminent, as much as they articulated that as an ends to their representational strategies. Given their dejected acceptance of a two-party system that was restricted on matters of militarism and terror, their resignation to the U.S. clientage with Israel, and their growing
understanding of US racist settler colonialism, did IRO members genuinely believe that a more equitable US could emerge?

Zareena Grewal argues that after 9/11, “ummah institutions led primarily by professional immigrants, such as ISNA, began to replicate explicitly patriotic religious rhetoric, abandoning countercitizenship narratives and their ambivalence about the American mainstream in order to promote a national rather than transnational moral geography” (2013: 151). Grewal’s claims were validated by my fieldwork, as I noticed the themes at IRO events often focused on harmony, pluralism, or assimilation. Certainly, this type of patriotism – mirrored in the fervent flying of flags by Muslims after 9/11 – was undeniable. I spoke with Imran, who has lived in Chicago suburbs for 20 years since emigrating from India. His son, now a medical student, had taken 2 years off during high school to attend a full-time hifz program – a learning academy where students complete the arduous task of memorizing the entire Qur’an verbatim. “Imagine this, my son is now a hafiz,” Imran beamed with pride. “And in a few years, he will be a physician. This is impossible in India, and probably in much of the Muslim world too. Back home, you’re either a hafiz or a doctor. In America, you can have both, deen and duniya.”

Imran’s words encapsulate Grewal’s notion of the exceptional American Muslim ummah: the sense that the unique blend of Islam and Americanism give rise to something truly phenomenal, superior to the Islam of the Muslim world. Taking Imran’s words seriously, I began to question the suggestion that Muslim patriotism since 9/11 was a simple defensive strategy. Sure, Muslim Americans put up their flags as shields in the face of Islamophobia. Yet, were they simply shields? Or was there a deep, internalized love of nation at the heart of these patriotic strategies?

23 The word “deen,” meaning “way of life,” usually is meant to refer to ‘religion’ or Islam. “Duniya” means the material world, “this life” before the afterlife.
At a Washington, D.C. event memorializing the 10 years since the 9/11 attacks, I listed to Dr. Kavakci, a Turkish American woman and professor at George Washington University, speak about the nation which has been her home for decades. In the late 1990s, Kavakci was prevented from taking her oath in the Turkish parliament because she wore a headscarf, and ultimately had her citizenship revoked for this reason.

I'm a person who cannot take for granted what this very country offered me and my family. I cannot take for granted how god, Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala*, blessed me through the means of this country. The day I landed here, Dallas, Texas, I had the shock of my life. Nobody was staring at me. Nobody was taking a second gaze at me, noting the difference in my attire at the time. In my home country, was that the case? No. Is that the case now? No. Islamophobia reigned then, in a Muslim country. And I know Turkey is not alone in that, there's Egypt, Jordan. I shall not continue. Growing up in a cosmopolitan Ankara, it was part of the everyday to be stared at, if not verbally attacked. With your religious covering, you'd be only fitting in or expected to fit in the periphery, outskirts of the city where the abject untouchables lived. History repeated itself in my mother and me in the name of Westernization, a Muslim country was ostracizing women who were committed to their religion through their attire. We needed to go, my father said, somewhere else. It's part of the Muslim tradition. We're not foreign to *Hijra*, moving from one place to another. You're persecuted, and there's a place to go, then you should go. Education was not optional in my family, based on Islamic tradition. It is a *sine qua non*. In order to find a way to be educated for me
and my two younger sisters, we needed to go. On a hot summer day...we landed in Texas, the place which has been my parents’ home for the past 24 years. In the meantime, my 2nd attempt to find my niche in the Turkish republic was a futile one with a high price. Becoming the first female parliamentarian with a Islamic headscarf was still unacceptable. It is still unacceptable...persecutions resulting in the process that lead me to the European Court of Human Rights. Here I was for the second time leaving the place I was born, the one I thought I belonged to, for the place I was valued despite my appearance. And not harassed and not attacked. On the contrary, I was embraced.

The U S of A, my home. How could I have taken this for granted? The kind of freedom of expression this country values, prioritizes, cherishes. When in Turkey, Muslim women can be denied from healthcare because they wear a headscarf. They can be denied from presence in courtrooms to give testimony, or as most of you know, denied from education or receiving driver’s license....3 generations: My mother, an academic, a professor of German literature, and I a politician, had to pay the price, and now my daughters who are grad students in the US. Who take the US as their home, the place that they were born, the place that embraced them and their mother. The place where we found solace. We call this freedom of expression, a place where you're not judged based on your expression. There is a lesson for Turkey to learn from the United States, for Tunisia, that will hopefully be built anew in the months to come. For Egypt, for Algeria to learn from the U S of A. I took part in voicing that lesson once I landed here.
Kavakci’s tale contrasts the relative freedom of the United States with the constraints of her native Turkey. Unlike the “native informants” described by Dabashi and Abu-Lughod, who use American secularism to pit Islam against the West, Kavakci uses religious freedoms – the ability to be a pious Muslim – as evidence of US superiority. Dr. Kavakci and Imran both point to an exceptional America that has done right by them, a far cry from a patriotism that is brandished defensively in the face of an anti-Muslim racism. Quite the contrary, both Imran, an IRO member, and Kavakci, a popular public figure and spokesperson profess a deeply internalized love for and indebtedness to the unique possibilities for Muslim Americans.

Yet this sentiment does not stand alone; the counterhegemonic or “countercitizenship narratives” (Grewal 2013) made by IRO’s often suggest a deep cynicism and cutting critique of sociopolitical possibilities in the US. I listened to Zaid Shakir during an ISNA speech connect Islamophobic rhetoric to the Draconian anti-immigrant laws that had been passed in Arizona, and Hamza Yusuf and Suhaib Webb repeatedly lambasted US foreign policy in their speeches. Many of the crafts being sold in the ISNA bazaar, a sprawling marketplace that drew many attendees who would otherwise not attend ISNA, were focused on the issue of Palestine. I met one Palestinian woman selling Handala key chains and embroideries that said “Free Palestine.” The t-shirts I describe in my chapter on hypervisibility also carried explicitly political themes.

Hamza Yusuf reached fever pitch during a speech about Islam in America, exclaiming, “The only reason militants have come to America is that militant Americans have gone to the Muslim world.” Thunderous applause broke out throughout his crescendo. “If militant America

24 A cartoon icon symbolizing Palestinian defiance of occupation.
had not gone to the Muslim world, we would not have militant Muslims coming to America. I
don’t want to see militant Islam. I want to see the Islam of peace. But there has to be mutual
respect. The Palestinian people have to be respected. ...This is the truth. I’m not even speaking as
a Muslim right now – I’m speaking as a human being. When you use an F16 against an armless
people that have no means to defend themselves, that is…that is simply wrong. It is wrong. It
needs to be condemned. When you create an apartheid system that was denounced in South
Africa as evil, when you create the same system in another place, it too has to be denounced as
evil. That’s all we’re asking for. An even playing field. There are people who are asking why
Muslims are angry. If you’re not angry about the current social condition, you’re not alive.”
Yusuf both reflects and inspires a righteous indignation among his audience members. With the
occupation of Palestine at the center of IRO members’ indignation about US foreign policy, there
is an inescapable element of radicalism in IRO politics. Certainly, this radicalism is not to be
confounded with far-left political mobilizing in the US, as IRO members are uneven in their
engagement with issues around class stratification, mass incarceration, immigration, or LGBT
rights. Yet with Palestine as an emblem of Muslim oppression, an interesting wrench is thrown
into the otherwise “mainstreaming” efforts of IRO’s.

The recurring appeal to the legacy of Malcolm X by IRO members similarly pointed to a
counterhegemonic stance. Many of the young IRO attendees I met – college students or recent
graduates – referenced the Autobiography of Malcolm X as a critical stepping stone in their
politicization. While Hatem at Ikhras uses Malcolm’s legacy to lambast the mainstreaming IRO
politics, I found an uneven identification with Black Nationalist politics and radical organizing
among IRO members. (Grewal’s book, Islam is a Foreign Country, contains a more exhaustive
review of the relationship between Muslim Americans and the legacy of Malcolm X.) I struggled
to name the relationship with Malcolm’s legacy, given the optimistic picture painted by people like Kavakci or Imran. Imran’s daughter, Rehana, had become a close contact of mine in the field, and I knew from my conversations with her that her father harbored deep moral objections to the US on political and social grounds. While the statements that appear above belie a fierce patriotism, his stance on “America” is actually far more uncertain. “My dad had me watch Roots when I was a young girl,” Rehana said, referencing the miniseries inspired by the book written by Alex Haley. Haley was moved to write Roots after writing the Autobiography of Malcolm X. “My dad knows that the radical black movements of the 1960s and 1970s had really good points—they called out America for being a big superpower bully, for all the racism and violence that’s happened toward minorities.” I had numerous conversations in the field with IRO members about the racism of mass incarceration, corporate crimes and Wall Street corruption, and the historic violation of the basic rights of people of color. There was a remarkable awareness that the Columbian expedition was a genocidal one and that the US strategically opposed democratic uprisings that destabilized US economic interests in Latin America.

On the one hand, the counterhegemonic, transformative logics of radical black organizing appealed to IRO members. Yet it coexisted with the aforementioned American exceptionalism. Imran being inspired by Alex Haley’s work and the legacy of Malcolm did not, to him, conflict with his suggestion that America is the best place to be a Muslim. In this way, there was no uniform sense of whether social injustice, racism, and xenophobia were foundational hallmarks of Americanism or anomalies. This unevenness leaves the question of what it is the IRO members aspire to, unanswerable. As an ethnographer, it remained unclear whether IRO’s sought to overhaul a system they saw as inherently violent, stratified, and unjust or whether they sought inclusion within a somewhat flawed social order.
Amidst validating the righteous indignation of U.S. Muslims and advocating civic duty and model citizenship as an antidote to Islamophobia, there exists the social imaginary of IRO members who conceptualize the United States in varying, ambivalent, seemingly contradictory ways. At once, the US is lauded as the land of opportunity, praised for its commitment to freedom and pluralism, the space for an “exceptional ummah” (Grewal 2013), and also the purveyor of unparalleled violence and injustice. Hardly a contradiction, this ambivalence is constitutive of uncertain IRO politics. What emerged throughout my fieldwork was an indecisiveness about whether the U.S.’s current Islamophobia machine was an anomaly – a blip in the greater story of U.S. opportunity, democracy, and social justice – or emblematic of a larger foundation of inherent inequality, imperialism, and racism that is as American as apple pie. This ambivalent social imaginary is at the heart of advocacy attempts that at once ask Muslim Americans to be exemplary and hope for a change in the U.S. sociopolitical landscape.

_Between Hope and Impossibility_

According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad visited the town of Ta’if to bring them the religion of Islam, but was violently rejected and pelted with stones. He left the town injured and near-death when the Angel Gabriel approached him. Gabriel relayed God’s message: Allah could crush the wretched people of Ta’if with the mountains as punishment for their rejection of Islam and mistreatment of Muhammad. Muhammad declined the request, expressing hope that perhaps the descendants of the infidels of Ta’if would be righteous and accept Islam. Muhammad’s demonstration of mercy and forgiveness after Ta’if was cited to me in numerous conversations about how Muslims should navigate their current demonization in the US. “The only way we can beat the anti-Muslim machine,” Romana told me, “is by modeling ourselves
after the Prophet Muhammad, peace upon him. Always merciful. Always forgiving. If the
greatest human ever could forgive the woman who threw trash on him every morning – do you
know this story? This woman would throw trash on him every day, until one day she didn’t. The
Prophet, peace be upon him, noticed that the woman wasn’t abusing him that day. You know
what he did? Subhanallah, he went to check on her because he was worried she was sick. She
accepted Islam immediately when she saw his merciful example. That’s all we have, his
example.” Time and again, the appeal to patience and sabr25 was highlighted as a key strategy in
the face of Islamophobia. For Muslims, obeying the sunnah (the example set by the Prophet
Muhammad) is a large element of practicing Islam. By emphasizing his forbearance and
patience, a religious imperative is constructed for Muslims in the U.S. to wait patiently.

Waiting, patience, and hope were thus intertwined in the IRO expectation of a better
future. While members expressed to me a sense that patient forbearance would hasten the arrival
of a better world for Muslim Americans, the coexisting sense of defeatedness and allegations that
the US was an unjust social formation at its core made me wonder just what this hopefulness
revealed. Hope, as Crapanzano writes, is not as agentive as desire: one who desires something
acts to bring about fulfillment of these desires (2003). Hope, on the other hand, requires an
individual to wait and, as a passive state of waiting, is a type of paralysis. For Muslim Americans
who waver between faith in their nation’s principles and cynicism of its hypocrisy, this hope is
indeed “so indefinite as not to have an identifiable object” (18). For IRO members, I wondered
whether the immense value of hope reflected a lack of imaginative possibilities as described by
Buck-Morss (2000), an overarching sense that there is an inevitable and unbreakable momentum

25 Sabr, defined as endurance or patience, is a cornerstone of faith for Muslims.

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of the political order. In her writing on Asian American immigrants, Lisa Lowe describes a
mirage of political freedom, arguing that consent-based forms of hegemony coalesce to produce
the racialization of Asian immigrants (1996). This is connected to the paralysis described above:
while IRO members understand their constitutionally-protected right to free expression, the
murkier representational politics I describe reflect deep discursive limitations. The understanding
that certain things “are not to be spoken of” during these delicate times is part of an overarching
strategy that makes apparent the mirage described by Lowe.

IRO members were unequivocally in opposition to Draconian components of the War on
Terror such as the establishment of the detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, a site that
“exemplifies the strange new geographies of empire in the twenty-first century” (Bayoumi 2004:
36). They understood this component of the War on Terror as being established by George W.
Bush, but continued under the presidency of Barack Obama. For many, the unfulfilled promise
by Obama to immediately shut down the detention center was evidence that transformative
politics were just out of reach. While Obama’s promise initially inspired a great response by
Muslim voters, defaulting on the promise reminded IRO members about the limits of
institutional change.

Indeed, the Obama presidency and the two-party system in general was a locus of
impossibility for IRO members. The recent voting history of Muslim Americans is critical in this
regard. In 2000, Muslim organizations took comprehensive steps to assemble the bloc vote and
systematic efforts to ensure a maximum number of Muslims voted. The attempt to unify Muslim
voters behind a single candidate was largely successful: in his first election, Bush received over
70% of the Muslim vote in the 2000 election. At the time, many Muslims looked favorably upon
Bush because he met with Muslim American community leaders during his campaign. Upon the
selection of Joseph Lieberman as the running mate for presidential candidate Al Gore in the 2000 election, there was a palpable sense of anxiety among many Muslim voters about the Democratic ticket. Many feared President Clinton's friendly stance toward Israel would only be intensified by a Gore/Lieberman administration. Others felt a Republican candidate was closer to the orthodox teachings of Islam, especially around issues such as family values and sexuality. Yet by the end of Bush’s first term, “Islamophobia” had become an unfortunate staple of the Muslim American lexicon. One of my contacts in the field told me that his “biggest regret was throwing away my vote on George Bush. Since I was naturalized in this country, I have always proudly voted for the Democratic candidate. But the Muslim organizations all pressured me to vote as a bloc. Truly, it was my biggest regret to elect Bush.”

After what an IRO member called “two Islamophobia terms”, Barack Obama’s campaign had energized many Muslim voters. He received an overwhelming proportion of the Muslim vote in 2008, with nearly 89% of Muslim Americans casting a vote for the Democratic candidate (CAIR). In fact, just as Muslim voters had switched party affiliations for the 2000 bloc vote, many long-time Republican Muslims cast a Democratic vote for the first time in the 2008 election. One Pakistani-American couple revealed to me that Obama’s 2008 campaign was the first time they had ever made a campaign donation since immigrating to the US in the 1970s. In fact, their donation to the Obama campaign marked not only their first donation, but also the first time they voted along Democratic lines since their naturalization in the 1970’s. I heard several such anecdotes of long-standing Republicans who, for the first time, enthusiastically supported a Democratic candidate once Obama's candidacy was announced. On the flipside, I gleaned an “I-told-you-so” sense of vindication from Muslim Democrats who had reluctantly joined the voting bloc for Bush in 2000. In fact, otherwise cordial conversations at times became heated as
Republicans and Democrats discussed the outcome of the Bush presidency.

Yet Obama's first term saw very little in the way of a reversal of the entrenched Islamophobia that had become, for many, emblematic of the Bush era. Indeed, some of the harshest elements of the USA PATRIOT Act were renewed by Obama, U.S. ties with Israel remained strong, and Obama quickly earned a reputation as a military hawk for his ongoing involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. He inaugurated the notorious drone program and did not, as promised, close the prison at Guantánamo Bay. Certainly, there seemed to be a strong anti-Bush sentiment and Democratic Party affiliation among most of the people I met in the field. Yet, at the same time, in-depth conversations revealed a deep ambivalence about electoral politics, Barack Obama's relationship to Muslim Americans and the War on Terror, and the two-party system in general.

While it has become somewhat of a commonplace to understand Muslim Americans as truly energized and optimistic about Obama in 2008, it is noteworthy that even at that time, there were whispers of discontent and suspicion regarding Obama’s true intentions with the Muslim world. In a conversation with a Muslim Democrat shortly after Obama’s first presidential election victory I was told that Obama’s actions during his campaign foreshadowed much of what his term would look like. “See what he did with Reverend Wright?” Azam said, referencing the Jeremiah Wright controversy in which Obama distanced himself from the pastor. He went on to say, “I think Reverend Wright said some very smart and brave things about the U.S. military, about the U.S. support for Israel. And Obama used to agree with that. But as soon as he got involved with politics, see what happened? Obama had to renounce Rev. Wright. He’s going to do that as long as he’s in office.” Azam was cut off by his friend, Nasir. “But what else did you expect him to do?” Nasir said. “He can’t get elected if he speaks out against U.S. foreign policy.
That’s just how politics work. Obama’s heart is in the right place. He may not be a revolutionary, but he’s going to do the right thing for the Muslim world.” What ensued was a mild debate between the two about Obama’s transformative potential, a debate that foreshadowed the larger climate that surrounded Obama’s second presidential campaign.

After having been “cheated” by George W. Bush after giving him the bloc vote and then disappointed by Obama, many Muslims felt that there was no transformative direction for their activism. They were alienated from what they considered “fringe” or “grassroots” movements such as anarchist politics, socialists, or (as Sumaiya referred to them) “people who throw their votes away on a third party that will never, ever be elected.” Recognizing the futility of the two-party system and de-legitimizing the potential of viable grassroots movements, IRO members reflect the limitations for earnest engagement.

I was speaking with Azam at a regional conference in Cincinnati about the issue of Palestine – he was wearing an eye-catching “Free Palestine” t-shirt that sparked the discussion. He remarked that most IRO’s were strongly against the violations of human rights and international law carried out by Israel and supported by the United States. “This injustice will end. If not in this life, then in the hereafter. We know from our Prophetic example that this kind of injustice only increases the reward for the victim in the afterlife. And Islam is not like Christianity – we are not taught to be passive in the face of oppression. We’re supposed to speak, act out, fight exploitation. But really, what do we do when speaking out will do more harm than good? Is there any purpose to speaking out when it means you lose a hard-earned professorship? When it means being blacklisted in the media? Even Jewish people – the Chomsky’s and Finkelstein’s – are accused of anti-Semitism and un-Americanism. What chance does my brown skin and beard stand?”
Azam’s defeated sense of “standing no chance” mirrors Linah’s assessment that now is not the time to speak of certain things. These unspoken rules about what can and cannot be spoken of guide the representational politics of IRO’s and contribute to a larger logic of the field of possibilities in the US. In his 2008 campaign, Barack Obama spoke at a rally in Detroit where a few women in hijab were asked not to sit directly behind the candidate. Campaign volunteers understood Obama’s own religious identity as a central concern to voters and thus asked the Muslim women to remain outside of the shot. I spoke about this with Linah, who told me that she was outraged by the event, but understood. “Yeah, it would be nice if Obama could have stood by what I think he really believes, which his that it doesn’t matter whether his supporters wear a hijab or are Muslim. It would be nice if instead of saying “Oh, I’m not Muslim, I’m a Christian,” Obama could say “why the heck does it even matter? But you can’t say those things. You have to be reasonable. So, while I’m upset that we live in a country that two-thirds of the people would freak out if they saw hijabi women standing behind Obama, the fact is that we do live in that country, so we have to be realistic.”

IRO representational politics and members’ aspirations reflect the fact that dire consequences would result from making “unreasonable” demands. IRO members claimed that discourse must fall within a reasonable, acceptable spectrum, that some battles were “impossible” to fight – especially now, perhaps ever. Hatem from the Ikhras blog was quick to dismiss ISNA’s representational politics as pandering, “House Negro” strategies that “kowtow to the establishment.” Considering the at-times contradictory sentiments of Dr. Kavakci, Imran, Linah, and Azam, a certain ambivalence about Muslims’ discursive possibilities becomes apparent. The question then arises – what exactly is at stake in speaking earnestly? We have seen IRO’s posit that violating the unspoken discursive rules jeopardizes the victory of a preferred
candidate and the loss of a professorship. In essence, though, IRO members expressed a fear that the project of cultural citizenship was at stake.

At times, it seemed crystal-clear to IRO members that there was a long, enduring history of dissent being deemed un-American. While Kavakci can celebrate her freedom to wear a hijab in public spaces in the US, there remained a pervasive sense that “any expression of restraint or caution about the dangerous erosion of our civil liberties has been equated with treason” (Marable 8). In Maira’s work, we see the ways in which dissent has been deemed unpatriotic, suppressing “radical movements, such as the American Indian Movement and Black Panthers, which were considered enemies of ‘American values’” (Maira 2009: 634). In the not-too-distant past, communist, socialist, and civil rights organizations were the target of covert activities of the FBI’s COINTELPRO program.

As I discuss above, IRO members and leaders alike are aware of this history. In a post-9/11 climate, “to refer even obliquely” to such matters as the U.S. government’s relationship to ‘some of the villains of the tragedy of 9/11”…is “tantamount to acting as an apologist for the assailants, and for terrorism generally” (Khalidi 2007: xiv-xv). Thus, IRO activity, which is aimed at Americanization (described in another chapter), treads carefully. Muslim Americans are “free” to speak in liberal spaces about mosque-building and hijabs, but this freedom comes at the expense of challenging foreign policy, allying with radical movements, or questioning the structure at its very core. Those challenges to entrenched structures of US empire are relegated to appropriate, private, or limited spaces. Whether or not IRO members literally anticipate a more just United States is less relevant than the fact that hopefulness underpins their strategies. Hope, as a structure of waiting, is revelatory of a deeper paralysis and ensnarement in US empire.
Waiting and hope provide a sort of refuge for the Muslims privileged enough to craft public responses to Islamophobia.

Conclusion

The ethnography in this chapter suggests that it would be erroneous to attribute any type of uniformly political orientation – radical, conservative, progressive, or liberal – to Muslim American IRO members. Within a decade, Muslim voters went from overwhelming support for George W. Bush to cautious backing for Barack Obama. Socially conservative IRO members level hard-hitting critiques in informal conversations about the treacherous role of US foreign policy, and at the same time offer platitudes about the US as inherently equitable and just. It is important to note that the fluidness of these political allegiances is specific to Muslim Americans who are IRO members: these are generally documented, highly educated immigrants of a professional class. In my chapter on Islamophilia, I consider the ways in which various shades of privilege enable a certain type of multicultural engagement from this particular subset of US Muslims.

For this specific group of engaged, relatively privileged Muslim Americans, it is clear that this privileged status is perceived as being in peril. Invoking a well-understood history of US racism and a strong understanding of the contours of contemporary US imperialism, IRO members cautiously walk a tightrope on their path to social citizenship. Their agentive capacity in this process is unclear. If vocal critique of US foreign policy means Congressional hearings on the radicalization of Muslims – a veritable witch-hunt – then IRO members’ caution is understandable. At the same time, the aversion to building allegiances with those social movements that are deemed too radical or fringe reveals underlying mainstreaming aspirations.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION: ISLAMOPHILIA AND THE NEW IMPERIAL HOMELAND

As this work has shown, Muslim Americans tread uneven, constantly shifting terrain. Within a matter of weeks, advocacy groups’ concerns may shift from extrajudicial surveillance within the U.S. to the targeted assassination of U.S. citizens on foreign soil to an incident of mosque vandalism in a small town. Given the unstable topography and diverse scales of Muslim American representational politics, I found it difficult to find a conclusive end date for my research. Nevertheless, after conversations with my advisor, I decided the 2012 presidential election served as a fitting end to my fieldwork. I knew more contemporary concerns would continue to surface after I completed fieldwork, but the election itself represented the major themes in my research. IRO’s relations to the 2012 elections encapsulated all the ambiguity, disappointments, silences, and hypervisibility that are central subjects in my dissertation.

In this dissertation, I have illuminated the ways in which multicultural politics and racial formation are central concerns in the War on Terror. I have attempted to answer the question posed by Nikhil Pal Singh, “How are socially consequential forms of intranational and supranational identity constituted in relation to the normative political structures and presumptive universals of Euroamerican modernity: the nation-state, democratic citizenship, and the public sphere?” (1998:472). The category of “Muslim American,” upon closer inspection, unravels as we explore the deep-seated divisions within the far-flung populations the category includes. Yet as an analytic unit, “Muslims in America” is summoned by those with both Islamophobic and Islamophilic intensions. As such, “Muslim American” glosses over core differences: differences in class, national background, religious piety, and (perhaps most
important for my work) political engagement. Groups that claim to represent Muslim Americans are burdened with representing a “community” that does not, as a unified whole, exist. The practice of representation becomes saddled with deciding who to speak for, who to select as spokespeople, and in what register to speak.

I was speaking with a Muslim comedian who has attained some popularity in both Muslim and non-Muslim media about the difficulties of being a ‘representative.’ “See, we have this crisis of authority in Islam. I can sit in suburbia and read Quran and the community will think I’m an expert on Islam. It’s just a small minority of Muslims who are actually affiliated with a mosque. And when it comes to scholarship, well, there’s no real way it works. You might have some Pakistani uncle at the mosque saying “I want to be imam” and then you could have Hamza Yusuf who is classically trained in the Islamic tradition. And they would both be taken as “Muslim representatives.” And a lot of these representatives want to speak as if “Islam says…” as if there’s one opinion. When you think about it, that’s what the media does, too. They paint Islam as one thing, Muslims as one type of person. Whatever small type of representative I am, my goal is not to do that. It’s to say ‘Islam is many things. Muslims are many people.’”

I observed with great interest IRO members reacting to the Trayvon Martin-George Zimmerman verdict in the summer of 2013, at which point I had completed my fieldwork. By and large, active IRO members were horrified by the verdict that left Zimmerman a free man on the basis that he had “stood his ground” in shooting the 17 year-old boy. The sense of anguish and defeatedness among IRO communities mirrored that of liberal Americans, anti-racists, and civil rights activists across the country. The Islamic Society of North America immediately issued a press release condemning gun violence and opposing legislation that permitted people from states like Florida to carry concealed weapons. White convert and IRO spokesperson Imam
Suhaib Webb wore a hoodie during his Friday sermon in solidarity with Martin, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations supported an investigation into the verdict.

Yet African American Muslim leaders were at the forefront of this outcry. Dr. Aminah McCloud, an African American woman and IRO spokesperson, accused mainstream Islamic organizations of not being vocal enough in their opposition to the verdict. She leveled harsh criticism against Muslim organizations that, she stated, “claim Americanness regularly when their own self interests are involved” (2013). McCloud’s criticism highlights the divisions and difficulties of IRO representational politics. Even though unity around racial difference was a valued principle at IRO events, McCloud was apt in holding these organizations accountable for their relative silence. Furthermore, anti-black racism among Muslims was a recurrent theme among IRO members. A Palestinian American woman, Reem, told me that people in her family “still call black Muslims 'abeed. This is the Arabic word for slave! I think that is such a horrible word to use. It's so racist. But my cousin tries to justify it; he says 'abeed has a different cultural context in the Arab world; ‘it only sounds this bad in the U.S.’ But to me, it's straight up racism, and it's counter to everything our Prophet believed.” These tensions within Muslim communities are at the center of my dissertation, as their connection to representational politics is especially revelatory. As my chapter on hypervisibility demonstrates, leveraging positive hypervisibility requires constructing a “good” Muslim persona who can capitalize upon the Islamosopic regime. Inevitably, race, class, orthodoxy, or immigration status all become crucial filters through which this visibility takes shape. Positive hypervisibility requires selective invisibility of certain subjects, being vocal about permissible topics and silent about others.

A brief discussion of the role of the Nation of Islam and historic black communities is useful for this discussion. The original teachings of the Nation of Islam are likely anathema to
most IRO members. Born in the early 20th century in Detroit, the central tenets (such as the belief that Allah had manifest himself in the person of preacher W.D. Fard) are in fact blasphemous to most Sunni and Shi’ite American Muslims, who also regard the central role of Elijah Muhammad in the Nation of Islam as blasphemous. In spite of these differences, there was a sense of allegiance with the NOI that surfaced inconsistently throughout my time in the field. For instance, the Autobiography of Malcolm X (X and Haley, 1964) was a cornerstone piece of literature for many IRO members; many of them marked it as having strengthened or solidified their belief in Islam. Indeed, several people told me that Malcolm's journey from the NOI to what they called “mainstream” Islam (which I took to mean Sunni Islam) was a form of validation for their own beliefs. I met one IRO member in Chicago, an African-American woman in her mid-20's, who spoke to me of her parents' journey to “mainstream” Islam from the Nation of Islam. She recounted the ways in which the NOI “laid the blueprint” for their ultimate arrival at Sunni Islam. “Say what you will about NOI philosophy; it definitely helped many black Muslims ultimately arrive at the true Islam.”

Just as fighting Islamophobia has been a concern for IRO's that was intensified by 9/11, it seemed that unity with African American Muslims also intensified as an institutional concern. While IRO's are primarily populated by immigrant (first- and second-generation) Muslims from South Asia and the Arab world, I noticed a concerted effort to reach out to African American Muslims during my fieldwork. An entire IRO weekend conference was devoted to the topic of Muslim-American diversity. Fittingly, the event was held near Detroit, at a Shi'ite mosque, no less (the issue of sectarian tension between Shi'ites and Sunnis was another such point of deliberate unity-building). The event featured an exhibit of African American Muslim presence in the US and, being in Dearborn, drew several black and Arab attendees.
I wondered about the deliberate attempt to unify black and non-black Muslims by IRO’s (that predominantly serve non-black Muslims). It certainly was a cohesive effort: IRO members used these events, along with social media and publications, to assert that the entrenched anti-black racism of immigrant Muslim communities was detrimental, un-American, and morally reprehensible. The racial harmony and pluralism of the times of Muhammad were frequently cited as examples for current Muslims. Thus, there was even a theological basis for the abolition of anti-black racism. At the aforementioned diversity conference, the example of Bilal was given in many official speeches and informal conversations. Attendees of all races seemed aware that the very first call to prayer during the Prophet's time was given by a freed black slave, Bilal. If the Prophet's community had entrusted such a critical, fundamental role to a black man, clearly there was no sanctioning of anti-black racism in Muslim American communities. IRO speeches urged immigrant parents to “allow” their children to marry Muslims of other races, to abandon nationalist ties and instead embrace a “Muslim first” identity, echoing the work of Naber (2005).

This attempt seemed earnest enough, and I did notice IRO members regarding their multiracial social circles and acceptance of interracial marriages as a sign of progress. Yet I also wondered if the institutional push for racial harmony and diversity was tied in to the goal of legitimacy for IRO's. In other words, given the hypervisibility I have explored, anti-black racism would hardly get any favor from the “mainstream” for Muslims facing Islamophobia. Also, with America configuring itself as diverse and tolerant, a key part of the justification for its own imperialist actions, American Muslims eager to claim legitimacy in the American social landscape must comply with the rules of multiculturalism and diversity. This, of course, means combatting anti-black racism on the level of discourse and representation. (This does not necessarily mean combatting anti-black racism through material measures, such as the
redistribution of wealth or the abolition of the New Jim Crow carceral state. Indeed, on such matters, I found the IRO community to be genuinely averse, or ambivalent at best. Rather than embracing a race-radical approach, as Melamed (2006) calls it, by and large a neoliberal multiculturalism guided the discussions of race.) The sense that eliminating racism was a dimension of “good Muslim” politics is a critical way of understanding that there are liberal mechanisms at work in the quest for legitimacy, too.

My work has highlighted the representational “trap” faced by IRO’s. Unable to be anything other than peace-loving patriots, dissent is relegated to the realm of the traitorous. In this way, radical critique that may exist among IRO members and leaders is either watered down or stamped out completely. As As’ad AbuKhalil has said, “Muslim and Arab-American organizations compound the problem by continuously issuing condemnations of all terrorist attacks, thereby putting themselves and their faith on the defensive, as if their citizenship is conditional on certain political declarations, and as if the obvious abhorrence of violence is a non-Muslim, non-Arab trait” (2002: 26). Second, by engaging in a politics of “Islamophilia,” IRO’s exclude those Muslims who are not compatible with the characteristics ‘good Muslim.’ My work explores the transformative potential of these practices. In other words, I ask whether the ‘good’ Muslim stands as a shield against accusations of bigotry or racism or a reinforcement of it. My writing asks what function the ‘good’ Muslim plays in the possibilities for anti-Islamophobia advocacy or civil rights work in the U.S. as well as de-escalating U.S. militarism abroad.

IRO politics reveal peculiar contemporary features of U.S. multiculturalism. One of the central questions my research begs is whether Muslim American spokesmanship and the Islamophilia syndrome is an age-old process that has been similarly enacted by other racialized
minority groups. Is the story of Islamophilia a uniquely Muslim American phenomenon, or is it a continuation in a long story of U.S. racial nativism? Are Islamophobia and Islamophilia simply the newest incarnation of quests for legitimacy in America? In this chapter, I explore the ways in which IRO representational politics are at once exceptional and the ways in which they mirror experiences of other marginalized groups struggling for legitimacy.

Next, I turn to what Maskovsky and Susser call “the new imperial homeland” (2009), in which I reflect upon how Muslim representational practices are connected to various aspects of U.S. militarism and both the domestic and international War on Terror. I take seriously Grewal's call to consider American history as inextricable from the context of imperialism and war. Since Said’s critique of the inattentiveness to U.S. imperialism in anthropology (1989), there has been an increase in the work on U.S. militarism, global capitalism, and the geopolitics of neoliberalism by anthropologists (Lutz 2006; Gill 2004). Yet by anthropologists “of” North America, there is a dearth of attention to U.S. imperialism, perhaps a disastrous by-product of the lingering area studies paradigm, in which the appropriate focus of an “Americanist” anthropologist is narrowly defined. This was certainly one of the challenges in my writing, given its multi-sitedness and transnational underpinnings. As Naber writes in Jadaliyya, “While teaching courses in Women of Color Feminisms and American Studies on the one hand and Middle East Women’s Studies on the other, I have run up against the limitations of area-studies divisions that continue to predominate within Middle East Women’s Studies—such as the framing of American Studies (including US Women of Color and Native American Feminist Studies) and Middle East Studies (including Middle East Women’s Studies) as separate fields and the United States and the Middle East as geographically bounded regions. Such divisions obstruct the possibilities for engagement with important questions such as whether and to what
extent racist/classist/heterosexist US prison structures have anything to do with the US War on Terror” (Naber 2013).

This concluding chapter attends to the stubborn inheritances of a discipline borne by colonialism, shaped by “areas,” but currently defining itself in stark opposition to both. By situating American Islamophobia and Islamophilia in a global and historical context, I aim to illuminate the ways in which America is a transnational, ideological concept, not a geographically bounded space. I also suggest that liberal politics of inclusion and racial diversity are part of the construction of America in the social imaginary as an inherently diverse space, and that this self-proclaimed multiculturalism is high on the list of justifications for American exceptionalism. The specific type of multiculturalism I explore here, then, often lacks any critical content or progressive transformative potential. Instead, it is a strategic tool in a war against which many Muslim Americans themselves have deep objections.

Islamophobia and Islamophilia: Foundational, or Anomaly?

“This is old stuff in American politics,” Imam Zaid Shakir said in a speech at a large Islamic convention. In his incredible presentation, Shakir draw raucous applause every few minutes, even a standing ovation, for his diatribes against U.S. racism and militarism, as well as an aside against gender- and sexuality-based reform movements among U.S. Muslims. His speech referenced SB 1070, the Draconian anti-immigration legislation that would ostensibly criminalize those thought to be undocumented immigrants in the state of Arizona. I heard Shakir, Hamza Yusuf, and other IRO speakers reference the horrors of the slave trade, the genocide of Native Americans, the internment of Japanese American Nisei during World War 2, and other acts of U.S. racism with great regularity. I noted that IRO spokespeople returned to themes of
U.S. racism, militarism, and injustice as they worked toward a counternarrative that had space for America’s Muslims. At times, IRO speeches rang with echoes of Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*: I heard the Haymarket massacre, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the Trail of Tears all referenced in speeches by key IRO spokespeople. These injustices were relevant for American Muslims struggling to place themselves in the story of this country and attempting to come to terms with the post-9/11 anti-Muslim environment, as I have discussed in further depth in Chapter 3.

That this coexisted with a fierce type of patriotism and pro-Americanism is hardly a contradiction; indeed, it seemed that knowledge of this brutal history could coincide with a sense that the U.S. was a meritocratic, egalitarian land of opportunity without conflict. (For more on this, see Chapter 5). I struggled to pigeonhole the politics of IRO members and leaders, finding them incommensurable with conventional categories of political leanings: Democrat, Republican, liberal, conservative, progressive, left-wing, right-wing. As investment bankers told me that the Quran was compatible with ferocious capitalism, Hamza Yusuf railed against the excesses of the United States’ financial industry and Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah lamented and warned against the ideological trappings of “leftist” movements. The active distancing of IRO’s from socialist and anarchist movements did not stop IRO members from proclaiming their admiration for Chomsky’s political writings. In fact, I found IRO members acquainted with the works of notable “leftists,” ranging from Paul Krugman to Howard Zinn to Cornel West. I heard IRO members proclaim allegiance with individuals ranging from Pat Buchanan to WEB DuBois, Malcolm X to Elizabeth Warren. As such, IRO members understood Islamophobia in varying ways, at times seeing it as the next step in a long history of U.S. imperialism, militarism, and white supremacy, and at other times as an anomaly, a blip emanating from a fringe right-wing
movement. I couldn’t figure out whether IRO members saw Islamophobia as essentially un-American, or as American as apple pie.

While I could not find an easy answer to whether IRO members consider U.S. racism an anomaly or foundational, my work has begun to consider the ways these representational politics echo and diverge from other racial projects and multicultural efforts in the country. In some ways, IRO’s “integrationist” (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009) measures are simply another incarnation of respectability politics, having the same tenor as Tyler Perry or Bill Cosby encouraging black Americans to self-uplift as the sole route to eliminating racism. For people of color, “respectability politics” continue to surface (not without controversy), most prominently among African Americans. In 2013, seven year-old Tiana Parker’s Oklahoma school sent her home for wearing her hair in dreadlocks, deeming the hairstyle contrary to a respectful learning environment. This was not long after the Zimmerman verdict had sparked public debate about whether wearing a hoodie on a dark night meant, for a young black male, an admission of guilt.

This commonplace acceptance that the onus for respectability falls upon black bodies is part of the economy of these respectability politics, in which “the virtues of self-care and self-correction are framed as strategies to lift the black poor out of their condition by preparing them for the market economy” (Harris 2014: 33). Harris highlights the ways ‘ghetto’ went from a term describing a poor, segregated neighborhood to a descriptor for inappropriate, racialized cultural expression, shifting the focus from structure to behavior. “Respectability politics can have the effect of steering “unrespectables” away from making demands on the state to intervene on their behalf and toward self-correction and the false belief that the market economy alone will lift them out of their plight” (35). The parallel between black respectability politics and my discussion of Islamophilia is clear: in a sense, the “good Muslim” is called upon to self-correct
those behaviors that are incompatible with Americanism in the “terror age.”

Islamophilia most closely merged with black respectability politics, as I discuss in Chapter 4, in the sense that Islam inherently provides a mechanism for uplift and self-determination. In other words, IRO members understood Islam as at its very core a tool for social justice. Mechanisms of self-respect and good citizenship, they argued, were essential Islamic principles, albeit ones that had been corrupted by those who did not appreciate Islam’s nature. Thus, this “essential” Islam had dual tasks: first, it could uplift a ghettoized underclass (my fieldwork was replete with appeals to the stories of black Muslims like Malcolm X in this regard), and second, it could reform the image of the incommensurable Muslim immigrant through the propagation of the ‘good Muslim’ trope.

Certainly, though, the lens of respectability politics cannot neatly be transposed to IRO representations. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Islamophilia rests upon a deeply problematic trope of the model minority, in which Muslims are presented as an already-existing professional class of contributing citizens. Yes, IRO’s emphasize the need for self-reform in the face of the Islamoscopic regime; at the same time, in their construction of the Muslim American counternarrative, they argue that Muslims have been model citizens all along. Aidi speaks of the cultural forces of Islam in America, including black nationalism and hip-hop Islam (Aidi 2004). He argues that these forces have created an oppositional counterculture, evidence of America’s failure to integrate marginalized voices and deliver social welfare benefits. This is what we see in the critique above offered by Zaid Shakir, and the oppositional stance taken at times by Hamza Yusuf (see chapter 3). My work adds to Aidi the dimension of a more elite type of cultural Muslim force: not the Islamic counternarrative created in inner-cities by entrenched, poor populations of color, but the counternarrative being crafted by an immigrant and American-born,
highly educated, professional class.

IRO’s in the New Imperial Homeland

Returning to the 2013 Zimmerman verdict, I was mesmerized by a Friday *khutbah* (sermon) given by Imam Zaid after the verdict had been issued. I quote him here at length.

“Allah tells us in a *hadith qudsi*\(^\text{26}\), ‘Oh my servants, I have made oppression forbidden for myself and among you. Therefore, do not oppress one another.’ This is an integral part of our religion. Our quest for justice does not allow us to kill indiscriminately and justify it as a quest for justice. But this is what governments argue: Our quest for security allows us to murder indiscriminately. What does that mean as a principle? Our quest for whose security? Have you been consulted? I’d rather be insecure before someone had to die for my security. And I’m sure most of you would agree with me. I would take my chances before I would allow anyone to indiscriminately murder someone so that I can allegedly be safe. This is not just. Islam argues otherwise…The Quran tells us ‘Don’t take the soul, the life that Allah has sanctified, except for a just cause: retribution for murder or for spreading sedition in the land.’

‘Just cause’ isn’t being between the age of 16 and 64 in Waziristan. Or Yemen. Or Somalia. Where you’re killed now, questioned later. Our president said in the aftermath of the Zimmerman trial, ‘we are a nation of laws.’ Well, he should start following those laws when he commissions these drone attacks that murder people and then they go to the body, and if he’s between 16 and

\(^{26}\) A *hadith qudsi* is a saying related by the Prophet Muhammad that is understood to be direct word from Allah.
64, he’s a militant. If he never picked up a gun in his life, if he doesn’t even know where America is, can’t locate it on a map, never heard of 9/11. Just some shepherd minding his sheep on a hillside in Afghanistan or Pakistan or Yemen, then is murdered. And if he’s between 16 and 64, his murder is justified. What kind of law is that? The law of the jungle. The law of might makes right. Allah tells us don’t kill the soul Allah has sanctified. We have no right to kill that person. There was no right to kill Trayvon Martin” (Zaid Shakir 2013).

What Shakir does in this khutbah is take on the issue of American (in)justice, weaving seamlessly between the United States and the Middle East, connecting drone policy and the not-guilty verdict for Zimmerman. Thus, Shakir here (and in many other speeches I heard during my time in the field) connects domestic racial politics and legal codes to the international workings of the War on Terror. As such, Muslim American representational politics cannot be separated from their transnational dimensions.

It is difficult, given the disciplinary separations and entrenchment of stubborn “area” paradigms, to discuss IRO politics without falling victim to the trappings of “Americanist anthropology” or “an anthropology of Islam.” Yet this diligence is critical, not just for anthropology but for an epistemological investigation into what we know about empire, Islam, and difference. According to Naber, “Researching and teaching beyond one-directional feminist analyses that focus on either the extreme devastation resulting from US imperialism and war in the MENA27 region or racial-classist-heteropatriarchal violence in the United States means taking seriously how US “domestic” politics and US “foreign” politics exist within a similar

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historical and political frame. The points whereby the U.S. “domestic” and “foreign” conjoin—and are made and re-made through one another—are also crucial axes for alliance building and accountability across disciplines and borders. Yet while framing the domestic and foreign structures of U.S. imperialism as relational and mutually constitutive, I also want to avoid assuming shared experiences, or that people hailed into US imperialism (and its racial and heteropatriarchal foundations) from varying locations share equal struggles. Rather, we might ask how the histories of people from different political locations within the US and the MENA region (and beyond) rub up against each other when they are hailed into similar imperialist structures—in different ways and to different degrees” (Naber 2013).

American ‘imperialism’ is a fundamental concern for IRO members; by and large, they are inclined to agree with the claim that the United States behaves as an empire. If imperialism is understood as projecting political power over disparate territories, IRO members saw U.S. empire as indisputable fact. They identified everything from the hardly-representative two-party system (and the general consensus between the two parties about U.S. militarism) to the immense military budget as evidence of such. Aadam, for instance, casually used the word “blowback” when talking about Muslim terrorists. I was not sure if he was specifically citing Johnson’s 2001 book of the same title, in which he argues that the United States functions as an empire, doing so “well below the sight lines of the American public” (2001: 65), something he calls “stealth imperialism”. In his oft-cited New York Times piece, Ignatieff argues vociferously that the U.S. is an empire, but “our grace notes are free markets, human rights, and democracy, enforced by the most awesome military power the world has ever known. It is the imperialism of a people who remember that their country secured its independence by revolt against an empire, and who like to think of themselves as the friend of freedom everywhere. It is an empire without
consciousness of itself as such, constantly shocked that its good intentions arouse resentment abroad. But that does not make it any less of an empire…” (2003).

Engseng Ho agrees about the remarkable inconspicuousness of U.S. empire, claiming that we live in the time of invisible American imperialism. For Ho, what is unique about American imperialism is that it is fiercely anti-colonial, yet undeniably imperialistic. While there is no (or little) formal colonization, there is “maximal projection of military power through sea and air space, a system of subordinate sovereign states, and multilateral institutions” (228). For Ho, the anti-colonial element bolsters the popular notion that America’s empire is somehow exceptional and preferable, allows its dominance to hide in plain sight. “While previous empires dominated their colonies with pomp and ceremony, the American invention of ‘extraterritoriality’ formalizes the idea that Americans are not really present” (232). “Damned if you do and damned if you don’t, flip-flopping between isolationism and nation-building abroad, two priorities at least are clear for the U.S. government: internal securitization of the U.S. population itself, and an increased investment in methodologies of invisibility abroad. Remote control bombers fly ever higher out of sight, while military advisors disappear into the Filipino jungles, Yemeni mountains, and Georgian gorges. As well, security, military, and colonial functions are farmed out to private companies, removing them from political oversight” (239). This is in line with what Junaid Rana describes as “an American empire that, via its chameleon-like characteristics, is able to hide elements of its domination in plain sight” (2011: 77).

Race politics in the U.S. have always been inextricable from its geopolitical quest for supremacy. David Harvey shows how the age of Clinton was certainly an imperial moment, with the use of so-called “soft power” and multicultural tolerance as its keys to validation. “The only difference between the Clinton years and now [the Bush era] is that the mask has come off and
bellicosity has displaced a certain reticence, in part because of the post-9/11 atmosphere within the US that makes overt and unilateral military action more politically acceptable” (2003: 22). Deepa Kumar writes about the imperialism of the Obama age, remarking upon the central role of diplomacy and markets (2012). In this era, Obama himself speaks publicly of civilization’s debt to Islam, fiercely rejecting the Huntingtonian argument and emphasizing the presence of a ‘good’ Muslim – domestically and abroad – with whom diplomatic relations are possible. (“Yet despite this multilateral strategy, the Obama administration still resorted to unilateral actions when needed – the assassination of Osama bin Laden, for example…” (Kumar: 134).)

As Nikhil Pal Singh writes, questions of multiculturalism “developed in the United States in a very particular time and place, and in a specific relationship to the question of world order” (1998: 473). Gunnar Myrdal’s pivotal An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (1944) critically looks at the puzzling coexistence of American white liberals and oppression of black Americans, always orbiting around the notion of an essentially inclusive, democratic, egalitarian American ethos on the world stage. At the end of Malcolm X’s life, his focus had shifted radically from American racism to the role of global racism and white supremacy in colonialism and empire. During the Cold War, domestic racial politics in the U.S. dovetailed with concerns about the defeat of Communism. The Black Panther Party, while popularly associated with domestic liberation struggles for African Americans, actually positioned itself as primarily opposed to American imperialism (Bloom and Martin 2013).

Mahmood's work does a terrific job of connecting American feminist politics to the resurgence of the global “clash of civilizations” (2008). In fact, U.S. feminism is a rallying cry for American liberals and conservatives alike in justifying American militarism in the 'Muslim world' (Mahmood 2008; abu Lughod 2002). Just as women's rights (or as Puar argues, “gay
rights" 2007) lend legitimacy to U.S. militarism, so do Islamophilic projects of inclusion among both Muslims and non-Muslims.

During the convergence of the Cold War and the civil rights movement, the question arose: Could the U.S. speak with any authority or righteousness on the global stage if it perpetuated horrific human and civil rights abuses domestically? Several decades later, the same questions surface. Can American militarism be taken seriously if LGBT rights are not acknowledged by the military? Can American intervention on behalf of democracy and equality be justified if women's rights are not assured at home? And, as my writing has shown, can the Global War against Terrorism hold any water if anti-Muslim bigotry is the order of the day?

As Grewal argues, colonialism, hegemony, and governmentality all intersect in ways that allow racialized and gendered subjects to emerge in relation to state power, all the while being created by state power (2005). The category “Middle Eastern man,” for instance, has had shifting significance based upon the historical moment. As comedian Dean Obeidallah jokes in *The Muslims Are Coming*, “Ten years ago, I used to be white. Now I'm Arab” (2013). The shifting racial categorizations of Arabs, South Asians, East Asians, and others – as white and non-white – has received appropriate attention in a range of literature on race (Lopez 2006; Naber 2000) challenging popular conceptions of the U.S. as a black-white racial binary (de Genova 2006). Empire is especially sensitive to racial difference. “…imperialism has always been plural with respect to places and parties involved. An appreciation of its plural nature is crucial to understanding unauthorized ideological cross-currents, such as communism and pan-Islamism…”(Ho 2004: 240).

The War on Terror reveals stark convergences in these domestic racial projects and international geopolitics. In the aftermath of 9/11, President George W. Bush established a
Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a federal cabinet department tasked with preventing and responding to acts of terrorism. Yet in 2003, the Department of Immigration and Naturalization Service was absorbed into the DHS. Thus, the anti-terror measures became inseparable from the record detentions carried out under the Obama administration or the passage of measures such as SB 1070. As Bill Ong Hing describes, flaws in U.S. intelligence are partially to blame for the events of 9/11, yet the post-9/11 crackdown has been primarily on immigration (Hing 2006). Fear of Muslims and fear of undocumented immigrants (presumed to be Latino) were institutionally imbricated. One IRO member, Rehan, remarked to me that Arizona's SB 1070 “shouldn't be called an immigration law. It's part of the War on Terror. This anti-immigration measure wouldn't have been acceptable if Islamophobic fear following 9/11 hadn't been drummed up. People's patriotism – and by that, I mean a certain type of racist American patriotism – has been given a blank check.”

Yet Rehan’s understanding of the intimate connections between the War on Terror and anti-immigrant xenophobia were not necessarily commonplace among IRO members. I sat, horrified, as Hammad spoke with me at a conference, lamenting undocumented immigrants through especially racist language. “These Latinos off the street, many of them gangbangers, they don't have papers to be here. I don't understand why you liberal types use this phrase 'people of color' as if there's any commonality between us and them. Yes, there are some Latinos who are basically white, you know, educated and not criminal types. But by and large, I don't know the statistics. But I think most Latinos are illegal immigrants. There's a big difference between their immigration experience and mine.”

But is there?

I knew, as did a number of IRO members, that U.S. militarism and undocumented
immigration to the U.S. from Latin America were strongly correlated. Be it in Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, or El Salvador, U.S. military intervention and waves of immigration to the U.S. – documented and undocumented – go hand in hand (Gonzales 2011). The entrenched history of supporting dictators and deposing democratically-elected leaders in Latin America neatly mirrors U.S. intervention in the Muslim world. “Whenever it has exerted power overseas,” Ignatieff writes, “America has never been sure whether it values stability -- which means not only political stability but also the steady, profitable flow of goods and raw materials -- more than it values its own rhetoric about democracy. Where the two values have collided, American power has come down heavily on the side of stability, for example, toppling democratically elected leaders from Mossadegh in Iran to Allende in Chile. Iraq is yet another test of this choice. Next door in Iran, from the 1950's to the 1970's, America backed stability over democracy, propping up the autocratic rule of the shah, only to reap the whirlwind of an Islamic fundamentalist revolution in 1979 that delivered neither stability nor real democracy” (2005).

When I relayed to Sumaiyya Hammad's comments about “gangbanger Latinos,” she became visibly saddened. “See, this is divide and conquer, that old colonial strategy. He can go to Wharton and get a fancy business degree, but if he doesn't know the history of that region, and how much it has in common with the history of our regions, or divisions are just going to stay in place.”

In my interview with Hatem of the oppositional shoe-thrower blog, he remarked that “As bigoted as American political culture is, we'll find lots of people say that Anti-Muslim bigotry is unacceptable. When Palin says something about Islam, something very racist, these things are easy to condemn. But it's much harder to take a position on U.S. policy. Things like the mosque campaigns are easy to talk about, but they don't talk about the hard issues. For instance, George
W. Bush killed a million Muslims in Iraq and thousands in Afghanistan, but they have never condemned him. Instead, they invite George W. Bush to their mosques! How can anybody with a conscience do that? You say, thank you President Bush for drawing a distinction between good Muslims and bad Muslims? This takes us back to Washington, there are things they cannot say and they know that. They want to be accepted and appear in the media. And they're willing to pay the price to do that, and that price is to go ignore war crimes, controversial issues. They are legitimizing foreign policy! While we want to say this War on Terror is illegal and we are opposed to it, the government sees a few Muslims on their side. You know, they think Muslims and Arabs are supporting them. They invite them to their conventions. Take Condoleezza Rice. 1500 Lebanese slaughtered under her. The same year, the American Task Force on Palestine – she was a speaker at their gala. She is a war criminal!” My conversation with Hatem often returned to the themes of colonialism, anti-colonial movements in the “Muslim world,” and current shades of U.S. empire.

Certainly, we can see the ways in which the War on Terror has transformed everyday life on a very local scale. The concept of 'homeland security' necessitates reconfiguring the 'home' as a site in need of protection: protection from terrorists (and, I'd add, undocumented immigrants) rather than developers (Ruben and Maskovsky 2008). The 'home' is to be defended from drug vials and suitcase bombs; all the while people lose their homes to the forces of urban renewal and gentrification. I was in a Manhattan apartment with members of a Muslim professional networking group shortly after starting fieldwork, and they played a clip by comedian Chris Rock. “They keep trying to scare us. They keep telling us to be on the lookout for Al-Qaeda. I ain't scared of Al-Qaeda! I'm from Brooklyn. I don't give a fuck about Al-Qaeda. Did Al-Qaeda blow up the building in Oklahoma? No! Did Al-Qaeda put anthrax in your mailbox? No! Did Al-
Qaeda drag James Byrd onto the street till his eyes popped out of his fucking head? No! I ain't scared of Al-Qaeda! I'm scared of al-Cracker!” (Rock 2004). Thus, 'homeland security' can serve as a distraction from domestic troubles, all the while American social harmony is deployed to justify things undertaken in the name of homeland security. The vicious cycle is, according to Maira, part of an unfolding tale of U.S. Imperialism (2009). Maira argues that there is an intimacy of empire, a way in which imperialism is active on public and private levels, producing surveillance, fear, and solidarity. This drumming up of fear of foreign evils is an age-old practice in assuring domestic complicity (Harvey 2003).

The hunger strike at Guantanamo Bay Detention Center perfectly embodied the connection between domestic multicultural politics and the War on Terror. The hunger strike captured popular attention in 2013 as approximately 100 inmates at Guantanamo Bay (the detention center created by President Bush in the aftermath of 9/11) protested their detention without trial or their being held in spite of being cleared for release. In response to this hunger strike, the US government initiated a force-feeding program that the U.S. medical community deemed torture. Rapper Yasin Bey (formerly Mos Def) attempted to voluntarily undergo force feeding on camera to demonstrate the painfulness and inhumanity of the process. When the holy month of Ramadan converged with the hunger strike in the summer of 2013, the government said it would continue its practice of force-feeding the inmates on hunger strike, albeit with observance of Ramadan. In other words, force-feedings would occur before sunrise and after sunset to accommodate observant Muslim inmates' religious beliefs. As one IRO member observed, “They will engage in torture while respecting diverse religious practices.” This, perhaps, best embodies the tense interconnections between U.S. multiculturalism and empire.
**Reflections**

What does it mean to be a hypervisible population, living in an age of purported racial ‘colorblindness’ and stealth imperialism? How is it that a racially diverse group is, ostensibly, being reconfigured as a racial group? What do the public debates about the nature of Islam – now a religion, now a political orientation – mean for the political nature of representational acts of Muslims in the U.S.? What does it mean that the Huntingtonian “clash” of civilizations has been resurrected since 9/11 while vocal IRO’s articulate a quintessential Americanness of Islam?

My research used these questions to intervene in larger issues, attempting to make connections between representational politics and global geopolitics. It rejects notions of identity and considers, instead, the agentive capacity to produce an identity, and the consequent use of that identity in ideological projects. It has moved past traditional notions of site and community to understand a population that is at once elite and marginalized, situated in the age of purported “postracialism” of the Obama age and the heightened militarism of the enduring War on Terror. What understanding the imperial homeland means is connecting the age of racially biased mass incarceration ("the New Jim Crow," as Alexander has dubbed it (2010)) to the age of indefinite detention and the merging of law enforcement and immigration authorities. Scholars must struggle to understand the years of record detentions under the Obama administration in relation to incarceration at Guantanamo. The gutting of the Voting Rights Act in 2013 was coterminous with public debate about U.S. citizen’s rights to not be assassinated by their own government without trial, as was done to American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and his 16 year-old son. Any debate about whether a mosque should be built or election of a new IRO president exists amidst these upheavals.

Much of this ethnography has revealed entrenched ambiguity and paradox, caught
between telling a story of belonging and exclusion, privilege and marginality, assimilation and revolution. The sense of political engagement by IRO members was opaque, not falling along any neat linear orientation or even having a consistent goal. I have shown how IRO members will come out full-force in support of Palestine, using anti-colonial and anti-racist language often reserved for the radical left. Yet these very members might also vehemently support a politics of respectability or argue that success in a capitalist system is the only way to beat Islamophobia. In one interview, a hedge fund banker spoke passionately about the need to “decolonize” Palestine; a few minutes later he spoke about how Venezuela and Cuba were the only two pockets of the “unfree” world. I was present for a tense conversation (about Palestine, once again) between two young men, one arguing that the wealth of Muslims in the West alone could liberate Palestine, and the other arguing that support from a “greedy system of capitalism” would never give rise to a just social configuration. I heard one panelist eschew “leftists” in a well-attended lecture, while another panelist spoke earnestly about U.S. neoliberal economics and involvement in Chile; based on my observation, attendees seemed equally amenable to both poles, even oblivious to the fact that herein lay a major clash.

The relationship between IRO's and the state is revelatory of this ambiguity. As I've described, IRO speeches often lambasted American foreign policy and the entrenched history of U.S. racism. Yet – especially at the larger, nationwide IRO events – a Congressman, Senator, or local councilperson was often among the prominent guests. While IRO members expressed a deep-seated pessimism in the possibility for transformative politics (i.e. whether Muslim activists would ever be heard on the issue of Palestine), many IRO events centered around writing letters to elected officials or how to get Muslim voters registered. I could never reach a conclusion as to how this contingency felt about the state and its possibilities.
IRO members described to me the very public controversy surrounding Hamza Yusuf’s White House visit to meet with President George W. Bush in the aftermath of 9/11 and at the dawn of the Iraq war. Many thought he was behaving as a traitor, wearing a suit and tie (as opposed to “traditional garb” he often wore) to this event and speaking with the man on the brink of waging another war against the Muslim world. Others, though, celebrated his decision to go to the White House, remarking that it signaled that there was room for dialogue between the state and Muslim Americans.

In the summer of 2014, the White House hosted an iftar during the month of Ramadan, as it does every year. Yet this year, the iftar coincided with the massive U.S.-backed military incursion by Israel into Gaza. It proved for this reason to be a divisive issue. There was a movement for Muslims to boycott the event altogether in protest of US military support for Israel. Yet the proposed boycott was unsuccessful, and several prominent IRO leaders attended the iftar, where President Obama reminded the attendees of Israel's right to defend itself. This inspired the ire of those who had called for the boycott. Attendees reminded them that “dialogue” would be the only way to gain political traction.

In my attempt to answer the question “what are the aspirations of IRO members?”, I found the struggle – between reform and revolution – to be constitutive of my ethnography. At once oppositional and assimilative, IRO politics escaped any neat classification. Similarly, the rules for being classified a “good Muslim” proved equally murky. As I've shown, being a “moderate” Muslim in the sense of religious practice is not a necessity in good Muslim politics; in fact, IRO discourse revealed a strong assertion that Americanness and orthodoxy were not at all at odds. Similarly, I have shown that Muslim women's unveiling was not necessary for “good Muslim” status. In my discussion of whiteness, I was careful to not equate whiteness with a
“good Muslim” designation, either – indeed, figures like Jihad Jane or John Walker Lindh complicate the binary. Perhaps it is less likely to locate the specific qualities which classify one as a “good Muslim” and more important to locate the ways in which marginalization and racist exclusion is mitigated through several indicators that relate to capitalism, patriotism, or even liberal principles such as diversity, in specific ways. A “good Muslim,” I have argued, cannot stand up to empire and can never claim a radical politics, even if their orthodoxy is at odds with secular liberalism. Radicalism, that quintessentially anti-American form of dissent, is anathema to liberal multiculturalism.

This work opens up a number of questions, rather than conclusively answering any one. The sense of uneasiness I am left with echoes what I felt in Chicago in July of 2011, as I sat frustrated with IRO commitment to radical or transformative possibilities. Yet I am not unsympathetic to the burdens of representation or hypervisibility. I have seen how earnest speech (about Palestine, the drone program, or surveillance) is tantamount to treason and quickly silenced by a well-funded, vocal Islamophobia network, a small group terrified of another terror attack or a takeover of American culture by Muslims. Yet I have also seen upward mobility and allegiance with a ferocious neoliberalism prioritized by those who speak out against Islamophobia. Caught between a counternarrative remaking of America and a quest for legitimacy, IRO contingencies are not easily pigeonholed. What becomes apparent instead are the profound impossibilities of speech and action, the ways in imaginative possibilities have become constrained in the terror age, the ways an exceptional multiculturalism actually limits the range of acceptable social difference.

In 2012, I drove between a mosque in Dearborn where a regional conference was being held and my housing in nearby Detroit, where the Allied Media Conference had convened
activists interested in using media to eliminate inequality. Detroit’s depression was apparent; what was clearly once a bustling and vibrant city resembled a ghost town that July. Just minutes away, Dearborn boasted its Arab influence on Arabic-language street signs and numerous people in Islamic attire. Again, my time in Michigan was marked by a sort of apprehension and sadness that marked much of my time in the field. Could the folks in Dearborn begin to understand the issues they were hotly debating – questions of diversity, Islamophobia, and race – in conjunction with the economic downturn of once-industrial cities like Detroit? Would the IRO members in Dearborn ever consider merging with the Allied Media activists, the way they eagerly ally with Congressmen or local sheriffs? Was there any meaningful way to create these connections, or is a quest for legitimacy the only realistic approach for any marginalized group? Is simply imagining that another world is possible is a form of transgression?
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