Policy Advocacy and the Performance of Muslim American Identity

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Policy Advocacy and the Performance of Muslim American Identity

By

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

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Emily Cury

Adviser: Professor Dov Waxman

In much of the political science literature, lobbying is conceptualized as a strategic attempt to influence policy. Policy actors are seen as independent agents competing to achieve policy outcomes that closely resemble their preferences. This understanding of policymaking has acquired a taken-for-granted nature and is therefore seldom questioned. Thus, the discourse of policy advocacy as a bargaining process has becomes, in part, a constraining discourse, leading academic inquiry to focus on questions of tactics and policy outcomes and ignore questions of how the policy process itself shapes and influences actors’ identities and behavior.

Understood in purely strategic terms, Muslim American foreign policy advocacy post-9/11 seems puzzling, since it appears to confirm the perception of Muslims as outsiders concerned not with American interests, but with those of other nations. This work argues that in order to explain why Muslim American organizations continue, and in some cases intensify, their lobbying on U.S. foreign policy, we must problematize the way lobbying and policy engagement have been traditionally theorized. Rethinking policymaking as a number of acts through which actors perform and communicate a particular identity can have important implications for our understanding of the policymaking process and the role interest groups play in that process.

I will present an in-depth case study of the two existing Muslim American interest groups, the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Muslim Public Affairs
Council (MPAC), focusing in particular on their post-9/11 foreign policy advocacy. The primary goal of this paper is to analyze how CAIR and MPAC are (re)presenting Muslim American identity through the various policy acts in which they engage. I argue that examining these acts will help us better understand how, and what kind of, Muslim American identity is being performed. Methodologically, this paper relies on a critical discourse analysis approach. Consequently, the data sources examined and used to illustrate this argument are the policy discourse produced by these organizations, which include policy reports and recommendations, public statements, action alerts, op-eds, and qualitative interviews.
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Introduction

The annual White House iftar dinner, established by the Clinton administration in 1992, is as much a celebration of America’s national values as it is a celebration of Ramadan. It is an affirmation of Muslims’ place in our nation’s diverse cultural fabric, a testament to inclusivity and religious freedom. Through events like these, the national identity of the United States, as the multicultural land of freedom and equality, is maintained and reproduced. More specifically, the dinner is a chance for the government to acknowledge the contributions of Muslims and publicly recognize those leaders who have sought active political engagement. Thus, the White House iftar is a highly symbolic event. It is an official embrace of (certain kinds of) Muslims and (certain kinds of) Islam, a formal recognition of those invited as the legitimate leaders of the community, and an endorsement of certain kinds of oppositional tactics as legitimate.

For President Obama, the 2014 dinner was also an opportunity to deflect growing criticism about his administration’s continued encroachment of civil and political rights. It was a chance to appease the Muslim American community with rhetorical claims of equality, such as those expressed by the president when he told his guests, “we are all Americans, equal in rights and dignity.”¹ This could have been the case; the event could have gone as unnoticed as in prior years, were it not for the 2014 Gaza-Israel conflict, which was raging as the dinner took place, and for the president’s readiness to lecture his guests on Israel’s right “to defend itself against … inexcusable attacks from Hamas.”² Not surprisingly, Muslim Americans took the comments as a

² Ibid.
palpable testimony of their social and political marginalization. The message was clear: Even if invited to the White House, their opinions, feelings, and policy preferences remained irrelevant.

Controversy surrounding the decision to attend these government-sponsored events is not new. In 2013, a group of grassroots activists called on Muslim American leaders to boycott the iftars, arguing that their participation aided the government’s efforts to whitewash its violent and discriminatory policies. The majority of Muslims, however, view these events positively, arguing that, albeit symbolic, gatherings such as the iftar dinner reflect the political integration of Muslims, particularly post-9/11. Thus, while acutely aware of the potential criticism, most of those invited saw the benefits of attending as outweighing the risks. One can safely assume that the last thing these leaders expected was for their president to use the event as a self-serving opportunity to emphasize the United States’ unwavering support of Israel, making them appear weak, acquiescent, or, as some critics put it, co-opted “House Muslims.”

In the days and weeks that followed the iftar, a heated public debate erupted regarding the wisdom and effectiveness of pursuing a strategy of policy engagement. Gaza and U.S. policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were at the center of this debate.

Why would President Obama refer to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in a speech addressed to Muslim Americans? And why would Muslim Americans mobilize so strongly

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3 In addition to the White House iftar, a number of government agencies (including the State Department, the Pentagon, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service) hold annual dinners to celebrate the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.
around events in Gaza? The answers to these questions are not immediately clear. First, the majority of Muslim Americans are not from the Middle East and, of those who are, only a small number come from Palestine or Israel. Second, in a post-9/11 context of increased suspicion and surveillance of Muslim Americans, their engagement on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—as well as the other foreign policy issues this work will examine—seems to contradict their interests. Targeted as “other,” they mobilize in ways that seem to confirm their otherness by fueling the perception of Muslims as outsiders concerned not with American interests, but with those of other nations.

In order to explain why Muslim American organizations continue, and in some cases intensify, their lobbying on U.S. foreign policy, we must problematize the way lobbying and policy engagement have been traditionally theorized. I argue that lobbying is not merely a strategic attempt to influence policy, but rather is a discursive practice through which the identity of policy advocates—and the collective groups they claim to represent—is performed. I further argue that interest groups do not necessarily require the existence of a cohesive collective whose interests they represent, but rather may precede and actively constitute the group on whose behalf they claim to speak.

Moving away from an understanding of lobbying as the strategic pursuit of pre-established policy preferences (Dahl 2005 (1983); Walker 1992; McCarty and Rothenberg 1996; Strokes 2005; Hall and Deardoff 2006) to lobbying as a practice through which identity is produced and maintained allows us to examine Muslim American foreign policy advocacy as a site in which a particular kind of Muslim American identity is being performatively constituted. As we will see, the fundamental role that difference and differentiation play on identity formation (Tajfel 1971; Fairclough 2013) is key to explaining why these organizations do not
limit their lobbying to issues of domestic policy, which would be strategically easier. This is partly because foreign-policy advocacy serves as a site where Muslim American identity is differentiated from foreign Muslims and, thus, discursively constituted.

This argument is premised upon two major ontological assumptions, which I elaborate here in an attempt to clarify both what this study aims to do and what it does not do. The most fundamental ontological assumption is that identity and naturalized social practices are socially constructed. This is not to claim that reality, in its physical and social senses, does not exist, but rather that our access to that reality is always mediated by systems of meaning in the form of discourse (Butler 1999; De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, 35). A second assumption is that—because all meaning is produced through difference—difference and out-group differentiation are central to the construction of identity (Derrida 1978; Tajfel 1979; Hogg, Terry and White 1995; Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe 2003). Furthermore, difference is never really neutral or innocuous; rather, that which is different is always, explicitly or in more implicit ways, a source of danger, a potential threat. Demarcating what is different is therefore not only a way through which “we” construct “ourselves,” but also a way through which “we” establish superiority over the different (Derrida 1973; De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999, 153; Wodak 2009).

It is important to emphasize, however, that there is no single and absolute metanarrative of representation and difference. Rather, difference and danger are constituted and meaning and identity are demarcated through multiple practices of representation. Furthermore, these discourses can change according to the time and context in which they exist. Hence, I do not claim to include all possible set of representational practices through which Muslim American interest groups are aiding in the construction of Muslim American identity. By focusing on a few
of these discourses of representation, this study emphasizes some of the key elements that all of these performative practices have in common: mainly, that fear, danger, and difference are prerequisites of all identity and that identity is defined, in part, by that which it excludes and opposes (Campbell 1998; Benhabib 1996).

**Contribution and Literature Review**

This study is grounded in and contributes to four major literatures: diaspora politics, Muslims in the United States, interest groups and social movement organizations, and constructivist theory.

*A Muslim American Diaspora?*

The President’s *iftar* remarks were implicitly grounded on the notion that Muslim Americans form a diaspora and are thus fundamentally linked to events taking place in the so-called Muslim World. It is also an argument that many scholars of Muslim minorities in Europe and the United States have made. Although diaspora studies can shed some important insights on the study of Muslim minorities, I argue that Muslim Americans do not comprise a diaspora. In fact, using the term to describe them leads to a great degree of analytical confusion and results in a fundamental misrepresentation of the group being examined.

Early diaspora scholars were deeply influenced by the case of the Jewish diaspora and concerned, primarily, with defining the term (Safran 1991, 1999, 2005; Sheffer 1993, 1994, 2005; Clifford 1994). The classic definition developed by William Safran (1991) relied on two major components: the displacement from an “original center” to at least two peripheral places, and the maintenance of a “vision, memory, or myth” about the original homeland, seen as the eventual place of return. Thus, diaspora political mobilization was explained as a triadic between
diaspora, host country, and homeland. Consequently, involvement in host-land politics was seen as being primarily driven by concern with the homeland. Thus, diasporas mobilized domestically in order to influence host-country policy toward the homeland. In spite of the theoretical advances made by Safran’s conceptualization of diasporas, it was criticized as too strict and too closely connected to the case it sought to explain: the Jewish diaspora (Clifford 1994; Brah 1996).

Thus, others argued that the Jewish diaspora should be considered an ideal type against which cases could be measured and compared. While disagreeing with what they perceived as a narrow conceptualization of diasporas, they maintained that the notion of homeland was an important aspect of the theory. The theory was applied to examine the Armenian case (Tololyan 1996, 2001), the African case (Mann 2001; Butler 2007; Alpers 2001), and a variety of ethnic and national groups (Wahlbeck 1999; Bhat and Mukta 2000; Jacobson 2002; Sheffer 2003; Wang 2007; Wald 2008; Totoricaguena 2004). Later scholars sought to expand the concept even further, arguing that neither a center of dispersal nor the idea of return were central components of the definition. The major goal of diaspora theory, they argued, was to unsettle absolutist notions of origin, homeland, and belonging. As such, its goal was to “offer a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as a desire for homeland” (Brah 1996, 180; Anthias 1998; Wahlbeck 2002, 2008).

Taking these insights into consideration, some have attempted to use the concept to examine Muslims in Europe and North America (Vertovec 2000; Mandeville 2003; Schumann 2007; Canefe 2008). The claim these arguments rely on is that this community meets two important requirements: an original dispersal and an enduring affiliation with a (metaphoric) homeland. Accordingly, these scholars critique the conceptualization of homeland as nation-
state, arguing that the concept is much broader and can thus include what Muslims refer to as the ummah, the global community of Muslim believers (Mandaville 2003; Schumann 2007; Moghissi 2009). Consequently, the political participation of Muslims in the United States is described as a triad between their community and “its two homelands,” the ummah, and the United States, with “all three sides in constant interaction and constantly re-shaping each other” (Schumann 2007, 27).

In other words, Muslim Americans are conceptualized as inherently interested in and mobilized around foreign policy issues because of their identities as Muslims. In addition to the conceptual stretching of the term, which has led to a great loss of analytical rigor (Brubaker 2005), applying the term to Muslim Americans overlooks important aspects of Muslim Americans’ concern with foreign policy and, more importantly, misrepresents the group under examination. As this study argues, the primary motive for Muslim American foreign policy activism is not the desire to influence homeland politics. Rather, foreign policy advocacy is best understood as a site in which Muslim American identity is being performed and negotiated. As such, engagement in U.S. foreign policy is part of the process of integration and naturalization of Muslims in the United States and is driven by domestic motivations to establish their belongingness to America, rather than by the pursuit of home-country interests.

**Muslims in the United States: Integration and Political Engagement**

A study of Muslim American interest groups is in many ways a study of Muslims’ integration into the United States. As this dissertation will illustrate, interest-group activism on U.S. foreign policy is a central way Muslim Americans are differentiated from “other” Muslims and thus constituted as an American minority. Examining the development of the community
these organizations claim to represent is thus central to understanding the factors that shape and influence their policy activism.

Given the focus placed on Muslims and Islam post-9/11, the dearth of research on Muslim Americans is puzzling (Barreto 2009; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). Early scholarship focused on the historical experience of Muslims in America (Haddad and Lummis 1987; Denny 1995; Leonard 1997, 2003; Smith 1999; Haddad 2000; Haddad and Esposito 2002). Whereas political scientists examining this group have tended to focus on the role of religiosiy in political mobilization (Bagby 2004; Jamal 2005; Ayer 2007; Ayer and Hofstetter 2008; Barreto and Bozonelos 2009; Jalalzai 2009), others, particularly sociologists, have been driven by questions of Muslims’ integration and settlement in the United States (Read 2000; Peek 2005; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Belici 2012).

The great majority of the literature, however, focuses on the post-9/11 backlash (Volpp 2002; Akram 2004; Cainkar 2004; Hagopian 2004; Cainkar and Maira 2005; Panagopoulos 2006; Cho, Gimpel, and Wu 2006; Jamal 2008; Jamal and Naber 2008; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). Consequently, these studies tend to analytically lump Arabs (Muslim and Christian), South Asians, and ethnic minorities mistaken for Muslims (for example, Sikhs). In other words there is a great degree of “conceptual stretching” (Sartori 1970) of the group (and therefore, the organizations) being examined; the result of the focus on post-9/11 backlash is that the category “Arabs/Middle Easterners/Muslims” has become the unit of analysis (Naber 2008).

In addition, this resulted in the joint examination of organizations working on behalf of this community, with little distinction made between Muslim American organizations and Arab American ones. Even more buried is the distinction between interest groups (Muslim and Arab) and community-based organizations. In fact, Muslim American interest groups are seldom
examined, partly because they are seen as disconnected from the Muslim American base and as largely ineffective (Gallup 2011).

This study is an attempt to fill some of these gaps regarding both the focus of existing research and the analytical rigor of work to date. It does this by focusing on the policy advocacy of Muslim American interest groups, thus clearly distinguishing the latter from Arab American and Muslim American social movement organizations.\(^7\) I do not mean to suggest that these organizations have nothing in common, or that scholars should never write about both. What I do suggest is that the questions we ask influence how we treat the subjects and variables under scrutiny. The overwhelming scholarly focus on questions regarding the post-9/11 backlash has naturally resulted in the conflation of Muslim American interest groups with Muslim and Arab American community-based organizations because these organizations have all focused, to some degree, on issues of domestic civil liberties affecting both communities.

**Interest Groups and Social Movement Organizations: Differences and Interactions**

Because this dissertation examines Muslim American policy advocacy, my analysis focuses on the two existing Muslim American interest groups: the Council for American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC). There are many other Muslim American organizations operating at national and local levels, but only CAIR and MPAC meet the fundamental requirements of an interest group, as suggested by a review of the literature (Walker 1991, Clemens 1997, Lowery 2007).

Perhaps because scholarship on Muslim American organizations is still in its nascent stages, a distinction between Muslim American interest groups and social movement

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\(^7\) For the sake of brevity, I often refer to these interest groups simply as “organizations” or “Muslim American organizations” in this text. It is worth emphasizing, however, that I use the term narrowly to refer specifically to interest groups.
organizations is seldom made. In fact, this distinction can be a difficult one to make, leading some scholars to argue that there is “no theoretical justification for distinguishing social movement organizations from interest groups” (Burstein 1999, 19; Meyer et al. 1998; Andrews and Edwards 2004). However, it is broadly agreed that whereas a social movement must involve collective participation and a unifying ideology (Tilly 1984; McAdams, Tarrow, and Tilly 2003; Benford and Snow 2000), interest groups require neither and are often established and managed by individuals or private foundations concerned with influencing policymakers and, thus, public policy (Dahl 1963 (2005); Walker 1991; Bentley 1995; Burnstein 1998; Bernstein 1999; Diani 2011).

Cross-fertilization has nevertheless meant that many of the insights provided by social movement theory can be useful to the study of interest groups. Broadly speaking, whereas sociologists have been more interested in studying social movements, and driven by questions of group formation, political scientists have focused on the study of interest groups and their influence on the policy process (Carruthers and Zylan 1992; Meyer and Tarrow 1998). Like social movements, however, interest groups are shaped and influenced by the context in which they arise and the resources available to them. Consequently, this research draws on social movements theory in order to account for the impact that context and available resources have had on the formation, evolution, and accomplishments of Muslim American interest groups.

Thus, in spite of the aforementioned similarities, I conceptualize the organizations this research examines as interest groups and differentiate them from other Muslim American social movement organizations. There are a number of reasons to support this decision. First, these organizations pursue a strategy of engagement from within, seeking to advise public officials and influence the policy process. Second, they are governed by formal rules and are positioned close
to centers of power. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, their tactics reflect common interest-group tactics such as engaging in litigation, running public opinion campaigns, writing and proposing policy recommendations, and advising government officials (Walker 1991; Edwards, Wattenberg, and Lineberry 2009; Smith 2005). Although social movement organizations also seek to influence policy, they are “much less institutionalized, often informal, and since they are excluded from routine politics, they rely on collective mobilization and protest instead of conventional action” (Cisar 2013, 617; Snow et al. 2004).

Consequently, whereas mass participation is fundamental to social movements, the organizations I examine are not membership-based, only reaching a small percentage of Muslim Americans through their listservs (Salam Al-Marayati, interview data, July 22, 2013; Corey Saylor, interview data, June 2, 2013). Furthermore, they self-identify as “advocacy organizations,” referring to their work as “policy engagement” and “lobbying government officials.” Both CAIR and MPAC are elite-based and hierarchically structured, rely on paid staff members, and employ a long-term agenda, all of which distinguish them from social movement organizations. Although a portion of community-based organizations also have some of these characteristics, there are radical community-based organizations that do not seek to be included in the policy process. This is particularly true when examining Muslim American organizations because, as the White House iftar controversy illustrates, many Muslim American community-based organizations call for a complete boycott of political engagement.

**Constructivist Theory**

Constructivism’s focus on the “dynamic, contingent, and culturally based condition of the social world” (Adler 2012, 114) has opened theoretical space for post-positivist questions and approaches to the study of politics. As such, it is one of the most important theoretical lenses this
study adopts. In its broadest sense, constructivism is a social theory concerned with examining the role of knowledge in constituting social reality (Price and Reus-Smit 1997; Christiansen, Jorgensen, and Weiner 1999; Hopf 1998; Adler 2012). Ontologically, constructivists believe that actors are shaped by their social milieus; hence, they focus on the role of ideas, norms, knowledge, and culture while highlighting the intersubjectivity of social life (Popper 1982; Searle 1995; Finnemore 2001; Muller 2008). One of the most important insights provided by constructivism is that the material world cannot be understood without understanding the ideational factors through which it is given meaning and interpreted. Constructivists are interested in studying not what things are, but how they have come to be; rather than assuming interests, interests are considered to be endogenous to interaction (Wendt 1995; Adler 2012).

Statist constructivism is the constructivist theory most known and applied in international relations theory (Wendt 1992, 1994, 1998, 1999; Haas 1992; Ruggie 1993; Eyre and Schuman 1996; Wight 2006). It takes the state as the actor whose behavior it seeks to explain, and argues that ideational factors determine states’ interests—and therefore behavior—in the international arena. Moreover, the theory examines how international norms influence state identity and interests (Finnemore 1996; Katzenstein 1996). Although statist constructivism is the most commonly applied constructivists theory in international relations, other approaches within constructivist theory, such as societal constructivism, seek to analyze how collective understandings and identities emerge and to examine the impact of domestic actors on international relations. As Checkel (1998) argues, constructivist theory would greatly benefit from taking domestic politics more seriously and trying to understand how internal social dynamics and events affect the state’s behavior in the international realm; constructivism, in other words, starts at home (Hopf 2002; Checkel 1998; Pouliot 2007).
Critical constructivism—on which this dissertation is grounded—understands collective identities as constructed through the use of language, ideas, and norms (Cox 1986; Deibert 1997; Williams and Krause 1997; Smith 2000; Rosamond 2006). Epistemologically, critical constructionism rejects the natural-science approach of causation, relying instead on postmodernist paradigms to the study of science (Deibert 1997). Whereas constructivists employ a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including case studies, process tracing, and comparative methods (Sikkink 1993; Klotz 1995; Checkel 2001), critical constructivists are more likely to rely on post-positivist and interpretivist methodologies, especially narrative and discourse analysis (Price 1995; Johnston 1995; Zabusky 1995; Lupovici 2009).

What is crucial to keep in mind is that constructivism is a meta-theory that can be used to explain the behavior of a wide range of actors. The nature of the actor being analyzed—a state, a domestic group, or a minority group, to name a few—is less important than the theory’s main insight that identity determines interests and, therefore, behavior.

**Methodology and Research Design**

Employing the lens of critical constructivism, this dissertation theorizes policy activism as a site where identity is discursively performed and constituted. Thus, the primary research methodology it uses is critical discourse analysis of the policy material created by CAIR and MPAC. The main aim of critical discourse analysis is to examine how and why certain aspects of social life come to be accepted as objective truth while others are seen as impossible (Fairclough 1992; Van Dijk 2001; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002; Wodak and Fairclough 2004; Fairclough et al. 1999; Mulderrig and Wodak 2011). Taking that approach, the main question driving all discourse analyses is how the social world and its subjects are constituted through discourse.
A number of common features of critical discourse analysis are important to this study: 1) Discursive practices are important building blocks of the social and political world; as such, written and spoken language, as well as images, are central units of analysis. 2) Discourse is constitutive of and constituted by social practice: it both shapes and reflects the social world. 3) Consequently, discourse and language should be examined in concrete social interactions, something in-depth interviews particularly allow. 4) All discourse functions ideologically; politically, discursive practice helps reproduce and maintain unequal relations of power. 5) It follows, therefore, that those engaged in critical discourse analysis do not understand their research as neutral or objective, but rather see it as “explanatory critique” aimed at exposing the political and social consequences of certain discursive practice (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, 64; Fairclough 1992, 1995, 1998).

In other words, critical discourse analysis aims to deconstruct structures we take for granted and show that particular interpretations have real social and political consequences. Its main goal is to show the link between discursive practice and the broader social and political realities they help produce. Consequently, this study is an explanatory critique of the policy advocacy of CAIR and MPAC, which seeks to examine how, through their discourse on U.S. foreign policy, these organizations are constructing a particular Muslim American identity. Whether the identity that CAIR and MPAC performatively constitute is indeed representative of Muslim American identity is a question that remains to be examined. The main focus of this study, therefore, is not on the construction of Muslim American collective identity, but on how—and why—these interest groups perform a particular kind of Muslim American identity.

To examine this question, I conduct an in-depth analysis of discourse produced by CAIR and MPAC. I have analyzed 20 policy reports, which account for all of those produced by these
organizations dealing with questions of U.S. foreign policy, as well as hundreds of press releases and action alerts relating to foreign policy, which I accessed through CAIR’s and MPAC’s listservs and social media sites. Both organizations are active communicators with a strong social media presence on Facebook and Twitter. During the Gaza-Israel war of 2014, for example, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Four, CAIR sent more than 1,000 tweets.8

In addition, I conducted about half a dozen in-depth interviews with the leaderships of CAIR and MPAC, most of which were recorded and transcribed (Weiss 1994). These interviews yielded important insights regarding the organizations’ day-to-day work and policy focus, as well as their organizational culture and social context. The organizational leaders I interviewed at both organizations were not only extremely open and willing to be interviewed, but also quite generous with their time; most interviews lasted about an hour. It is important to highlight that the data collected through these interviews should be seen as supplementary to the other discursive data I examine. Further, because this dissertation focuses on the foreign policy discourse of these organizations, I was primarily interested in interviewing the leadership and those directly engaged in the production of policy discourse. Thus, the data this dissertation examines include MPAC’s and CAIR’s written, visual, and spoken policy communication.

By focusing on Muslim American interest groups, this work is implicitly engaged and interested in the more top-down acts through which identity is performed and communicated. I argue that top-down influences are important because, through their position, Muslim American national organizations are able to reach a wide audience, including Muslim Americans, American political elites, and the broader society. It must be emphasized, however, that elite discourse is in a dialectical relationship with bottom-up processes of identity construction,

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8 I analyzed CAIR’s tweets at the peak of the war, from July 22 to August 23, 2014. In these 30 days alone, 801 messages were sent via CAIR’s Twitter feed.
maintenance, and negotiation. Thus, an important question to examine is how the Muslim American identity that is performed through CAIR’s and MPAC’s discourse is perceived and received by the group on whose behalf these organizations claim to speak—a topic that Chapter Five will examine.

 Nevertheless, I argue that elites and their organizations are key signifier agents and, as such, play an important role in communicating identity. In making this claim, I draw from Uri Ram’s argument that identity, or what he refers to as narrative, does not emerge from nowhere, but is produced and spread by actors in concrete institutionalized contexts (Ram 1994). This should not be taken to mean that these actors are engaged in a conscious and deliberate construction of reality or that they function outside the forces that construct all reality, but rather that through their policy acts they (re)present a particular Muslim American identity—and in the process their own identities as advocacy actors.

 More specifically, their physical location in Washington, D.C., where they engage with policymakers, write and present their policy positions to members of government, and participate in the policy process, has shaped and influenced the policy issues they highlight, consequently shaping the identities of these elites and their organizations. This is because, as constructivist theory reminds us, “if the discourse changes, the object not only changes its meaning, but it becomes a different object, it loses its previous identity” (Wodak and Meyer 2001, 20). The

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9 I borrow this term from Jacques Lacan.
10 In making this argument, I draw on Norman Fairclough’s dialectic conception of discourse as both constitutive of and constituted by reality. For Fairclough, as for many constructivists who have been influenced by his theoretical and methodological approach to discourse analysis, discourse is an important form of social practice, one that reproduces and challenges social relations and identity, while being itself shaped by social practice and structure. For more on this see: Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 1995.
identity being produced should not be seen as clearly demarcated, singular, and neat, but blurred at the margins, marked by flux and ambiguity, and in a constant process of becoming.

**Plan of the Study**

Thus grounded in the theoretical framework for my research, it is essential to understand the development of my subject: Muslim Americans. Chapter One presents a historical narrative of their development as a collective group, starting from the early waves of migration in the late 1800s and concluding with the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and their effects on the process of Muslims’ integration in the United States. Chapter Two examines the post-9/11 “othering” of Muslim Americans as a political opportunity structure for CAIR and MPAC. Chapter Three analyzes Muslim American policy advocacy focusing, in particular, on their foreign policy advocacy. Chapter Four is dedicated to an in-depth case study of policy activism around the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, one of the major foreign-policy issues with which these organizations are engaged. Chapter Five examines the degree to which the interests these organizations claim to represent, and the Muslim American identity that they perform, reflect the opinions and attitudes of Muslim Americans. Chapter Six concludes with a summary of the major findings and implications of my research for the study of interest groups and foreign policy advocacy, as well as with a discussion of the broader implications of this study on Muslim American political integration.
Chapter One

Negotiating Integration: From Muslims in America to Muslim Americans

No fiction, no myths, no lies, no tangled webs—this is how Irie imagined her homeland. Because homeland is one of the magical fantasy words like unicorn and soul and infinity that have now passed into language.

—Zadie Smith, White Teeth

While we huddle together as Pakistanis or Egyptians or Iranians or whatever else, our children are, whether we believe it or like it or hate it or not, American kids. The question should be whether they will be Muslim-American kids or just American kids. Anyone who believes that he will raise an Egyptian boy in America is wrong: the maximum we can do is have a distorted Egyptian kid. The Grandchildren will be without doubt American.

—Maher Hathout (quoted in Haddad 2011)

Introduction

What does it mean to be an American, and what is the process through which an immigrant becomes one? Can immigrant communities ever fully integrate into the receiving society? How much political influence do immigrant groups wield in the policy process? Much of contemporary American political discourse seems to be motivated by these questions—a fact that should come as no surprise. Immigrants have been central to the establishment and identity of the United States: those fleeing violence, oppression, poverty, and persecution have helped constitute America as the bastion of freedom, justice, and democracy. Immigration is what defines the American “melting pot”; without it the former would be something else entirely. Similarly, immigrants’ collective identity is also, inevitably, shaped and influenced by the social and political context of the United States. Thus, the dialectical relationship between immigrants and America: each a product and producer of the other.
Being an immigrant is not a permanent condition. Many groups that were once viewed as foreign are today considered native or “authentic” Americans—Irish, German, and Italian immigrants being but a few such groups. Others, previously secured in their belonging, have been made foreign, something that was made all too clear during the “Red Scare” of the 1950s. Identity, it seems, is never fully secured. Under the right conditions, even the most fixed identities can waver. Far from being a current academic fad, questions of identity—its construction, evolution, and influence—are central to understanding the political behavior of collective groups. It seems that this is all the more important when examining immigrant groups and their impacts on the political and cultural landscape of the United States.

Collective identity is neither primordial nor naturalized, but contextually and historically grounded. As such, historical narrative is a central building block of collective identity; just as individuals, collective groups “are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history” (Ricoeur 1988, 247). It is this aspect of identity as narrated that allows multiple and often contradictory experiences to form a coherent collective reality. Much of the insight for this understanding of collective identity as narrated comes from the study of the modern nation-state as a social construct, one that exists only through the various traditions, rituals, and practices it performs (Anderson 1983; Campbell 1992; Ram 1995; Hall 1996; Wodak et al. 2009).

It would thus be impossible to examine the Muslim American identity being communicated through post-9/11 foreign policy advocacy without first examining the historical narrative of integration in the United States. This is important because the preferences of Muslim American interest groups and the policy interests they pursue are a result of the broader historical
experience of Muslims in America. History, as we are often reminded, “always proceeds from history” (Ricoeur 1988, 247).

In order to understand the development of Muslim American interest groups and their specific policy preferences, we must, as historical institutionalism reminds us, “take history seriously.” This does not simply mean to examine the past, but rather to examine how present conditions are influenced by past occurrences: to examine “process over time” (Pierson and Skocpol 2002, 5). The need to take history seriously is particularly acute when examining Muslim American interest groups, since they are as much a product of internal group dynamics as of the broader U.S. policy context. Thus, any analysis of Muslim American policy advocacy must account for how the policy terrain in which these organizations operate developed and, consequently, how it has shaped the actors and issues they pursue (Collier and Collier 1991; Thelen 1999; Pierson 2000; Pierson and Skocpol 2002).

This chapter argues that the development of policy advocacy organizations aiming/claiming to pursue the interests of the Muslim American community is the result of a long process of integration, one that has been influenced by the American (social, political, and legal) context as much as by internal group dynamics. As previously mentioned, this dissertation examines how a particular Muslim American identity is being performatively constituted through the policy advocacy of Muslim American interest groups. Examining the process leading to these organizations’ development is thus important in order to contextualize, and hence better understand, their policy engagement. Although policy engagement could be examined in isolation, this chapter is intended to highlight the basic tenet of historical institutionalism: things in the social world, which are often taken as the starting point of analysis, take a long time to happen (Pierson and Skocpol 2002, 9).
This chapter should not be read as a chronicle of the Muslim American experience. As those concerned with thinking of political phenomena historically remind us, “any historical narrative must simplify reality by designating some elements as salient and omitting many more as not significant” (Buthe 2002, 487). Based on an in-depth study of this case in addition to elite interviews (George and Bennett 2005, Tansey 2007), the chapter posits that there are two major events that classify as critical junctures in the study of Muslims’ integration in the United States: 1) the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which ushered meaningful and long-term Muslim immigration to the United States; and 2) Muslims’ becoming the victims of the post-9/11 backlash, which resulted in a new political structure of opportunities for Muslim American organizations. Because the post-9/11 political opportunity structure engendered by the backlash is examined in Chapter Two, the remainder of this chapter discusses the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, paying specific attention to the process of settlement and integration it propelled. Understanding this process is a key to explaining the development of CAIR and MPAC and the policy issues they pursue.

**Immigration, Assimilation, and the Development of Group Consciousness**

As Muslims living in Muslim-majority countries, belonging to a collective Muslim identity was taken for granted. The belonging was a palpable, visible, part of the everyday experience of being a member of a majority group. Similarly, what it meant to be a Muslim was apparent: believing in one God, his final prophet, and perhaps practicing the basic tenets of Islam. Migrating to the United States and thereby becoming “foreign” unsettled what had been taken for granted, bringing questions and anxieties over identity to the forefront (Bilici 2012). The history of Muslims in the United States is thus a history of trying to negotiate what it means
to be a Muslim, to set roots in America, to integrate into American society, and to become American, while remaining Muslim.

Although Muslim immigrants began arriving on American shores in the mid-1800s, meaningful Muslim immigration started only after the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Leonard 1993a; Haddad 2011; Bilici 2012). As such, The 1965 Act can be conceptualized as a critical juncture that created the conditions necessary for Muslim American group development, integration, and institutionalization (Pierson 2000; Mahoney 2000; Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). This is not to say that there were no Muslim immigrants before this date,\footnote{In fact, Muslim migration to North America is believed to have begun with the emergence of the slave trade in the sixteenth century. However, African Muslims were captured and brought to the United States against their will, and thus had no choice in the process of migration. For more about Islamic influences in America before the nineteenth century, see: Precious Rasheeda Muhammad, “Muslims and the Making of America,” \textit{(Muslim Public Affairs Council}, February 2003), \url{http://www.mpac.org/publications/policy-papers/muslims-and-the-making-of-america.php#U8ia2Fa4lFJ} (accessed August 2, 2012).} but rather that the development of Muslims as a collective group in America was the result of specific changes in U.S. immigration policy, explicitly ushered in by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

**The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 as a Critical Juncture**

For much of our country’s history, assimilation was the encouraged course of action: Muslims, like all other immigrants, were expected to shed their previous identities and adopt American values (Huntington 2004; Haddad, Smith and Esposito 2003; Haddad 2011). These expectations were codified into law beginning in the late 1800s. The Naturalization Law of 1870, for example, codified racist beliefs regarding the inability of certain cultures to achieve the qualities required to be an American (Hing 1993; Nagel et al. 2005). The impetus for these laws
was the concern not only that immigrants were incapable of learning the values and qualities necessary for becoming American, but also that their traditions and habits were polluting the political body. These racist and nativist trends culminated in the Americanization movement, which posited that background behavior needed to be instilled before immigrants could be considered ready to participate in the political life of the nation. Language classes were a key component of this training, but so were classes in hygiene, childrearing, housekeeping, and public behavior (Mitchell 2001; Van Nuys 2002; Pavlenko 2002; Huntington 2004).

Not unexpectedly, Muslim immigrants entering this social and political environment viewed assimilation as the prudent course of action. Anglo conformity was promoted as the basis for citizenship and “like the million of immigrants who passed through Ellis Island, [Muslims] followed the patterns of integration and assimilation that refashioned them into American citizens” (Haddad 2004, 4). Like most other nineteenth-century immigrants to the United States, Muslim immigrants strived to shed—or at the very least suppress—those aspects of their identities that marked them as different. There is perhaps no clearer mark of this than Muslim names being changed upon arrival to Ellis Island; thus, “Mohammad became Mo, Rashid became Dick, Mojahid became Mark, and Ali was recognized as Al” (Haddad 2004, 4). Many of these early immigrants also enlisted in the military, serving as American soldiers during World Wars I and II and demonstrating both their loyalty and belonging to their new country. Hence, the culture, laws, and policies of forced assimilation partly dictated how these early Muslim immigrants related and integrated to America.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 marked a radical break in U.S. immigration policy and, as such, can be conceptualized as a critical juncture in the development of a Muslim American collective consciousness, eventually leading to the establishment of organized groups.
Prior to its passage, the Immigration Act of 1924—the purpose of which, according to the U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, “was to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity”—guided U.S. immigration policy. The Immigration Act of 1924 limited the number of immigrants from Asia, Eastern Europe—especially Jews escaping persecution—and the Middle East. By relying on race and ethnicity to exclude people of “Asian lineage” from entering the United States, the Act effectively stalled immigration from the Muslim world (Haddad, Smith and Esposito 2003; Haddad 2011).

It was the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act that catapulted immigration from Muslim-majority countries to the United States. These “new” Muslim immigrants differed markedly from their earlier counterparts. Whereas the first wave Muslim immigrants strove to assimilate into American society, those who immigrated after 1965 (thus the majority of Muslim immigrants) were far more likely to want to retain their religious and ethnic affiliations. “[They] often found the accommodation of the earlier immigrants too high a price to pay, especially since America began defining itself as Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish … They believed that difference and distinctiveness were a necessary means of affirming a place for Islam” (Haddad 2004, 24; Leonard 2003; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009).

This trend must also be understood in terms of the broader cultural and political changes that were taking place in the United States. Encouraged by the advances of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, many minorities began organizing to demand their civic, political, and cultural rights. Underprivileged social groups such as women, homosexuals, people of color, and indigenous peoples resisted normative expectations to assimilate into a hegemonic American culture and sought to fundamentally redefine notions of integration and belonging. The

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metaphoric “melting pot,” where differences dissolved, gave way to the “American mosaic,” where difference coalesced to form a whole (Johnston 1973; Irigaray 1993; Howe 1998; Brubaker 2001).

Thus, the America to which post-1965 Muslim immigrants arrived was fundamentally different than the one their nineteenth-century counterparts had experienced. Not only was complete assimilation no longer expected, but multiculturalism was increasingly promoted, thus allowing immigrants to conceive of different forms of belonging. Not surprisingly, it is this post-1965 generation of Muslim immigrants that began thinking of Islam as an identity signifier, sparking the process of Muslim American identity construction. It would be years, however, before the contours of a particular Muslim American identity would take shape, for even though post-1965 Muslim immigrants rejected the assimilationist tendencies of previous immigrants, most still thought of themselves primarily in terms of their ethno-national identities (Leonard 2003; Haddad 2004; 2001).

A Contested Community

Rather than being a simple demographic question, the attempt to quantify the number of Muslims in the United States is, fundamentally, an attempt to shape the identity of both the United States and the Muslim American community. The U.S. Census prohibits questions regarding religious beliefs and association, so there is no way to definitively assess the number of Muslim Americans in the United States. Not surprisingly, the exact size of the community is highly contested, ranging from 1.7 million to 6 million (CAIR 2000; Pew 2011; Gallup Poll 2007; ProjectMAPS 2009). These wide-ranging estimates underline that numbers and their
interpretation are never purely objective, but rather are involved in the construction of a particular reality.

Whether accurate or not, polls that find a small percentage of Muslim Americans are conducive to imagining America as predominantly Christian and White, just as those that find them to be a large(er) minority imply their potential to influence American culture and politics. Although most scholars agree that the numbers we have are approximations, combining a few of the major surveys serves to highlight some characteristics of the Muslim American community, particularly those relevant to its collective development.

The Pew Research Center opinion poll (2011) estimates that there are roughly 2.3 million Muslims in the United States, including 1.7 million adults (18 or older) and 850,000 younger than 18; Muslim adults are estimated to make up 0.6 percent of the U.S. population. The 2001 American Religious Identification Survey corroborates these findings (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar 2001), but other studies put the estimate between 5 million and 6 million (CAIR). Of this contested population size, nearly 65 percent of adults are estimated to be foreign born and to come from at least 68 countries (Pew Research Center 2007, 11).13

Although South Asians make up the majority of the world’s Muslims, the largest immigrant group of Muslim Americans, or 37 percent, comes from the Middle East and North Africa; South Asians14 are the second largest group, comprising 27 percent of the total Muslim American population. There is also a large U.S.-born Muslim population. In fact, 37 percent of Muslims were born in the United States and, despite the large number of foreign-born Muslims,

14 I use the broader term “South Asia” to refer to Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Afghanistan. This is the term commonly used in the literature on Muslim Americans to refer to Muslim immigrants from the Indian subcontinent.
the citizenship rate—81 percent—is among the highest for any immigrant group (Pew Research Center 2011). Muslim Americans are also a young group, with an average age of 36 years, lower than the average age of all other religious groups. As a point of comparison, the average age of the Jewish American community is 50 years, and the average age in the Catholic community is 48 years (Pew Research Center 2011).15

**Fragmented Identities: National and Ethnic Identity Salience**

Muslim immigrants arriving to the United States are deeply divided along ethnic and national lines. Moreover, home-country politics have played a major role in the lives of immigrants, serving to further mobilize them around their national and, to a lesser extent, ethnic identities. Whereas Muslims from the Arab world rallied around events in the Middle East, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Six-Day War, Muslims from South Asia were primarily concerned with the politics of the Indian subcontinent (Abdullah and Hathout 2003; Haddad 2011).

The diversity of post-1965 Muslim immigrants to the United States meant that there was little by way of a collective unifying identity (Naber 2008; Haddad 2011). As this study illustrates, however, this was a fleeting condition. Encouraged by the example of the African American Civil Rights Movement, many minority groups began organizing politically, leading to a burgeoning number of minority and identity-based organizations throughout the 1970s. In this social and political context, a number of Muslim American organizations begin to be established and, through them, a collective Muslim American identity begins to be discursively constituted.

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by Muslim immigrants attempting to negotiate their place in their new surroundings. The blurring of inter-group difference plays a central role in this construction (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel et al. 2010).

It is important to note that these immigrants’ encounters with the United States begin long before the time of migration; they were arriving in America at a time when the United States was also becoming more meaningfully involved in their home countries—particularly in the Middle East—a fact that influenced how these immigrants perceived their host country and their places in it. Many have argued that this wave of Muslim immigrants is best viewed as “collateral damage” of U.S. foreign policy in their countries of origin (Haddad 2004, 6). Hence, immigrants came to America not only seeking opportunities, but also escaping the military, economic, and political crises that resulted from U.S. interventions in their home countries. The process of integration is thus inevitably influenced by the immigrants’ perceptions of America before their arrival. Further, U.S. involvement in Muslim-majority countries continues to influence how Muslim Americans perceive, integrate, and adapt into America. As the following chapters illustrate, U.S. policies, both domestic and international, are a major determinant of Muslim settlement and integration.

**Establishing Roots: Negotiating Islam in America**

At the time of arrival, most of these immigrants related to the United States as a transient place to get an education or some work experience before returning “home” (Haddad 2011; Bilici 2012). It was not long, however, before they realized that, to their surprise, they were setting down roots: America was becoming home. There is, of course, nothing essentialist about “home”; rather, it is the very process of inhabitation that makes a place, any place, become a
home. In other words, “[w]hat is crucial for the sense of home is the experience of dwelling …
The subject appropriates a given space as home only after she projects into that space her
subjective being, that is, when she dwells” (Bilici 2012, 92). Examining the process of dwelling
through which America went from being a transient place to becoming a home is a key to
explaining Muslim American integration. Most importantly, it is partly through the discursive
construction of America as home that Muslim American identity begins to be narrated and
performed. Thus understood, cultural settlement is the attempt to mitigate the loss, rupture, and
disequilibrium of immigration by reclaiming the attachments to one’s surroundings, even if a
new self must be constituted in the process.

But how do Muslim immigrants experience, interpret, and appropriate their new
homeland? The answer to this question lies in the process through which Muslims negotiate the
process of integration and thus begin to delineate the contours of Muslim American identity.
Myths, symbols, and rituals play a crucial role in this process; as such, the common narrative
provided by Islam—its texts, rituals, practices, and myths—must be examined as the discursive
building blocks through which Muslim Americans perform and construct their own collective
experience and reality (Hall 1996; Clifford 1998; Wodak 2009). The narrative provided by Islam
becomes particularly relevant to explaining the policy positions of Muslim American interest
groups and will be further examined in Chapters Three and Four. However, before examining
how Islamic narrative influences the specific policy preferences of CAIR and MPAC, this
chapter will discuss how Islamic narrative shapes the broader process of integration into
American society. As previously argued, this is important because the development of interest
groups is only possible once Muslims begin to relate to America as a permanent home.
Constructing Home, Conceptualizing Belonging

Migration has played an important role in the historical narrative of Islam: Whether to escape persecution, proselytize, or conquer other lands, Muslims and Islam have been in constant movement (Esposito 1999). This narrative, found in Islamic jurisprudence, gave immigrants a way to interpret their social surroundings and to make sense of their experience. Islamic jurisprudence is thus an important part of the discourse of Muslim American integration and a major way through which Muslim themselves explain and rationalize their immigration, settlement, and belonging in America (Bilici 2012).

One of the most important aspects of this historical narrative comes from the theorization of a binary opposition differentiating Muslim-controlled lands—dar al Islam (the abode of Islam, peace)—from the rest of the world—dar al harb (the abode of war, chaos). Muslims living within the dar al Islam were perceived to inhabit a familiar place and to belong to a bounded and recognizable community (Bilici 2012, 94). Classical Muslim jurists, concerned with protecting the community, or ummah, saw no reasons for Muslims to move to dar al harb permanently, unless their departure was due to necessity. This, then, becomes the lens through which early Muslim immigrants not only experienced, but also legitimized their migration to the United States: Migration resulted from either economic or academic necessity and was, therefore, temporary.

Further, many Muslim immigrants considered living in America as potentially dangerous, an exposure to possible moral decay. It is important to note that not all Muslim immigrants were, or are, concerned with a religious-philosophical interpretation of their experience, nor do they all seek a religious justification for their presence in America. However, these questions do play a
major role in the historical narrative of the community and, thus, in the discursive performance of Muslim American identity.

Up until the 1970s, Muslims wanted only to avoid the negative effects of living in America, to remain “pure,” and to return to *dar al Islam* (Schumann 2007, 11). During these years, some Muslim thinkers promoted isolationism—living in separate Muslim enclaves—as a way of preventing the possible corruption that could come from living in the United States. This sentiment was most starkly voiced by Syed Abu Al Hassan Ali Nadwi, an influential Muslim speaker from India, who argued that “should there be the least danger to faith, go back to your native land, or to any other place where there is the security of faith; go, and take your family, go even if you have to go on foot” (Nadwi 1983, 111; Haddad 2003, 2011).

This isolationist tendency changed over time, mainly as a result of an internal process of reinterpretation of the dichotomous understanding between *dar al Islam* and *dar el harb*. Rather than an either/or dichotomy, Muslims began reintroducing juridical concepts such as *dar al dawah* (abode of mission) and *dar al ahd* (abode of contract), which made it possible to begin seeing and thinking of America as a place of settlement, a place of opportunity: as home (Bilici 2012).

Since 9/11, many Muslim scholars and leaders have gone further, criticizing the entire notion of abodes and arguing that these rigid dichotomies do not make sense in a globalized world. They argue, rather, that the whole world is a single *dar*: a single abode. These internal modes of conceptualizing belongingness are important because they provide the seeds for the development of Muslim American organizations. Only after Muslim immigrants naturalize America in Islam (i.e., as a place where Islam can be practiced and lived) can these organizations begin to imagine and narrate the collective Muslim American community on whose behalf they
claim to speak. Some Muslim American scholars and leaders have gone even farther, arguing that as a democratic, open, and pluralistic society, America is the only place where Muslims can practice true Islam, free from any compulsion and corruption (Maher Hathout, interview data, June 2, 2013).

**Language and Belonging: Imagining America in Islam**

The debate surrounding the adoption of English as the official language of Islam in America is a microcosm of the broader debate about integration in the United States. On the one hand are those who argue for a pragmatic solution: As a universal religion, Islam could be practiced and adopted in any social context. From this perspective, the Quran is written in Arabic only because it was the language spoken by the first Muslims and the Prophet Mohammad. There is nothing intrinsically superior about the Arabic language, nor inadequate about English; rather, context dictates which is to be used. On the other hand are those who fear that changing the language of Islam will inevitably change and corrupt its essence. These debates are, above all else, about the fluidity, flexibility, and transience of identity. They become all the more important for immigrant groups fearing assimilation and the “loss” of their—constantly changing and disputed—identities. How this is negotiated is thus part of the broader story of how Muslim American identity is (re)presented and defined (Mattson 2003; Bilici 2012).

Perhaps nothing is more displacing than attempting to communicate in a language other than one’s own. Our feeling of home is directly related to our ability to understand and express ourselves through language. Rather than being a question of semantics, the way language is expressed and created is a key aspect of cultural settlement and, thus, belonging. Language is also an inseparable aspect of identity. It not only determines how we speak of, think of, and express our individual and collective identities, but also is constitutive and productive of those
very identities (Bourdieu 1991). As such, it can be reasonably expected that the English language itself, the language that immigrants had to confront and acquire, plays a role in the delineation of a particular Muslim American identity. This is because the connection between language and belonging is a crucial connection; “linguistic and cultural categories inform and nurture one another” (Bilici 2012, 64). Muslim immigrants encountering the English language were thus alienated from the sense of belonging that comes from speaking, thinking, and “being” in one’s native language.

Consequently, the transition of English from a “foreign” to a Muslim language, one that a large number of people speak while practicing Islam, is an important aspect of the integration process and the establishment of a Muslim American identity. Perhaps ironically, the only way that a collective Muslim identity can exist in America is through the use of English, since English makes it possible for immigrants from various ethno-national backgrounds to communicate in a common language and avoid segregation along ethno-linguistic lines.

Although Friday prayer (jum’ah) is universally held in Arabic, the language of the Quran, English is becoming the de facto language of Friday sermons and other religious assemblies. Some mosques have gone as far as declaring English their official language, legitimizing their decision in terms of what is most conducive to cultural settlement: “Arabic is taught as the language of the Holy Quran. The language of communication and conducting activities of the Center is the language of the land, i.e., the English language”¹⁶ (Maher Hathout, interview data, June 2, 2013).

Acceptance of English as a language able to communicate Islam, just as the broader process of cultural settlement, has been anything but linear. Many immigrants have a sense of

attachment to the Arabic language, which is deeply associated with the rituals and traditions of Islam. Some *imams* (religious leaders) also continue to believe that using Arabic is mandatory because it was the language used by the Prophet Mohammad in his sermons. Even for South Asian immigrants—perhaps even more so for them—17—the use of Arabic represents a symbolic, practiced, and day-to-day aspect of what defines them as Muslim, leading people to fear that changing the language in which Islam is practiced will lead to a corruption of Islam. If we think of the fluidity of identity, these fears are not completely unfounded.

Although these concerns may seem to be specific to the Muslim American community, they are, indeed, part of a broader and familiar story. Questions of religious rituals and practice, more than beliefs per se, often acquire new significance for immigrants struggling to adapt to their new surroundings (Hirschman 2004). This is because reenacting the familiar becomes a central way to make sense of what appears foreign:

Religious belief and practice can serve as ballast for immigrants as they struggle to adapt to their new homeland ... immigrants must confront the existential question of “Who am I?” In a new social context, immigrants could often find meaning and identity by reaffirming traditional beliefs, including the structures of religious faith that may have been taken for granted before. The certainty of religious precepts can provide an anchor as immigrants must adapt and change many other aspects of their lives and habit ... The normal feeling of loss experienced by immigrants means that familiar religious rituals learned in childhood, such as hearing prayer in one’s native tongue, provide an emotional connection, especially when shared with others (Hirschman 2004, 6).

The ways in which the English language is negotiated, incorporated, and experienced in Islam shape how Muslim Americans think of themselves and their place in America and, as such, become a major building block for the performative constitution of Muslim American identity.

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17 Muslims across South Asia use Arabic, the language of the Quran, as the language of ritual. Many have argued that for non-Arab Muslims the attachment to the rituals of Islam, including the use of Arabic, is a way of claiming their belongingness to the religion.
Establishing the Foundations of Home: Religious Institutions

As previously argued, settlement is defined above all else as feeling at home. In more theoretical terms, settlement takes place when the objective environment is no longer external to us, but subjectivized; when the unfamiliar becomes understood in terms of the familiar—or as Bilici (2012) describes it, when the IKEA desk becomes the late-night refuge: no longer an external object, but understood in terms of the self (Arendt 1998; Bilici 2012). Thus, transforming our external world—a new country, job, or desk—to be in harmony with our subjective one is how one begins to “feel-at-home,” to settle. Part of this “feeling-at-home” also requires that we make a strange environment more familiar. For Muslim immigrants this was of even more immediate concern, because fulfilling their religious duties required a familiarization and internalization of their physical surroundings. The need to face Mecca during prayer forced Muslims to think of directionality and of the American geographic space in terms of Islam’s holiest site.

For Muslim immigrants, like other minorities before them, establishing places of worship was one of the earliest attempts to transform the unfamiliar into the familiar. Even though the first American mosque was established in 1921, the great majority of mosques, like Muslims themselves, are a post-1965 phenomenon. Fewer than 13 percent of American mosques were founded before 1970, but by 2011, the last year for which data are available, there were 2,106 across all 50 states, with 56 percent built after 2000 (Bagby 2012). The ways in which these physical spaces have evolved and changed is, in many ways, representative of the journey of Muslim American integration. What began as a hesitant attempt to find a physical and

\[18\] Established in Detroit by Imam Hussien Karoub, an immigrant from Syria who arrived in Michigan in 1914 to work at the Ford plant. The mosque did not survive long, most likely due to lack of funding. Imam Karoub established another mosque in 1937, known as the “Dix Mosque,” which still exists today.
metaphoric space for Islam in America became a much more confident assertion of Muslim American identity.

Architecture can thus tell us a great deal about collective identity, and the architecture of the mosque in America is no exception. Until the late 1980s, the majority of American mosques were architecturally nondescript. They had rarely been built to function as mosques, and were most often humble spaces converted to serve as a place for the community to gather. Although most had a room for prayer, the only real requirement of a mosque, they also had a hall for weddings and parties (Khalidi 2000; Kahera 2002). In addition, until the mid-1970s it was not uncommon for Muslims to congregate in the mosque on Sunday, the Christian day of rest. Thus, from the outside there was almost no sign that a particular building was a mosque. That this began to change dramatically in the late 1980s is a fundamental testimony of Muslim cultural settlement. America was becoming home, and the architectural structures of mosques were reflecting that (Leonard 2003a).

Mosques built in the 1990s were architecturally assertive structures that epitomized American Islam. Their designs combined elements of both traditional Islamic architecture and American architecture, taking the immediate surroundings into consideration and trying to build structures in harmony with the landscape. The Islamic Cultural Center of New York is but one example of this approach. Built with traditional Islamic motifs and geometric forms, it is nevertheless a strikingly modern structure, fitting, complementing, and adding to its New York City surroundings.
Fig. 1

The fact that Muslims are feeling increasingly at home in America is thus made physically visible in the architecture of their mosques. Just as the English language was appropriated to become a language of Islam, one that Muslims can speak while practicing Islam and being Muslim, so is architecture amended to meet this community’s demands: to be both Islamic and integrated in its surroundings.

**Establishing the Foundations of Home: Civic Institutions**

Religious institutions are major drivers of immigrant integration, and their role in engendering political participation is well established (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Tate 1993; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Jamal 2005). Muslims in America realized that to really feel at home in America they would need to establish civic, political, and associational institutions to serve and meet their community’s interests. Dr. Agha
Saeed, a Muslim political activist and the founder of the American Muslim Alliance, summarizes the sentiment by claiming that Muslims need to “not only speak without an accent but also think without an accent” (Saeed 2002, 55). What he meant, of course, was that Muslims should shift their focus away from the “Muslim world” and toward the American homeland. It is worth emphasizing that Muslim immigrants did not progressively shift from building religious to building civic institutions; rather, both evolved concurrently, are still being developed, and are best seen as different expressions of the same trend toward integration.

In the 1970s, the young Muslim professionals and graduate students who had migrated to the United States in the previous decade began establishing the institutional foundations of the community. Although their missions were initially undifferentiated, they generally fit into two major groups: American Islamic organizations and Muslim American political organizations. Whereas the former were mainly concerned with issues of religion and education, the latter emphasized participation in American politics. Through their work, these organizations, and the leaders who represent them, have been actively delineating the boundaries of the community and defining a Muslim American “uniqueness.”

The earliest of these organizations were the Federation of Islamic Association (FIA), established in 1953, and the Muslim Students’ Association (MSA) in 1963. Whereas FIA was short-lived, MSA remained active until 1982, when a group of its student leaders established the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), thereby bringing both organizations under one umbrella. Today, ISNA is the largest North American Muslim umbrella organization. Like FIA and MSA, ISNA is best seen as a civic association, concerned and engaged with issues of

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19 Although this term is problematic, because it conceals the great religious diversity that exists in Muslim-majority countries (as well as non-religious Muslims), I use it hesitantly to refer to countries where Muslims make up the majority of the population. My main rationale in using the term is its usage by the organizations I examine.
religion, education, and, to a lesser extent, humanitarian relief. In addition, it publishes a bimonthly journal, *Islamic Horizons*, and organizes an annual convention that brings together more than 30,000 people. These Islamic organizations provide the basis for Muslim American social connectedness; through their membership, Muslims in America physically encounter and engage with other Muslims and thus begin thinking of themselves as a collective group. As is well established, this fostering of social ties is fundamental to the process of cultural and, consequently, political integration (Putnam 1991).

Although debates about the permissibility of permanently residing outside Muslim-majority countries continued into the 1980s, in 1986 ISNA took a position favoring citizenship and participation in mainstream U.S. politics, thus ushering in the establishment of political Muslim American organizations (Poston 1992, 32; Leonard 2003a). Whereas the focus of the previous organizations had been mainly on religion, education, and community outreach, the organizations established in the late 1980s and early 1990s shifted their efforts to the policy process. These organizations’ guiding principle was that Muslim American integration would only take place through political engagement and mobilization; they argued that the question was not whether to pursue assimilation or isolation, but how best to accomplish Muslim American collective interests while contributing to the American homeland.

The Muslim Public Affairs Council and the Council for American Islamic Relations, established in 1988 and 1994, respectively, are the only two existing Muslim American advocacy groups and, as such, are the focus of this study. They are dedicated to promoting and defending the civic, political, and social rights of Muslim Americans, while presenting the “Muslim American perspective” on domestic and foreign policy issues (Haddad 2011; Leonard 2003b).

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20 See: http://www.isna.net/about-isna.html
As such, they provide fruitful ground for analyzing how Muslim American identity is being performatively constituted through their policy discourse.

The Pluralism Discourse of the 1990s

In addition to the organizations that were being established, or perhaps as a result of them, questions about Islam’s relationship to pluralism and democracy stimulated a rich intellectual debate among Muslim American thinkers. Writings on pluralism and Islam proliferated as intellectuals sought to understand the role and contributions of Islam in pluralistic democracies (Schumann 2007; Mandaville 2003). This discourse would become all the more important following the events of 9/11 and the ensuing questions and demands from American pundits regarding Islam’s (in)compatibility with democracy. It is important to highlight, however, that these questions were driving internal thinking and dialogue well before 9/11, and resulted mainly from an attempt to negotiate the integration and settlement process the community was undergoing.

Questions of pluralism are not new to Islam, but have been central to its intellectual development: From early treatment of minorities to encounters with colonialism, dealing with non-Muslims has been a major pragmatic and intellectual concern for Muslims and Islam (Haddad 2011; Bilici 2012). Although historically the question was how to deal with non-Muslims in Muslim lands, immigration to the United States (and to other non-Muslim countries) changed the question to how to deal with being a minority in a non-Muslim country. Muslim American intellectuals advocated for a pluralistic Islam, grounded in the Quranic teachings of coexistence and equality of humankind.21 The inherent compatibility between Islam and

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21 Among the most important Muslim intellectuals writing on issues of democracy and pluralism from an Islamic perspective prior to 9/11 were Fathi Osman, a Princeton University-educated scholar born in Egypt, and Abdulaziz Sachedina, the current Chair of George Mason
democracy became an important component of the pluralism discourse; a discourse both constituted and constitutive of Muslim American integration and cultural settlement.

Thus, both organizations I examine are fundamentally products and producers of this discourse: Their establishment resulted as much from the intellectual developments within the Muslim American community that made their vision of an American Islam possible as from the social and political context of American pluralism. Further, their goals and work center on a vision of Islam that is not only compatible with but also part of American pluralism and democracy. MPAC’s president, Salam Al-Marayati, illustrates this point, claiming that:

We have to be part of a pluralistic model wherever we live. Even if we are part of the 99 percent Muslims, well, there are some Muslims who are not practicing, some Muslims who have different lifestyles—some are nationalists, some are atheists, some are communists, some are socialists, and so on—so the goal is to construct a pluralistic model of government. To me, that is what the Prophet did when he was in Medina, because he brought the Jewish tribes and the Christian tribes and they formed a covenant called the Medina Charter, which was based on security, common citizenship, and equality (Salam Al-Marayati, interview data, July 2, 2013).

The true principles of Islam are thus presented as being in fundamental agreement with the principles of pluralistic democracy. By presenting the practices that today signify American democracy—citizenship, deliberation, security, and equality—as representative of “true” Islam (as practiced by the Prophet Mohammad), the principles of Islam and American democracy are presented as being in fundamental agreement.

**On Trauma, Victimhood, and Belonging**

For Muslim Americans, as for all Americans, the collective traumas caused by the events of September 11, 2001, are still felt, lived, experienced. The violation of the homeland, both

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physically and metaphorically, disrupted the sense of home that comes partly from feeling safe, secure, and in harmony with one’s surroundings. As with all traumas, collective mourning became a way to interpret the events, grasp the loss, and attempt to overcome as a nation. For Muslim Americans, however, the traumas of 9/11 were amplified. Not only were they victims of an attack on their nation, they were also blamed and victimized as somehow culpable. Their culpability was, of course, seen to stem from nothing other than sharing the religion of the perpetrators. Their identities as Muslim Americans—their very being—marked them as dubious.

In addition to being (temporarily?) excluded from the imagined American community (Anderson 2006), Muslim Americans were also alienated from their institutions of government (Haddad 2011, 38), a subject I examine further in the next chapter. The trauma of 9/11 was thus magnified for Muslim Americans, who became the domestic targets of their government’s War on Terror. Hardship, however, can stimulate, build resilience, and be developmentally helpful. According to CAIR’s national legislative director, Corey Saylor, his organization had for years tried to convince the community that their political participation was a necessity, but to little avail. The backlash engendered by the September 11 attacks was a wake-up call:

[the backlash] really made people aware that we couldn’t just hang out in our mosques and be comfortable and enjoy the privileges and freedoms that come from living in America. Just because freedom is on paper it doesn’t mean it exists in reality. You really have to struggle for it (Corey Saylor, interview data, July 22, 2013).

Muslim Americans became increasingly politically mobilized as a result of the backlash. The community realized that in order to claim their place in American pluralism, they would have to fight for the civic and political rights their Constitution granted them. However, Muslim American organizations were utterly unprepared to meet the demands imposed on them by the attacks—a fact that, ironically, proved conducive to the integration process. Lacking
organizational resources and know-how forced them into alliance building, a process that had begun prior to 9/11 but that necessity dramatically hastened. In addition, the backlash legitimized these organizations as the representatives of the Muslim American community, providing them with an aggrieved group whose interests to represent. Media and government elites were eager to gain the “Muslim American perspective” and thus granted organizational elites a degree of attention and access previously unimaginable. As such, 9/11 was a critical juncture during which Muslim American policy actors were able to use their newfound access to further the process of Muslim American integration (Collier and Collier 2007).

Conclusion

The historical narrative of Muslim settlement in the United States is complex, non-linear, and still evolving. It includes the assimilationist tendencies of nineteenth-century Muslim immigrants as much as the isolationism of the newer, post-1965 ones. It is best understood as a process of negotiation through which Muslim immigrants attempt to appropriate their surroundings while reinterpreting them to fit their needs. At its core, it is a narrative about how collective identities are formed, how they evolve, and how they change. Today a Muslim American collective identity is emerging and, while still evolving—as all identities always are—is also increasingly clear, confident, and comfortable in its surroundings. This chapter has presented a historical narrative of Muslim life in America. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was examined as the first critical juncture in this narrative, since it catapulted long-term Muslim immigration to and settlement in the United States. The following chapter will examine the second critical juncture in the narrative of Muslim American integration: 9/11 and the ensuing backlash against Muslims.
Chapter Two

The Post-9/11 Backlash: Constraints and Opportunities

_In a crisis, be aware of the danger—but recognize the opportunity._
—John F. Kennedy

_9/11 is the B.C. and A.D. of the Muslim American community._
—Maher Hathout

**Othering and the Post 9/11 Structure of Opportunity**

Although CAIR and MPAC were both established more than a decade prior to 9/11, their mission, influence, and visibility grew dramatically as a result of the attacks. In fact, the very targeting and marginalization of Muslim Americans following 9/11 has strengthened the interest groups that claim to represent them. This should not be taken to suggest that these organizations were immune to the post-9/11 backlash, or that they did not suffer as a result of the government’s policies. They most certainly did. In fact, documents leaked as recently as July 2014 show that CAIR’s executive director, Nihad Awad, was under strict government surveillance from 2002 to 2008.\(^{22}\) However, events like this, and the many other violations that have become collectively known as the “post-9/11 backlash,” have been extensively researched and documented (Cainkar 2005; Volpp 2002; Whitehead and Aden 2002; Sekhon 2003; Cainkar and Maira 2005; Naber 2008; Bozorgomehr and Bakalian 2009; Aziz 2011, 2012).

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What has not been as deeply examined, I argue, is the opportunity structure that the post-9/11 crisis engendered. Post-9/11 policies through which Muslim Americans have been discursively constituted as an out-group have created the structural conditions for Muslim American interest group participation and, to a great extent, determined their strategies and claims-making capacity. The government’s response to 9/11, therefore, represents a critical juncture for Muslim American interest groups: It resulted in the opening of political space and granted them access to the policymaking process, which they have used to make their demands and try to produce change (Eisinger 1973; Pierson 1996; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Salam Al-Marayati, interview data, June 2, 2013).

I conceptualize structures of political opportunity as openness to the policy process. As such, perception plays an important role, since actors have to perceive that there is, indeed, an opening; what is important is that the perceived openness incentivizes actors to engage in political action that they would otherwise not have pursued (Tarrow 1994). Specifically, I argue that the targeting of Muslim Americans as an out-group created three major structures of opportunity for CAIR and MPAC: 1) It strengthened Muslim American identity salience, which interest groups claim to represent; 2) it substantiated their claim to speak on behalf of the community, thus granting them access to government officials and the policymaking process; and 3) it provided these organizations with a discourse to challenge—“Muslim Americans as others”—allowing them to construct a counter-discourse of Muslim Americans as patriotic citizens. In short, it is only due to a specific structure of opportunity, brought about by the post-9/11 targeting of Muslim Americans, that CAIR and MPAC have been allowed some access to the policymaking process. This access has allowed them to position themselves as the official
voice of the Muslim American community, make policy demands, and in the process, engage in
the discursive construction of Muslim American identity.

In order to illustrate this argument, this chapter proceeds as follows: Part I examines the
post-9/11 discursive construction of Muslim Americans as an out-group in order to analyze how
their othering resulted in specific opportunity structures for the Muslim American organizations
this work examines: CAIR and MPAC. Part II then examines the broader structural opportunities
that emanate from the U.S. institutional context. As Meyer and Minkoff (2004) remind us, the
distinction between general and specific political opportunities is an important one to make. As
such, I will distinguish between the general structures of opportunity resulting from the
American institutional context and the specific structures of opportunities that the post-9/11
attacks engendered for these groups. Part II pays particular attention to the vital role that political
elites have played in both establishing Muslim American organizations and accessing the
political space granted post-9/11.

**Part I: U.S. Legal Discourse and the Othering of Muslim Americans**

In order to demonstrate that the othering of Muslim Americans resulted in a political
opening for Muslim American interest groups, it must first be established that Muslim
Americans were indeed othered (i.e., constructed as an out-group through U.S. policy). To do
this, this section specifically examines U.S. legal discourse dealing with the War on Terror,
paying particular attention to the discursive practices through which Muslim Americans are
constituted. I argue that legislation and policies such as the USA Patriot Act, special
registrations, and extrajudicial deportations and detentions, positioned Muslim Americans as
potentially dangerous and a potential and latent threat to “our” national security. This allowed for
the War on Terror to be brought inside the American national home and for Muslim Americans to be made into its main domestic target (Cainkar and Maira 2005).

The USA Patriot Act is one of the most expansive and ambiguous pieces of legislation dealing with the War on Terror. As such, it is also one of the most important discursive sites for the construction of Muslim Americans as an out-group. Its main purpose and rationale was to facilitate evidence-gathering procedures and expedite the prosecution of suspected terrorists. To accomplish this, the Act granted the government increased powers for the monitoring and surveillance of groups perceived to pose a potential threat to national security (Sekhon 2003). Because the Act is exceedingly long and complex, comprising more than 300 pages, this analysis will focus only on provisions that either directly refer to or implicitly impact Muslim Americans.

The Patriot Act begins with a disclaimer that provides the first glimpse of its intended targets: “Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and Americans from South Asia play a vital role in our Nation and are entitled to nothing less than the full rights of every American.” Thus, while purporting to condemn discrimination against the identified group, it implicitly defines and identifies the targets of the post 9/11 social and legal backlash (Sekhon 2003). Moreover, claiming that “Muslim Americans have become so fearful of harassment that many Muslim women are changing the way they dress to avoid becoming targets” represents the targeting of Muslim Americans as the result of the visibility of Muslim American culture and customs.

23 The Act, officially titled “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism,” was proposed on September 24, 2001, by President George W. Bush and passed almost unanimously, and without debate, by the Senate (98-1) and the House of Representatives (357-66). It was signed into law on October 26, 2001, and extended by President Barack Obama on May 26, 2011.
Muslim Americans are constituted as not only visibly different than other Americans, but also as capable of avoiding (or at least attempting to avoid) becoming targets by changing that which makes them visibly different: in this case, a woman’s *hijab*, or headscarf.

What becomes immediately clear upon reading this preamble is that the Patriot Act seeks to assign, and thus shift, responsibility for the backlash against Muslim Americans to the level of the individual—as opposed to that of the state. The backlash is thus presented as the result of the actions of a misguided few—an aberration—rather than the result of state policies that not only encourage, but also are directly implicated in discriminatory practices against those perceived to be of Muslim, Arab, or South Asian descent. Discursively claiming its innocence in the targeting of Muslim Americans serves to challenge the claims that substantiate Muslim American organizations, mainly that Muslim Americans as a group are targets of sanctioned discrimination.

The Patriot Act argues, for example, that “when American citizens commit acts of violence against those who are, or are perceived to be, of Arab or Muslim descent, they should be punished to the full extent of the law.”

Thus, in this construction “the law” is to serve as the protector of the targeted group against the misguided actions of a few. No mention is made as to what should be done when “the law” itself is providing the rationale to target these groups, and the state—represented by the various institutions of government such as the FBI, the CIA, and the police—is the main perpetrator of violence.

By expanding the government’s powers, the Patriot Act has led to the erosion of the constitutional and civil rights of all Americans, but American Muslims have been disproportionately targeted (Whitehead and Aden 2002; Sekhon 2003; Jamal 2008). Section 218

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of the Patriot Act, for example, dramatically expands the government’s surveillance capabilities and powers, previously curtailed by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978. The Patriot Act grants federal authorities (specifically, the CIA and the FBI) the rights to define and interpret what constitutes suspicious behavior, while granting them the right to identify, prosecute, and punish those suspected. Not surprisingly, most of these “suspect” citizens were of Arab and South Asian American descent (Sekhon 2003, 126).

Another policy discourse that aided in the construction of Muslim Americans as an out-group was the National Security Entry and Exit Registry System (NSEERS), a special registry for non-immigrant residents of the United States. The registry initially targeted people with origins in the Muslim world and singled out Muslims (especially males) with origins in what were deemed to be high-risk countries. Further, the Federal Register Publication, signed by then Attorney General John Ashcroft on August 9, 2002, granted the Attorney General and law-enforcement agents the power to define who was deemed a high-risk non-immigrant resident. Part 264 of the proposed NSEERS stated that “Nonimmigrant aliens who meet pre-existing criteria … determined by the Attorney General or the Secretary of State to indicate that such aliens' presence in the United States warrants monitoring in the national security, as defined in section 219 of the Act, or law enforcement interests of the United States.”

Although clearly aimed at non-immigrant residents, the existence of a special registry created a context of fear and anxiety for Muslim Americans regardless of their citizenship status. This anxiety was not unmerited, since, in fact, there were also cases in which the Immigration and Naturalization Service targeted naturalized American citizens. The justification for NSEERS

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was that potential terrorists could be identified, and removed, before becoming a tangible threat; the registry resulted in the deportation of more than 13,000 individuals without a single terrorist suspect being found in the process (Naber 2008). That should not be taken to mean that the registry was completely futile, however, since although it failed in identifying terrorists, it succeeded in creating and defining a broad category of people believed to be potentially threatening to national security. The fact that no evidence of this was found does not negate its purpose and achievement as part of a broader set of policies that served to delineate the vague, but nevertheless all too real, contours of the out-group.

Extrajudicial detentions took place both within the framework of NSEERS, which detained people found to have violated their visa status, and FBI “voluntary” interviews and raids that targeted Muslim, Arab, and South Asian “suspects” (Chishti et al. 2003; Hing 2006; Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). These detentions were, and continue to be, shrouded in secrecy, since the Patriot Act has made it legal for individuals deemed a risk to national security to be held indefinitely and without formal charges. Detentions play a central role in the construction of an out-group: Physically holding individuals marks them as a threat in need of isolation—a danger that, left unchecked, could threaten the social fabric. Physical separation becomes a way through which the boundaries that differentiate an in-group—those in need of protection—from an out-group—the source of threat against which protection must be granted—are clearly drawn and guarded.

The Terrorism Information and Prevention System (TIPS), proposed by President George W. Bush in the summer of 2002, must also be considered as part of this broader attempt to construct the source of threat against which the government claims to provide protection. The program sought to enlist “citizen observers” to report activity they deemed suspicious. Mail
carriers, utility workers, truck drivers, and other government employees who, due to the nature of their jobs, would have access to people’s homes were to become citizen patrols, policing, defining, and thus helping protect the nation against the threat posed by the covert enemy lurking within. Due to strong opposition from civil rights groups, particularly the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the program was overhauled in Congress on November 25, 2002. Nevertheless, its proposal and rationale were critical for the discursive construction of Muslim Americans as an out-group; representing certain individuals as deserving of increased surveillance (in this case, not only by the state, but by their fellow citizens) constitutes them as potentially guilty, disloyal, and capable of crimes against the homeland. Thus, potentiality is perhaps the most important building block in the construction of Muslim Americans as an out-group: As long as the potential of threat exists, they need not commit a crime in order to be considered outside the boundaries of the American nation.

This section has aimed to examine how government policies comprising the War on Terror have performatively constituted Muslim Americans as a group deserving of increased surveillance and punishment: an out-group. The latent targeting of Muslim Americans as different than the rest of Americans serves to discretely, but readily, separate them from the rest of the American imagined community. U.S. counterterrorism policy is thus one of the major sites—though not the only one—through which Muslim Americans are framed as an out-group and an internal other against which American identity can be measured and defined. This reading of the War on Terror, and the policies encompassing it, sees hate crimes, bias incidents,

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27 Section 880 of the Homeland Security Act, signed into law on November 25, 2002, specifically forbade the creation of the TIPS program.
28 Although this research is concerned with the effects of othering on the out-group—in this case Muslim Americans—internal others are, in fact, fundamental for the construction of any national identity. Through the (re)presentation of the other, the identity of the in-group is also (re)produced.
and discriminatory policy not as aberrations or as the unintended but inevitable result of fighting terrorism, but rather as a productive discourse through which certain groups are constituted as outside the boundaries of the national community.

In order to substantiate their claims to represent Muslim Americans, CAIR and MPAC require the existence—or active construction—of Muslim Americans as a group that views itself, and is viewed by others, as a collective. As examined in Chapter One, the development of a Muslim American collective identity is part of a complex sociohistorical process of immigration, settlement, and integration in the United States. I argue, however, that the events of 9/11, and the government policies previously discussed, strengthened the salience of Muslim American identity. This is because, as social identity theory reminds us, discrimination can often lead to the activation of the targeted identity. Hence, the othering of Muslim Americans also explains why Muslim American identity—as opposed, for example, to an ethno-national one—becomes salient (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Hogg 2006; Peek 2006; Chandra 2012). Policies that performatively constitute Muslim Americans as an out-group must, therefore, be seen as foundational for Muslim American interest groups, since it is precisely the othering of Muslim Americans that grants these groups the legitimacy to speak on behalf of this constructed, and in many ways imagined, community (Anderson 2006).

**Media Discourse and the Othering of Muslim American**

The legal discourse of the War on Terror is only one site through which Muslim Americans have been constituted as an out-group. As all discursive sites, it does not function in isolation, but belongs to a broader mode of thinking, speaking, imagining, and representing Muslims and Islam (Saïd 1978; Saïd 1993; Volpp 2002; Marr 2006). Due to its reach and pervasiveness, the mass media is an important producer of social discourse (Gamson et al. 1992)
and, as such, is among the most significant sites for the construction of Muslim Americans as an out-group (Alsultany 2012). Well aware of this, both CAIR and MPAC have established media outreach offices dedicated to engaging media producers and countering what they perceive to be inaccurate or racist depictions. In other words, these organizations’ discourse is not produced in isolation: Examining the legal and media discourse through which Muslim Americans are constituted as an out-group is important to explaining the counter-discourse of Muslim American interest groups.

Scholars who have examined media portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the United States before 9/11 have found that the most common frameworks of representation include violence, terrorism, oppression, and war (Said 1981; Shaheen 2001; Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2002; Alsultany 2012). News media representations of Muslim Americans are often seen to stem from—or at least be influenced by—this broader set of discursive frames through which Muslims and Islam have been historically represented. Although by providing a ready-made vocabulary and a number of familiar themes and images for thinking, seeing, and talking about Muslims in general, these frames inevitably influence media representations of Muslim Americans, media discourse of Muslim Americans post-9/11 is often more nuanced than these accounts allow for.

I conduct a brief analysis in order to exemplify some of the specific ways Muslim Americans are implicitly represented as outside the boundaries of the American community. The purpose of this analysis is purely illustrative, intended to highlight some of the most common discursive practices through which Muslim Americans are othered. This is nevertheless an important component of the overall argument, because the discursive representation of Muslim Americans as an out-group has influenced the counter-discourse of CAIR and MPAC (as well as
their claims to represent a discriminated-against minority). Although multiple media sites could be examined, I focus on a number of print news articles collected from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, arguably two of the most influential newspapers in the United States. Further, as will be further demonstrated, the primary target audience of CAIR and MPAC is the U.S. policy establishment; examining the media discourse that the latter is most likely to read can help illustrate the interconnectedness of discourse and laws that target Muslim Americans, and media representations of this group.

A major finding of this analysis is that even though there were a number of explicitly biased stories against Muslim Americans, the majority of the news articles relied on more subtle representations that served to implicitly differentiate Muslim Americans. This analysis suggests that the othering of an internal constituency—as opposed to an external group—is not done explicitly, but functions in more nuanced and implicit ways, which may be precisely the reason for its pervasiveness.

Through the content analysis, I find that a slight majority of the articles (52 percent) represent Muslim Americans as an out-group. The great majority of the reporting in this

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29 One could examine, for example, cable news shows, radio talk shows, and a variety of other print news sources. Because the purpose of this section is purely to illustrate some of the frameworks of representation through which Muslim Americans are constructed as an out-group, I focus on two national newspapers. This analysis is by no means exhaustive.

30 An article pool was created through a LexisNexis search, which yielded 164 articles. I focus on the period between September 11, 2001, and December 30, 2004, in order to examine media representation of Muslim Americans during approximately the same time that the government’s backlash against this group was at its peak. I conduct a content analysis to examine the ways in which Muslim Americans were represented in both publications, and how these discourses influence, reinforce, or challenge government policies that constituted Muslim Americans as the outgroup.

31 I assign each article to one of the following categories: out-group, in-group, or victim. The variables I use for **out-group** are religion, ethnicity, violence, terrorism, extremism, and dual-loyalty. For **in-group**, I use cooperation with the government, loyalty, peaceful, and secular. For **victim**, I focus on discrimination, bias, prejudice, and civil rights violations.
category, however, is not explicitly biased and is particularly cautious to depict Muslim Americans in a tolerant manner. Nevertheless, there are five major frames employed that implicitly serve to differentiate Muslim Americans as an out-group: 1) religion/overly pious; 2) culturally different; 3) foreign; 4) implicitly associated with violence/terrorism; and 5) potential for dual-loyalties. The most commonly emphasized and utilized of these frames is religion. Hence, what most of these representations had in common was that they highlighted, first and foremost, Muslim Americans’ religious identities, presenting them as overly pious and overly concerned with the rituals of religion (i.e., prayer, attending Mosque, religious dress code).

The mosque is the ubiquitous setting for many of the stories. Whether the reports dealt with participation in local politics, collaboration with local enforcement, or post-9/11 discrimination, a description of the physical mosque, the act of prayer, or a woman’s veil seemed to be a central component of the reporting. An article dealing with a voter registration campaign for Muslim Americans, “After the call to prayer, there came the call to politics.”32 Not only is the call to prayer needlessly highlighted (the event being reported is a voter registration campaign), it also indirectly presents religion as having priority over politics; the call to politics follows the call to prayer.

Another example of the religious framework can be seen in an article about the post-9/11 traumas affecting the community. The setting for the report is a local New York mosque, where “the chanting begins. Men and boys in stocking feet kneel and touch their heads to the green wall-to-wall carpeting, while a toddler pulls at his traditional Muslim cap, or kaffiyeh.”33 Not only is the description meant to emphasize what makes Muslim Americans different, the

*kaffiyeh/*—a traditional headdress worn mainly by Arab men (Muslim and Christian) and which has no religious significance—is erroneously described as a “traditional Muslim cap,” discursively lumping Arab and Muslim identities. Since the man is in a mosque, knelt in prayer, it seems only reasonable to assume that everything else associated with him must have religious significance. Similarly, an article describing a politician’s visit to a local mosque begins by reporting that he “removed his shoes before entering the thickly carpeted prayer hall.”34 Although the demarcation of difference is implicit and subtle (i.e., the thickly carpeted hall, the removal of shoes) it becomes clear that the mosque—and the act of worshiping in a mosque—is physically different from ordinary American places of worship.

The following passage from a *Washington Post* article is a particularly significant example of the nuanced ways in which Muslim Americans are discursively othered. It combines a number of tropes and, in only two sentences, succeeds in implicitly representing Muslim Americans as foreign, overly pious, and culturally distinct from the rest of America:

> Muslim Americans from more than 20 countries gathered at a Reston park yesterday for an old-fashioned picnic, eating grilled burgers and watermelon and listening to appeals to vote in the upcoming election. They also heard recitations from the Koran, took a midafternoon break for one of five prayers devout Muslims offer daily and spoke of the religious requirement of involvement in politics and community activities.35

Highlighting that Muslim Americans are from “more than 20 countries” can be seen to suggest that they lack deep roots in America. Further, although they engage in “American” behavior—an old-fashioned picnic, eating grilled burgers, listening to appeals to participate in elections—the recitations from the Koran and calls to prayer quickly demarcate them as other.

Just as in colonial representations of the colonized, the latter is seen as a carbon copy, always trying to mimic the colonizer, but also always falling short. The article thus becomes not so much about the political participation of Muslim Americans, but about what marks them as culturally and religiously different.

The second most common way of representing Muslim Americans as other is by emphasizing their foreignness (either by highlighting their ties to other countries or their cultural difference). Emblematic of this is another *New York Times* story, “Sharifa Alkhateeb, Feminist Within Islam, Is Dead at 58.” The primary identity marker suggested by the heading is “feminist within Islam.” Nothing would suggest that the individual in question is actually an American born and raised in Philadelphia, which the article mentions in passing. She is described as an “advocate of Muslim culture in the United States who helped place courses in Middle Eastern culture and Arabic in public schools.” Islam is thus not only a religion, but is here represented as a “culture,” and one that is apparently interchangeable with Middle Eastern culture and the Arabic language. Overlooking intragroup variation is key to highlighting intergroup differentiation and thereby constructing an essentialized and seemingly cohesive out-group. Further, referring to Islam as a culture, instead of a religion, starkly differentiates Muslims from the rest of Americans, because they are portrayed as not only practicing a different religion, but as also belonging to an altogether different culture.

Other articles used the terms “Arab” and “Muslim” interchangeably, without pause or explanation. Take, for example, the following title: “For Arab Americans, a Familiar Backlash: Harassment, Threats Prompt Police to Provide Extra Security for Mosques, Islamic Centers.”

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The article itself continues to use the term Islam, Muslim, and Arab interchangeably: “Arab Americans braced for the backlash, which came overnight. By yesterday evening, Muslim groups in the United States had received more than 100 calls of harassment.”37 Not once does it clarify that not all Arabs are Muslims, that not all Muslims are Arabs, or that, in fact, the great majority of Arabs in the United States are Christians.

Just as Muslim and Arab Americans are discursively linked, Muslim Americans are also associated with violent events in the Middle East, a fact that, in turn, represents them as inherently tied to foreign places and, consequently, violence. No region is more associated with Muslim Americans than the Middle East, and no conflict seen as greater proof of their inherent violence than the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is this association that allows journalists to claim, for instance, that “a terrorist attack on the United States detonates particular repercussions here among both Muslims and Jews, whose kin in the Middle East are locked in a bitter battle.”38

The attacks of 9/11 are presented as an extension of a “bitter battle” that has been “raging” in the Middle East and that “has now arrived like an unwelcome immigrant in American shores.” The terrorist attacks are thus discursively associated with the Palestinian Israeli conflict and American Muslims—and Jews—seen as particularly tied to the attacks due to their “roots” (i.e., their “kin”) in the Middle East. In this specific construction, however, Jewish Americans are seen as the victims, while Muslim Americans as potentially culpable. Whereas the

former “could not help linking the victimization of Americans to that of Jews in Israel” the latter “struggled to assert their identities as loyal American citizens.”

Some of the articles reviewed also implicitly represent Muslim Americans as potentially disloyal, since their loyalty to Islam is seen to contradict their loyalty to America. Take this excerpt from another Washington Post article, in which Marc Fisher rhetorically asks, “Is it reasonable to ask students … whether there is a conflict between being an American and being a Muslim?” He reckons that:

It certainly seemed fair after six young people, all born in this country, all American citizens, told me that no, they did not believe that Osama bin Laden was necessarily the bad guy the President says he is, and no, they did not think the United States should be attacking Afghanistan, and, no, they might not be able to serve their country if it meant taking up arms against fellow Muslims.

Thus, the beliefs of “six young people” are enough to legitimize questioning the loyalty of an entire group. The article is careful not to generalize its findings and to clarify that its focus is on one particular Islamic school in Potomac, Maryland. However, it is reasonable to believe that such a report can serve to establish suspicion, a key element enabling the domestic War on Terror. Further, the subject matter, in addition to the selection of quotes included, emphasizes a looming social anxiety that children of Muslim immigrants are not being socialized to become patriotic citizens.

The article goes on to claim that the “children’s minds are shaped [by] their principal, who seems to have an angry agenda.” When asked about the potential conflict between loyalty to America and loyalty to Islam, the principal states:

Allegiance to national authority is one thing, but the one who gives us life is more entitled to that authority. This is the story of religion through all time. When national laws and values go counter to what the Creator believes, we are 100 percent against it.

Thus, the position of the individual principal becomes “proof” of what society at large fears most: That the religious loyalties of Muslims trump their allegiances to the nation. Most of the children interviewed, as well as the principal, are highly critical of U.S. foreign policy. However, instead of presenting this as the patriotic duty of citizens to criticize their government when the latter is erring, or presenting the children as socialized to be critical thinkers, their critique is represented as potentially treasonous, their reasoning as un-American.

Through this everyday media discourse Muslim Americans are defined as overly pious, culturally distinct, foreign, potentially violent, and potentially disloyal implicitly and subtly constituting them as an out-group. These media constructions of Muslim Americans are far from innocuous. Representing an entire group as different and potentially dangerous functions to normalize the surveillance of Muslim Americans and thus help enable discriminatory government policies. This is because opinions and perceptions are not formed in a vacuum. The fact that 39 percent of Americans believed that Muslim Americans should carry a special identification card and 41 percent (Gallup 2006) believed they should undergo more intensive security at airports results in part from a particular way of representation that lumps Muslim Americans with those responsible for the attacks, thus constructing them as sources of threat in need of increased surveillance and control.
Part II. The Othering of Muslim Americans: An Opportunity for CAIR and MPAC?

Rather than passively accepting their construction as an out-group, Muslim American organizations have seen an opportunity to challenge discriminatory state and social practices, thus claiming their belongingness to their nation. Being othered has strengthened the perception—both within the Muslim community in the United States and in the broader American public—of a cohesive Muslim American collective identity. This, in turn, has substantiated the claims of Muslim American organizations to speak on behalf of a unified community, thereby providing them with access to the policymaking process. As such, they have been able to put forth a counter-discourse through which Muslim Americans are disassociated from Muslims overseas and constructed as patriotic American citizens.

Although it seems counterintuitive, the government’s domestic War on Terror resulted in a number of unintended positive consequences that combined to form a new post-9/11 political structure of opportunity for CAIR and MPAC. To begin with, being othered solidified perception of and attachments to a Muslim American identity, further legitimizing, in the process, the claims-making capacity of CAIR and MPAC as the representatives of this targeted community. As a result, both organizations gained increased visibility and access to the policy process, the media, and sources of funding (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Salam Al-Marayati, interview data, June 22, 2013).

The post-9/11 attention granted to Muslim Americans in the U.S. media has not been entirely negative, particularly for their organized groups and those who claim to speak on behalf of the community. Many journalists and publications seeking the “Muslim American perspective” have reached out to these organizations and their leaders, providing them with a forum and a degree of visibility that would have been unimaginable prior to 9/11. This increased
visibility has provided these organizations with a platform to speak on behalf of Muslim Americans and, thus, position themselves as their legitimate representatives. Leaders who presented well on screen and spoke English well—and preferably unaccented—were given access to the media in a way that would have been simply unimaginable prior to 9/11. Salam Almarayati, MPAC’s president, for example, has appeared repeatedly on MSNBC and CNN and in *The New York Times, The Washington Post*, and *The Huffington Post.*

In addition to their media visibility, a sign of these organizations’ growing importance in the policy realm has been their ability to—often successfully—challenge policies that target Muslim Americans, on both legal and moral grounds. Relying on the Constitution and the Bill of Rights as their reference point, CAIR and MPAC advocate and litigate on behalf of Muslim Americans, contesting the targeting of Muslim Americans as unconstitutional and un-American. Through this process, they are implicitly engaged in interpreting and defining American values and what it means to be an American, while asserting their place in the American nation. Further, Muslim Americans are (re)presented not only as belonging to the nation, but also as patriotic defenders of the homeland, defending the Constitution against those who seek to destroy it.

Take, for example, CAIR’s lawsuit, filed against the U.S. government on January 18, 2011, on behalf of Gulet Mohamed, a 19-year-old Muslim American who was denied re-entry to the United States after traveling overseas and being placed on the government’s No Fly list. CAIR’s lawsuit accuses the U.S. government—specifically, Attorney General Eric Holder, the FBI, and the Department of Justice—of violating the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution. The U.S. government is accused of persuading the Kuwait government of holding and torturing Mohamed on mere suspicion, and denying him “perhaps the most basic prerogative

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of American citizenship: the right to reside within the United States.”\(^{44}\) CAIR’s goals in filing this particular lawsuit are, of course, not only to remove Mohamed from the No Fly list and bring him back to the United States, which they accomplish, but also to challenge government policies surrounding the War on Terror as unconstitutional, thus presenting themselves as the protectors of the constitution. In the words of CAIR’s Corey Saylor, “the American Muslim community is now at the frontline of defending the Constitution from forces that seek to erode it” (Corey Saylor, interview date, July 2, 2013). It is worth emphasizing that it is precisely the government’s policies comprising the War on Terror that grant CAIR the platform to litigate on behalf of individual members affected by those policies, increasing their visibility and substantiating their claims to speak on behalf of a broader group.

Muslim American organizations are acutely aware of the fact that the construction of Muslim Americans as an out-group has also created a context of opportunity for them—an insight corroborated by personal interviews I conducted and by reports published by CAIR and MPAC. For example, in a 2004 report titled “The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States,” CAIR lists the most important factors affecting the social and legal status of Muslim Americans, which include: 1) the lingering atmosphere of fear post-9/11; 2) increased anti-Muslim rhetoric that portrays Muslims as followers of a false religion and/or enemies of America; 3) the USA Patriot Act; and 4) CAIR’s growth and increased resources, allowing victims to report cases which may have previously gone unreported (CAIR 2004).

Thus, the increase in anti-Muslim discrimination that resulted, in part, from the discursive practices of government and media previously examined in this chapter, has created the need for organized groups to represent and come to the aid of the targeted community, opening a space

\(^{44}\) Ibid.
and granting these organizations a role to perform. Because Muslim American groups were largely unprepared to meet the post-9/11 demands, forming partnerships with other minority and civil rights groups became necessary. These partnerships positioned Muslim American organizations among other American civil rights organizations, granting them important non-material resources such as organizational knowledge, solidarity, authority, and, most importantly, legitimacy (Jenkins 1983; Minnite 2005). Thus, the ACLU, the American Friends Committee, and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights became indispensable partners.45

This is not to suggest that coalition-building efforts did not exist prior to 9/11, but 9/11 became the critical juncture that hastened, intensified, and solidified nascent partnerships. Through these partnerships, CAIR and MPAC gained the immediate assistance they needed to aid the community, leading to a number of legal successes that further strengthened their organizations. Further, the coalitions granted both CAIR and MPAC a greater degree of social recognition and legitimacy and, most importantly for this research, embedded their mission in the broader framework of American civil rights, emphasizing their status as American advocacy groups fighting on behalf of not only Muslim Americans, but also American values and, as such, of all Americans.

The American Institutional Context as a Structure of Opportunity

In addition to the specific structural opportunities that resulted from the post-9/11 othering of Muslim Americans, these groups have also benefited from a broader political structure of opportunities specific to the American institutional context. This should come as no

45 In March 2006, for example, MPAC joined the Liberty Coalition, which includes the ACLU, MoveOn.Org, Common Cause, the American Conservative Union, and Amnesty International. The coalition’s main goal is to coordinate public policy initiatives dealing with civil and human rights.
surprise, since the institutional context in which organizations operate is a key in defining the opportunities they have for gaining access to the decision-making process (Marks and McAdam 1996; Pollack 1997; Lowery 2007).

The separation of powers, built into the U.S. Constitution and meant to ensure that no group was powerful enough to corrupt politics, also granted groups access to the decision making process. The system of checks and balances, established to prevent any one branch of government from becoming too powerful, guaranteed interest groups multiple points of access to policymakers and provided a fertile institutional ground for lobbying government and elected officials. In addition, the existence of a strong independent judiciary has enhanced the power of interest groups, many of which view legal advocacy as an important part of their work (Boehmke 2002; Maloney, Jordan and Mclaughlin 1994). Acutely aware that the courts, not the legislature, have settled some of the most important political issues of our time, Muslim American organizations have used the opportunity to access the judiciary as a means to challenge the government’s policies in the War on Terror. CAIR in particular has undertaken legal advocacy, filing two lawsuits against the U.S. government and an amicus brief to the Supreme Court.  

None of this would be possible without the advances made by previous minority and immigrant groups in pushing for increased civic and political rights. The legal and moral precedence established by the Civil Rights Movement granted Muslim American organizations an existing legal framework to demand their rights. In addition, the long history of institutionalized ethnic and immigrant mobilization in the United States provided an important guiding example and basis of reference. Muslim American organizations have used this history to their advantage, learning from and appropriating the techniques used by other minority

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46 For an account of CAIR’s legal advocacy work, see: http://www.cair.com/civil-rights/in-the-courts.html.
groups. CAIR and MPAC’s leaders both reference the model of the so-called “Jewish Lobby” and Jewish immigrant organizations, some of which they closely work with (Salam Al-Marayati, interview data, June 2, 2013; Corey Saylor, interview data, July 22, 2013). According to Corey Saylor, CAIR’s national legislative director, much of CAIR’s success in litigation efforts against anti-sharia bills being introduced in state legislatures was due, in part, to support from the Jewish community, because, according to Saylor, “the Jewish community recognizes that these laws would not only affect us, but would affect many of their practices as well” (Corey Saylor, interview data, July 22, 2013).

As previously mentioned, Muslim American political leaders rely heavily on the legal and moral precedence established by the Civil Rights Movement when framing and pursuing their policy interests, particularly those dealing with discriminatory and illegal government initiatives. Thus, CAIR’s legislative advocacy is only possible because it is functioning in a post-civil rights era; CAIR’s taking the government to court over warrantless surveillance and detentions would have been simply inconceivable before the Civil Rights Movement, something the leadership is very cognizant of (Corey Saylor, interview data, July 22, 2013). Hence, in the post civil-rights era, the law and the principle of equality under the law have given minority organizations the legitimacy and political access necessary to make their demands.

Political Leaders and the Formation of Muslim American National Organizations

Although this institutional context provides a fertile ground for interest groups to function and often succeed, the question of what motivates their initial formation remains. This is an important question; despite the abundance of studies regarding the influence of interest groups, those examining their formation are hard to find (Wilson 1995). A second and more important reason why this question is important is that—as this study argues, and unlike common
theories—the formation of interest groups does not necessarily require the existence of a collective group whose interests to represent, but rather may precede and actively constitute the group it claims to represent. Before delving into this argument (in the next chapter) and analyzing how interest groups can be constitutive of the collective group they claim to represent, I briefly summarize previous theories of group formation and dedicate the remainder of this chapter to examining the fundamental role that Muslim American political elites played in the establishment of Muslim American organizations.

Early theorists believed that interest groups were the spontaneous responses of people facing deprivation and increased frustration. People joining together to advance their common interests was not seen as puzzling until Mancur Olson’s critical analysis of group formation (Olson 1965). For Olson, participating in political action required people to invest time, energy, and resources. But since people could still reap the benefits of collective action without the cost of participating, Olson argued that people would participate only if they were provided with material incentives or coerced to participate.

Although Olson’s theory provides critical insight regarding interest group formation and participation, later scholars found that very few interest groups provide the material benefits Olson thought necessary to attract supporters (King and Walker 1991, 406; Wood 2003). These scholars emphasized the role that non-material incentives such as emotions and inspirational leaders sometimes singlehandedly play in the establishment and achievements of interest groups. For better or for worse, group leaders were found to “play an important role in determining the fortunes of individual organizations,” often becoming “the prime movers behind interest group formation” (Nownes 2003, 58). Further, movement leaders can be incentivized by personal gain and career advancement (Olson 1968), but it is more likely that moral or purposive incentives are
what most motivate them to bear the cost of participation (Berry 1977; Tillock and Morrison 1979; Wood 2001; Goodwin 2009).

Leadership, and the amount of authority granted to leadership, was one of the most important components in the formation of CAIR and MPAC. Moreover, personal interviews I conducted with the leaders of these organizations corroborate the theoretical insight that political leaders are primarily motivated by moral incentives. When asked what motivated them to establish (and maintain) their organizations, Salam Al-Marayati (MPAC’s president) and Nihad Awad (CAIR’s founder) gave similar responses, arguing that they were driven by the teachings of Islam and its emphasis on struggle, justice, and freedom. Thus, their faith and religious beliefs are interpreted in a way that provides the incentives to bear the cost of their engagement, and bear the cost they have. According to Al-Marayati, his office has been vandalized several times, he has received threatening phone calls, he has been unfairly and wrongly accused of having a “radical Islamic” agenda, and he has even been criticized as a traitor by some members of the Muslim American community. He says that rather than discouraging him, the criticism reinvigorates his work (Salam Al-Marayati, personal interview, June 2, 2013).

The narrative through which Al-Marayati explains the establishment of MPAC in many ways exemplifies the moral and purposive incentives driving organizational leaders. He relates that when, in 1988, he decided to establish an organization to advocate on behalf of the Muslim American community his goal seemed unattainable, almost laughable. In our interview, he recounted how his work establishing MPAC reminded him of a story he read to his young children, *The Little Engine that Could*: “[the engine] went up a huge mountain and it simply said ‘I think I can, I think I can,’ and that’s how MPAC has survived. It just believes that it can” (Salam Al-Marayati, personal interview, 2 June, 2013). The story is perhaps fitting when one
learns, as I did from Al-Marayati, that he began the organization with one staff member, himself, and a budget of $30,000—the result of his individual fundraising efforts. Today, according to Al-Marayati, MPAC has twelve full-time employees and a budget of $6 million.

The role of political entrepreneurs was also crucial for the funding of CAIR. According to its founders, they were mainly motivated by the negative effects that the “stereotyping and defamation” of Islam was having on their children and the overall civic paralysis it was causing within the Muslim American community (CAIR website). Nihad Awad, one of CAIR’s co-founders and the organization’s executive director since the organization’s establishment in 1994, was listed among the world’s 500 most influential Muslims in a 2009 publication produced by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center in Jordan and Georgetown University. Awad explained that his personal efforts have been central in forging greater toleration toward Islam and Muslims.47

The significance of these leaders cannot be overemphasized, particularly in the post-9/11 context. They used the newfound context of opportunity to lobby on behalf of Muslim Americans’ civic and political rights and further their legal, political, and cultural integration in the United States. Times of crisis, however, also provide political elites with the opportunity to increase their influence by “engendering ethnic insecurity through highly selective and often distorted narratives” (Brubaker 2004). In other words, political entrepreneurs can often find an opportunity to increase their own influence through narratives of fear and persecution. Seen through this lens, the emphasis on Islamophobia can also be seen as constitutive of their organizations’ role, purpose, and consequent identity. This does not mean that leaders are

engaged in purposely manipulating Islamophobia to their gain. As previously described in this chapter, the discriminatory policies through which Muslim Americans are constituted as an out-group are very real. What I mean is that the discourse of Islamophobia, like all discourses, should be seen as both constituted by and constitutive of the reality of which it speaks. Through the discourse of Islamophobia, Muslim American leaders and organizations are also constructing their own roles and purposes.

As all political leaders, the leaders of Muslim American organizations must possess and acquire certain skills to be effective: the ability to build interpersonal ties, communicate effectively, and serve as an inspirational example are among the skills exhibited by the leadership of both CAIR and MPAC. More specifically, the ability to build coalitions and alliances with other interfaith organizations is key for these leaders to represent Islam as an American religion, not a foreign one, thereby further embedding Muslim Americans in the United States. Building interpersonal ties with leaders of other interfaith and ethnic organizations is thus a crucial skill and a resource leaders rely on for promoting Muslim Americans as part of American multiculturalism. MPAC, for example, works closely with leaders of the Jewish community holding interfaith meetings and workshops and often appearing together when making public statements about civil and religious liberties. This is exemplified in a joint statement that MPAC and Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice made to Congress, on November 13, 2013, demanding immigration reform, which partly reads:

In combining our voices, we hope Congress hears that immigration reform is a priority issue across America’s many diverse communities, bringing together even those that many believe have little in common. In fact, America’s Jewish and Muslim communities share the collective experience of facing xenophobia and prejudice for their culture and faith, and being treated as outsiders in our home country.
Challenging the Othering of Muslim Americans Through Lobbying

Lobbying is perhaps the tactic with which interest groups in the United States are most commonly associated. Although lobbying is often seen as an attempt to pressure and influence elected officials, lobbyists can also be an important source of information to policymakers, thus helping formulate successful policies and strategies. Although the influence of lobbyists on actual policy formulation is often overemphasized, having access to policymakers and being able to directly present them with views and interests can be a powerful tool of persuasion (Austen-Smith and Wright 1994; Baumgartner and Leech 2001; Edwards, Wattenberg, and Lineberry 2009). Learning from the example of other immigrant and ethnic interest groups, MPAC and CAIR have both made lobbying a major part of their efforts. According to MPAC, one of its central missions is “to inform and shape public opinion and policy by serving as a trusted resource to decision makers in government and policy institutions” (MPAC website). MPAC also sees its role as educating policymakers who are often misinformed. Thus, engaging in policy debates and informing policy before it is formed is a major component of MPAC’s work. Realizing the need to be physically close to policymakers in order to engage them and build the interpersonal relationships often critical for lobbyists’ success, MPAC established an office in Washington, D.C., in 2006.

Since its establishment, MPAC’s D.C. office has been involved in lobbying policymakers and various departments within the administration on a number of issues affecting the Muslim American community, such as the War on Terror, counterterrorism policy, and preempting religious extremism. As previously mentioned but worth re-emphasizing, gaining an audience willing, sometimes eager, to hear their views was perhaps one of the most relevant opportunities

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brought about by the 9/11 attacks. As a result, MPAC has positioned itself as the representative of the “mainstream” Muslim American voice, making that voice heard on key issues that, according to MPAC, are often “written about, debated and decided without direct Muslim American voices sitting at the table.”⁴⁹ According to D.C. Office Director Haris Tarin, MPAC seeks to be at least invited to be a part of the conversation, not only because it directly affects Muslim Americans, but also because MPAC can contribute meaningfully to the debate and, thus, ensure that the soundest policy is being adopted (Harris Tarin, interview data, July 22, 2013).

**Lobbying and the Construction of Muslim American Identity**

On the surface it is easy to understand why CAIR and MPAC would want to be included in policy debates that deal with, and could therefore profoundly impact, the Muslim American community. If one looks at this issue a little closer, however, one finds a far more nuanced relationship than that of organized groups pursuing the common interests of their community. The picture that develops of these organizations—and of the Muslim American community they claim to represent—is far more complex. The historical narrative of Muslim Americans examined in Chapter One leaves little doubt as to the tremendous degree of ethnic, theological, and cultural diversity this group embodies. What is less clear is whether, despite their differences, they identify and see themselves, at least broadly, as a cohesive group that identifies with the “Muslim American” label—and, if this is the case, how this came to be.

Scholars agree broadly that post-9/11 backlash strengthened the salience of a Muslim American group identity (Leonard 2003; Read 2003; Haddad 2004, 2011; Lori, 2006). This finding is in line with social identity theory, which argues that the perception of shared threat,

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discrimination, and intergroup conflict can intensify people’s attachment to the targeted group (Dion 1975; Turner 1982; Crosby et al. 1989; Branscombe et al. 1999; Jetten et al. 2001; Schmitt, Spears and Branscombe 2003; Klein et al. 2007). Further, studies have found that discriminated-against minorities are more likely to emphasize their dual identities (as both ethnic/religious minorities and citizens), especially when communicating with audiences who may question their belonging to the group and their identity claims (Barreto et al. 2003).

Building on the insights of social identity theory, some scholars have begun emphasizing the communicative and performative aspect of identity, arguing that social identities are articulated with a particular audience in mind, and thus gain their meaning, in part, from specific interactions. Moreover, “others’ perceptions and expectations impose constraints, which in turn can shape the situational contents and meanings of social identities” (Phalet and Verkuyten 2010, 761). Taking these insights into consideration, this work examines the ways in which, through their policy advocacy, CAIR and MPAC discursively perform a specific Muslim American identity (Campbell 1992; Derue and Ashford 2010).

Thus, I argue that far from being concerned with only protecting the interests of the Muslim American community, MPAC and CAIR are actively performing a particular Muslim American identity through the issues they have selected and the positions they have taken—one that is moderate, embraces liberal democratic values, and opposes all forms of extremism. In other words, identity—in this case Muslim American identity—has “no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality” (Butler 1990: 133). It is important to highlight that this is one of many possible Muslim American identities that could be discursively represented. The U.S. policy establishment, which is by and large the target audience and
consumer of the policy reports and information produced by these organizations, inevitably shapes and influences the particular Muslim American identity that CAIR and MPAC perform.

The goal of this study is thus to analyze and explain how CAIR and MPAC (re)present Muslim American identity through various “policy acts”—by which I refer to the policy issues on which they have focused their lobbying, litigation, and public opinion efforts. Examining these “acts” will help us better understand how and what kind of Muslim American identity is being (re)presented. I argue that because of the crucial role difference and differentiation play in identity formation, foreign policy is an important site through which Muslim American identity is being performatively constituted. Moreover, I argue that the geostrategic importance the Middle East has for the United States is part of the reason why CAIR and MPAC focus the majority of their foreign policy advocacy on the region: They are attempting to position themselves as relevant to the U.S. policy establishment. Nevertheless, these organizations’ involvement in other policy acts must also be examined, because repetition across time and space is also central to the constitution of identity. The more times an “act” is performed, and the more places and institutions in which it is performed, the more it will become naturalized and seen as an inherent part of identity (Butler 1990). This is what is meant when identity theorists argue that identity is “performatively constituted”; it exists only because of the acts that naturalize and make it seem an objective reality (Butler 1988, 1990; Campbell 1992).
Policy Advocacy as Discourse

Although interest groups are an established actor in American democracy, their desirability and purported impact continue to be a source of public and academic debate. They are perceived to play a highly influential role in the policymaking process, which is understood as a bargaining process between a set of subsystems and government actors (Truman 1971; George 1980; Hilsman 1987; Nownes and Freeman 1998). More specifically, policy actors are seen as independent agents competing to achieve policy outcomes that closely resemble their policy preferences. This understanding of policymaking has acquired a taken-for-granted nature and is therefore seldom questioned.

This understanding is nevertheless based on the assumption that rational actors, with preexisting established identities, come together to promote their preferred policy outcomes. Questioning social constructions such as these—and more importantly, the assumptions on which they rely—is crucial, because specific ways of understanding have real social

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50 Also referred to as organized interests, special interests, pressure groups, and lobbies. I apply David Truman’s widely used definition of interest groups as “any group that, on the basis of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behavior that are implied by the shared attitudes.” See: David Truman, The Governmental Process, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971).
consequences. As Michel Foucault (1972) reminds us, the fact that certain discourses and ways of understanding become predominant must be examined in terms of power: The power to delimit the ways issues can be thought and talked about, consequently ruling out alternative ways of being and thinking. Thus understood, the discourse of policy advocacy as bargaining becomes, in part, a constraining discourse, leading academic inquiry to focus on questions of tactics and policy outcomes and ignore how the policy process itself shapes and influences actors’ identities and behavior.

This chapter seeks to problematize this assumption and examine how, rather than arriving at the policymaking process with established, secured identities—and therefore interests—these groups are influenced, shaped, and constrained by the context in which they operate and by the audiences they attempt to reach. Hence, theorizing identity as being performatively constituted and situationally embedded unsettles the assumptions on which traditional understandings of policymaking rest—mainly, that actors with securely established identities engage in a bargaining process, with the goal of achieving predetermined outcomes.

Rethinking policymaking as a number of acts through which the identity of policy actors is constituted can have important implications for our understanding of the policymaking process and the role interest groups play in that process. I argue that rather than arriving at the policy process with a pre-formulated set of interests and goals, it is their very participation and involvement in policymaking that constructs these actors’ identities and interests and, therefore, their goals. Even in cases when interest groups have a preconceived notion of what their interests and goals are, they are inevitably molded, modified, and often changed through their participation in the policy process.

I borrow this term from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 133.
To illustrate this argument, this work relies on an in-depth case study of CAIR’s and MPAC’s policy advocacy post-9/11. I focus on these organizations because (as of the time of this writing) they are the two Muslim American organizations engaged in policy advocacy and, thus, producing policy discourse. As argued in Chapter Two, the post-9/11 backlash against Muslim Americans created an opportunity structure for CAIR and MPAC that they had previously lacked. As the self-described representatives of the Muslim American community, these organizations were given a degree of access to government and media elites who sought their purported insider knowledge, especially on issues related to radicalism and counterterrorism. Although this access was (and remains) limited, it nevertheless provided them with opportunities that would have been simply unimaginable prior to 9/11 (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009).

However, most of the foreign policy advocacy this dissertation examines did not take place immediately following the post-9/11 backlash, but is rather a fairly recent phenomenon. A number of factors explain this. First, following the attacks these organizations were forced to make strategic decisions as to what goals to pursue and decided to focus their efforts on the more pressing issue of civil rights’ violations affecting the community. Second, the government’s response to the attacks, including the Patriot Act and the War on Terror, made Muslims (foreign and American) an increasingly important focus of U.S. policy and, hence, gradually intensified MPAC and CAIR’s involvement in foreign policy advocacy. In short, the fact that much of their foreign policy advocacy is a fairly recent phenomenon results from the institutional growth both CAIR and MPAC experienced in the decade following the attacks, as well as from broader U.S. policies that link Muslim Americans to foreign policy issues and, thus, provide the context for these organizations’ engagement.
Consequently, the primary goal of this study is to analyze how CAIR and MPAC are (re)presenting Muslim American identity through the various “policy acts” in which they engage. Examining these “acts” will help us better understand how, and what kind of, Muslim American identity is being performed. Thus, the data sources examined in this chapter and used to illustrate this argument are the policy discourse produced by these organizations. They include policy reports and recommendations, public statements, action alerts, op-eds, and elite interviews. Although the data collected through elite interviews is important, it should be seen as supplementary to the other discursive data here examined. As discourse theorists remind us, data “is anything that may be read for meaning; language, texts, pictures, events, and objects” (Morgan 2010, 3; Scollon and Scollon 2004).

Due to the role that difference and danger play in identity construction (Tajfel 1982; Connolly 2002), I argue that foreign policy advocacy is one of the major sites through which Muslim American organizations are delineating what it means to be a Muslim American. Nevertheless, their involvement in other policy areas must also be examined, because the more times an act is performed, and the more places and institutions in which it is performed, the more it will become naturalized and, thus, seen as an inherent part of identity (Butler 1988).

In other words, repetition is key to identity construction. This is what is meant when identity theorists argue that identity is “performatively constituted”; it exists only because of the acts that naturalize and make it seem an objective reality (Butler 1988; 1999; Campbell 1992). Thus, before delving into these organizations’ advocacy around specific U.S. foreign policy issues, I examine some of their domestic lobbying efforts around counterterrorism,

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52 For the purposes of this research, I define “policy acts” or “acts” as the discursive performance of the policy issues on which Muslim American organizations have focused their lobbying, litigation, and public opinion efforts.
radicalization, and civil liberties. This is important not only to explain how certain discourses, performed throughout different policy areas, represent and constitute a particular Muslim American identity, but also because Muslim American organizations view their domestic and foreign policy advocacy as intrinsically linked, a view that the War on Terror has made blatantly clear.

**Counterterrorism Advocacy: Differentiating Partners from Targets in the War on Terror**

Since the 9/11 attacks, Muslim American interest groups have become gradually involved in U.S. counterterrorism policy. Acutely aware of the potential benefit of gaining the trust—thus, the cooperation—of local communities, government officials have actively sought and welcomed the “Muslim American perspective” (Tyler, Schulhofer and Huq 2010). This, in turn, provided Muslim American interest groups with an opportunity to voice their views and critique what they largely perceived as failed U.S. counterterrorism strategy. Through their counterterrorism reports, evaluations, and analyses, MPAC and CAIR are representing the “Muslim American perspective,” but they are also inevitably shaping, delineating, and defining the perspective they claim to represent. Hence, these policy reports constitute rich sources of data through which to examine how Muslim American identity is being performed.

CAIR and MPAC’s policy advocacy on counterterrorism illustrates that difference is key to the constitution of Muslim American identity. As identity theorists often remind us, “all identity is constituted in relation to difference” (Campbell, 1992), but there is a variety of difference—multiple “others” against whom Muslim Americans are differentiated. The first of these “others” is what I refer to as “Muslim Fundamentalist/Fundamentalist Islam,” the popular image that the West, and in particular the United States, has of Muslims and Islam, and which
was briefly discussed in the previous chapter (Said 1978; Sayyid 2003). As will be illustrated through the analysis of counterterrorism reports, dispelling this image, and differentiating Muslim Americans from it, is a central component of CAIR’s and MPAC’s discourse. What Muslim American leaders seem to be saying is that “we” are not what you have wrongly made us out to be by lumping all Muslims together. Moreover, they are not only correcting that image, but also, through that process, defining and redefining who they are.

Due to its depth and reach, MPAC’s 2003 counterterrorism policy report\(^53\) is among the most important policy papers written by a Muslim American interest group.\(^54\) This report is of particular importance to this study because it exemplifies the ways in which counterterrorism, radicalization, and the erosion of domestic civil liberties are discursively linked and treated as different manifestations of the same disease: misguided U.S. policy. Accordingly, MPAC presents the report as an attempt to educate policymakers and aid in the development of “appropriate” counterterrorism policy. One of its central aims is to dissociate Islam and Muslims from terrorism, to problematize the ease with which people, groups, and nations are labeled as terrorists. Further, the report argues that Muslim Americans should be seen as key allies in the fight against terrorism, rather than treated as potentially dangerous. Thus, there is a clear effort to demarcate the cultural parameters of Muslim American identity by first and foremost disassociating Islam and Muslims from violence and foreign terrorism.


\(^{54}\) High-ranking members of government have attested to the importance of MPAC’s 2003 counterterrorism policy paper. As quoted in a Washington Times article, Attorney General John Ashcroft and FBI Director Robert S. Mueller both “recognized the importance of MPAC’s anti-terrorism initiatives and encouraged similar efforts to educate the Muslim community about federal counterterrorism efforts” (November 28, 2004: http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/nov/28/20041128-121133-2044r/?page=all).
In addition to presenting Muslim Americans as crucial assets in U.S. counterterrorism efforts, MPAC also advocates for the inclusion of “the vital voice of American Muslims within counterterrorism discourse” (MPAC 2003, 1). The term “American Muslims” is used throughout the report, even though the most commonly used term by these same organizations is Muslim Americans. It should come as no surprise that speaking to American policymakers should make these groups want to emphasize—and prioritize—their American-ness and status as members of the majority in-group.

The report begins by clarifying critical aspects of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence. Why would a report on counterterrorism strategy begin with an explanation of Islamic jurisprudence? The answer, according to MPAC, is that the crude misrepresentation of Islam has led to the alienation of the Muslim American community, a fact that “harms both the American Muslim community and the intelligence gathering capacity of the United States” (MPAC 2003, 10). In other words, harm to the Muslim American community is harm done directly to the United States by hurting its intelligence gathering efforts and, thus, its security. Linking harm done to them to harm done to the nation presents Muslim Americans as an integral—and inseparable—part of the United States.

A similar claim is reiterated in the 2004 report, “Counterproductive Counterterrorism: How Anti-Islamic Rhetoric is Impeding America’s Homeland Security,” which is dedicated to exposing the danger of racist and Islamophobic organization, presenting them, in the process, as a threat to U.S. national security. Steve Emerson’s “Investigative Project” is given special attention as one of the worst examples of Islamophobia in America. MPAC is clear to specify

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that Emerson “has the right to do and say whatever he pleases,” presenting itself as a fierce protector of the First Amendment even as it is the target of hateful—and erroneous—speech. However, just as Emerson’s freedom of speech is protected, “those who know more and do more for the cause of fighting terror” must speak out in order to contest his misguided views. Thus, MPAC positions itself as among those who “know and do more” to fight terror (hence, true defenders of America’s security), claiming that:

In the fight against terror, it is crucial that we use the insight of all segments of our pluralism. The works of Emerson and his colleagues is blunting for American Muslims to participate in our democracy. [His] lack of insight and aptitude has led to faulty analysis and sensationalized claims that misguide the public’s search for truth and squander the resources of our government in defending America. We as Americans should not allow those who are interested in the profitable industry surrounding terrorism to steer us down on the path of dividing America in the war on terror. With statements such as this, MPAC constructs Anti-Muslim rhetoric as a national-security issue, not only a civil-rights issue, because it leads the government to squander resources that could be used to fight the real threat, rather than the imagined one. Thus, Islamophobes who seek to paint Muslim Americans as potentially dangerous pose a threat to not only the Muslim American community, but also to the American nation. Further, figures like Emerson are presented as the real traitors for seeking to divide “us” while profiting from “our” collective national security. Muslim Americans are thus constituted as members of the American in-group: It is Emerson and Islamophobes like him who fall outside its boundaries.

U.S. counterterrorism policy is stringently criticized for the ways in which it implicitly and explicitly links terrorism, Islam, and the Middle East and “identifies terrorism with the identity of the perpetrator, rather than the nature of the act itself” (MPAC 2003, 33). MPAC buttresses its critique by claiming that it is one also made by many U.S. allies skeptical of the United States’ designation of terrorist groups, a skepticism “reflected in the reluctance of nearly
all other nations, including U.S. allies in Europe and elsewhere, to designate groups such as Hizbullah and Hamas as terrorist organizations.” Further, the State Department’s designation of “state sponsors of terror” is critiqued for further equating Islam with terrorism. MPAC argues that even though countries such as Cuba and North Korea are on the list, “Iraq and Iran … Libya and Syria have been more persistently singled out for the sponsorship of terrorist organizations,” and that these “designations quite often involve considerations that have little to do with formal intelligence reviews and threat assessments” (MPAC 2003, 28).

MPAC also recommends that law-enforcement focus its counterterrorism efforts on criminal behavior, rather than thought. The argument being made, of course, is that extremist beliefs do not necessarily lead to violent behavior; thus, it is not extremists who should be feared, but people whose behavior and actions are cause for concern. In other words, MPAC claims that thoughts and beliefs, no matter how fringe or radical, should not be criminalized, arguing that the “ideological approach” to law enforcement is “a profoundly un-American activity that does not enhance security” (MPAC 2003, 46). By arguing that criminalizing a person based on their thoughts, beliefs, and opinions—as abhorrent as they may be—is un-American, MPAC is implicitly claiming to both know, and seek to protect, what is truly American. Since what it means to be American is constantly shifting and being (re)defined, MPAC is constituting Muslim American identity, but in the process, it is also attempting to define what counts as authentic American values.

By positioning themselves as the protectors of true American principles, Muslim American interest groups are implicitly linking Muslim Americans to other American minorities who have struggled for their civil rights and, consequently, those of all Americans. In the words of CAIR’s Corey Saylor:
Right now, we are under the lens and what I say to people is: this is our opportunity. All these other groups before us have defended liberty in this country. We have the African American community to thank for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which we use all the time to defend our community. Today the lens is on us, we have to hold the line and try to defend those civil liberty protections (Corey Saylor, interview data, June 22, 2013).

Positioning themselves as the defenders of the core American principles of freedom, justice, and liberty is a central building block in the representation of Muslim American identity. As such, it is a theme that is continuously emphasized across policy discourse, which will be further examined in the discussion on foreign policy engagement.

Although their policy reports are meant primarily for policymakers and members of the government, MPAC is acutely aware that their audience also includes the broader public, including members of the Muslim American community. In “Recommendations for the American Muslim community and Organizations,” MPAC states, “while some individual Muslims, motivated by political agendas rather than religious guidance, have sought (and may still seek) to inflict harm on American citizens and interests, the American Muslim community … is an integral components of American civic and political life, and can have a positive impact on American civil society” (MPAC 2004, 78).

Claiming that the main impetus driving Muslims seeking to harm the United States is political in nature implies that those who carry out terrorism are not motivated by their religious beliefs. This could be seen as an attempt to disassociate the broader religion (and thus the majority of Muslims) from the politically motivated acts of a few. Further, distinguishing between the teachings of Islam on one hand and politically motivated acts on the other can also be seen as echoing the American separation between Church and State; thus, a way to further

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56 In MPAC, Counterproductive Counterterrorism: How anti-Islamic rhetoric is impeding America’s homeland security, December 2004: http://www.mpac.org/assets/docs/publications/counterproductive-counterterrorism.pdf
naturalize Islam, and Muslims, in the United States.

The specific recommendations made to the Muslim American community provide a fascinating example of elite (re)presentation of Muslim American identity. In many ways, these recommendations illustrate that CAIR and MPAC’s policy advocacy is as much an attempt to influence their target audience as it is about performing a particular Muslim American identity. These recommendations constitute CAIR and MPAC as reasonable, moderate, and mainstream policy actors that are seeking to guide their communities in ways that are acceptable and conducive to the aims of the broader policy establishment: These suggestions should be seen as a (re)presentation of American Islam as well as for Muslim American identity. Take, for example, the following suggestions:

• National Muslim organizations should develop educational materials and other initiatives designed to educate law enforcement officials.

• The nation’s leading Muslim organizations should work in concert with other civil liberties groups to protect America’s constitutional freedoms

• Muslim religious institutions should take steps to mitigate extremism and angry rhetoric by establishing educational and training programs that:

  (1) emphasize the importance of tolerance, citizenship, and social/civic responsibility as Islamic values; and

  (2) educate mosque officials about their responsibilities regarding irresponsible speech and/or activity on their premises.57

As can be gleaned from the above recommendations, some of the key qualities Muslim American grassroots leaders and organizations should possess and promote are tolerance, civic values, responsibility, and cooperation. Further, by presenting these values as Islamic values MPAC is positioning itself as an authority on Islam with the ability to tell religious leaders how

Islamic values should be interpreted and promoted. Although MPAC is a policy organization, not a religious one, and has no credentials on Islamic jurisprudence, through these recommendations it nevertheless presents itself as able to make claims on Muslim religious institutions. Whether these recommendations are actually heeded is less important for the purposes of this research than what they say about the kind of Muslim American identity MPAC is discursively performing. Further, it is worth bearing in mind that this discourse differentiates Muslim American identity not only from Muslim Fundamentalist/Fundamentalist Islam, but also from illiberal and conservative interpretations of Islam, such as Wahhabism, which the same MPAC report defines as “an exceptionally austere and puritanical interpretation of Islam that rigidifies the faith.” Thus, through these policy recommendations, CAIR and MPAC counter fringe conservative interpretations and constitute a liberal, democratic, and tolerant American Islam.

These sentiments, and the desire to differentiate American Muslims from “other” Muslims were reiterated by Dr. Maher Hathout, MPAC’s senior advisor and a leading Muslim American scholar, who described fundamentalist interpretations of Islam as having no place in America: “If you are fascinated by the ways things are done in Saudi Arabia, be my guest, go there. But don’t try to implant Saudi Arabia here, because this is a foreign body that will be rejected” (Maher Hathout, interview data, June 2, 2013). The other, in this case, is represented as an illiberal and dogmatic Islam, a foreign other that will be rejected by American Muslims upholding the real message, and thus the essence, of Islam.

**Policy Discourse, Othering, and Muslim American Identity Construction**

As discussed in previous chapters, integration into American society and the normalization of Muslims and Islam in America are major concerns of Muslim American interest
groups. This should come as no surprise, particularly if we recognize that the loyalty of Muslim Americans and the compatibility of Islam and democracy have become increasingly questioned in the post-9/11 context. In 2004, for example, almost half of Americans believed that the civil rights of Muslim Americans should be restricted, and 27 percent believed that they should be asked to register with the federal government (Cornell 2002). Further, 46 percent of all Americans and 55 percent of conservative Republicans believed Islam was more likely than other faiths to encourage violence; only 22 percent believed that Islam and their own religions had a lot in common (Pew 2009). In this context of heightened suspicion regarding the belongingness of Muslim Americans, it could be reasonably expected that the interest groups that claim to represent the community would focus their policy engagement on domestic issues, such as those previously discussed, and recoil from engaging in U.S. foreign policy debates, particularly when their views run counter to those espoused by the official U.S. foreign policy establishment.

What we find, however, is that far from withdrawing from these debates, CAIR and MPAC continue, and at times intensify, their foreign policy engagement. Although puzzling at first, if we understand their foreign policy engagement as a site where Muslim American identity is being performatively constituted, the latter becomes, in a very real sense, a central way of being and becoming. The question remains, however, as to why these organizations would choose to focus on foreign policy as opposed to solely domestic issues. After all, there is always a plethora of domestic groups through which out-group/in-group differentiation can be

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established and a Muslim American identity constructed, so why not focus on only domestic
differentiation?

Part of the answer to this question, I argue, lies in the fact that foreign policy advocacy
discursively differentiates Muslim American identity from a variety of foreign Muslims, and
helps cement Muslim Americans’ belonging to the American nation (De Cillia, Reisigl, and
Wodak 1999; Hall 2001; Martin 1995; Benhabib 1996). In other words, having a “Muslim other”
serves to more clearly define what it means to be an “American Muslim” by demarcating the
latter from an “other” (non-American) Muslim. Through this discursive performance, Muslim
Americans are (re)presented as part of mainstream American society—that is, as belonging to the
American in-group.

Foreign Policy as Discourse

This work understands discourse in the Foucauldian sense as “practices that
systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972). Critical discourse analysis
is, therefore, best understood as a way to reveal the contradiction between and within discourse,
with the goal of both questioning and deconstructing the subjects which discourse forms and
which become “taken-for-granted” (Burr 1999). But what, exactly, are these discursive foreign
policy acts through which CAIR and MPAC perform Muslim American identity for the U.S.
policy establishment? I argue that there are four major foreign policy discursive sites through
which identity is being performed: 1) the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; 2) democratization in the
Muslim world; 3) violent religious extremism; and 4) U.S. policy toward Iran. As previously
mentioned, part of the reason why these foreign policy issues comprise the focus of their
activism is primarily due to the Middle East’s geostrategic importance for the United States.
Thus, these groups’ focus on the region is best understood as an attempt to make themselves relevant to the policy establishment by focusing on the issues with which the establishment is concerned.

To make this claim is not to suggest that these are all the discursive practices through which Muslim American identity is being constituted; in any given historical time and social context there are multiple discourses through which individual and social identity is (re)produced (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Rather, I argue that in the post-9/11 context, and in the context of the wars and international conflicts that have followed, foreign policy has become one of the dominant discursive sites for the construction of Muslim American identity—albeit not the only one. Because the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a focal point of policy engagement for these organizations, Chapter Four is solely dedicated to an in-depth case study of MPAC and CAIR’s policy engagement toward the conflict. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the other three foreign policy discourses: democratization in the Muslim world, violent religious extremism, and U.S. policy toward Iran.

**Democratization in the Muslim World**

**The Iraq Invasion**

A close examination of CAIR’s and MPAC’s democratization discourse, particularly post 9/11, serves to further illustrate the notion of discourse as being constitutive of, and constituted by, social practice. It is no secret that democracy in the Muslim world has, for many years, been a major theme of U.S. foreign policy. Following the attacks of 9/11 and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the theme of democratization gained increased political and international significance, with the Bush administration attempting to legitimize the war on Iraq as a step in its broader strategy
of democracy building in the region. The argument put forth was that deposing Saddam Hussein and establishing the foundations of a democratic state would make Iraq a beacon of democracy that other countries in the region would seek to emulate. The U.S. intervention and subsequent war in Iraq became an important focus of CAIR and MPAC’s advocacy; it not only bolstered their existing concern with U.S. foreign policy, but also engendered debate and critical analysis regarding the role that Muslim Americans should play in advising and informing their government vis-à-vis democratization in the Arab and Muslim world (Harris Tarin, interview data, June 22, 2013).

The policy reports, analyses, and recommendations made to government officials regarding the invasion and subsequent U.S. strategy were a way through which CAIR and MPAC sought to inform and influence U.S. foreign policy. Their policy activism was also, as this dissertation argues, a site for the performance of Muslim American identity. Through their engagement with these issues, the organizations negotiated and delimited what could be legitimately argued, presenting and representing Muslim American identity in the process. Their very participation in foreign policy advocacy—attending government panels, presenting their recommendations to elected officials, and producing foreign policy reports aimed at members of government—relied on a particular understanding of dissent and opposition from within and, in the process, reflected and reproduced that understanding (Fairclough 1992).

Following Saddam Hussein’s fall, for example, MPAC released a statement declaring it “wished Saddam Hussein had avoided this war by heeding our call … to step down from power.”60 MPAC is, of course, not only referring to its own demands for Saddam Hussein to step

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down, made at their annual convention on December 22, 2002; it is linking its demands to those of the United States. After all, who could forget the ultimatum made by former president George W. Bush on March 17, 2003: “Saddam Hussein and his sons must leave Iraq within 48 hours. Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing.”

It is perhaps surprising to see MPAC apparently supporting President Bush’s demands by blaming the war on Hussein’s refusal to heed U.S. demands. However, if we understand foreign policy as a discursive site where Muslim American identity is being performed, MPAC’s agreement with certain aspects of the U.S. foreign policy establishment should come as no surprise. Even when critical of U.S. foreign policy, the groups are speaking first and foremost as American organizations driven by their duty to protect American interests.

Even though it was supportive of a limited intervention, MPAC remained critical and apprehensive of the scope of the mission, recommending that the invasion be as short as possible to allow completing “our” responsibilities. MPAC’s initial agreement with the basic U.S. policy goals of deposing Hussein and establishing the foundations of a functioning democratic state should in no way be taken to signal support for subsequent U.S. policy, particularly the long-term military occupation of Iraq. MPAC opposed intervening militarily to depose Hussein and became increasingly critical of the long-term occupation and prolonged conflict that ensued from the initial invasion. Nevertheless, MPAC’s initial agreement with a limited U.S. mission to depose Hussein is remarkable, considering that 75 percent of Muslim Americans were against a U.S. invasion (Pew 2007, 5).

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Their position, however, becomes less surprising if we understand the audience that national Muslim American organizations are trying to reach. These organizations’ primary audience, and the target of their policy discourse, is the U.S. policy establishment—including policymakers and institutions such as the military, intelligence, and security—not the broader Muslim American public they claim to represent. Although highly unpopular among Muslim Americans, there was strong government support for a limited intervention to depose Saddam Hussein; supporting that position was one of the ways MPAC sought to reach its primary audience and legitimize its position as a policy advocacy group.

While claiming to speak on behalf of a minority that is often perceived as disenfranchised, especially institutionally, CAIR and MPAC are attempting to be policy insiders and to appeal to members of the U.S. policy establishment. As interest groups, increased inclusion in the policy process is the primary goal (Goldstein 1999; Haris Tarin, interview data, June 22, 2013). As opposed to grassroots organizations, interest groups cannot rely purely on oppositional strategies, such as protests, boycotts, rallies, and civil disobedience to achieve their goals, because their goals are fundamentally different. Al-Marayati is candid about this point, arguing that the interests of the community will be met not by protesting but by claiming access to decision-makers and making the demands of the community heard where it matters: in the centers of power (Salam Al-Marayati, interview data, June 2, 2013).

Organizations are driven by different goals, resulting in different strategic calculations. Although organizations usually have a choice about the strategies they pursue, they are also shaped, constrained, and influenced by their strategic choices. A tactic of policy engagement on the part of these groups presents them with great opportunities to reach the upper echelons of the foreign policy establishment, with potentially immeasurable impact. At the same time, the
strategy delimits the boundaries of what can be legitimately said and done, thus influencing the kinds of discursive practices that become privileged and the identities that are consequently performed and constituted.

However, this should not be taken to suggest that these groups are completely homogenous or that no dissonance exists; on the contrary, CAIR’s tactics and discourse surrounding the initial invasion of Iraq differed drastically from MPAC’s. What it does suggest is that these organizations are constantly negotiating the expectations of their primary audience (policymakers), while attempting to gain legitimacy from the group whose interests they claim to represent (Muslim Americans). An example can be seen by examining CAIR’s stance toward the war on Iraq, which differed significantly from MPAC’s, at least initially. In a statement released on February 27, 2003, only a few days before the invasion, CAIR stated its unequivocal opposition to the war:

[an] American attack on Iraq would almost certainly lead to the death of many innocent civilians, further destabilize an already unstable region, harm international efforts to combat terrorism, drain much-needed financial resources from our struggling economy, and set a dangerous precedent for unilateral intervention in the affairs of other nations. Any American invasion and occupation of Iraq will fuel anti-American sentiment and would thereby harm our nation's image and interests in areas outside the Middle East.\(^2\)

Nevertheless, the differences between CAIR and MPAC’s positions on the Iraqi invasion should be seen as differences of degree, rather than principle. Both organizations see promoting and defending American interests and security as their primary goals. Further, they both make claims to the same guiding principles of justice, human dignity, and freedom, basing those claims on Islamic jurisprudence and American values. They differ over the question of how best

to achieve these principles, and how U.S. interests could best be served. Whereas MPAC envisioned the possibility of a limited U.S. intervention to establish the foundations of a democratic state in the Middle East as potentially beneficial to U.S. interests, CAIR saw any intervention in the Muslim world as harmful to American long-term security and economic interests.

Even while blaming the initiation of war on Saddam Hussein, MPAC called on the United States to recognize that its past support of dictatorships in the Middle East, as well as its biased support of Israel, had led to the region’s instability and, consequently, to the weakening of U.S. interests. Muslim American organizations recognize the importance of promoting not only procedural democracy, but also the democratic principles of justice, human dignity, and the rule of law to securing long-term U.S. interests. These organizations’ foreign policy activism is also aimed at holding U.S. policymakers accountable for their support of dictatorships and rogue elements in the region, which (re)presents them as staunch defenders of American democratic principles. Buttressing their demands with Islamic values, they argue that because they are Muslims—not in spite of that fact—they are able to best promote and protect key American democratic values.

*America’s Role in the Arab Spring*

Although CAIR and MPAC’s policy discourse surrounding the “Arab Spring” is an extension of their broader discourse on democratization, its relevance in the performance of Muslim American identity deserves separate analysis. By presenting their policy positions regarding the Arab Spring in general and calling for the United States to intervene in Syria

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63 Also referred to as the “Arab Awakening” or the “Arab Uprising,” the term refers to the period of mass demonstrations and regime transitions in the Middle East, beginning in December 2010 in Tunisia.
intervention in particular, these organizations are discursively associating Muslims and Islam with the Arab world and signaling to their audience that the region is of significant importance to them as Muslims. In the process, perhaps ironically, they are also helping to reproduce discursive representations that lump Muslims with Arabs and portray Muslims as inherently connected to the Middle East.

Following President Obama’s Cairo Speech, CAIR—in conjunction with other representatives of the Muslim and Arab American community—released a statement applauding the president’s stance but cautioning that the principles of the speech must be translated into “actions and concrete policies.”64 In his statement, CAIR’s Executive Director Nihad Awad argued that, especially because of its past history in supporting the region’s dictators, the United States could not remain neutral, but must rather support the masses’ demands for freedom and human dignity. By making reference to U.S. policy in the region, Awad emphasized that the United States was partly responsible for the state of affairs and that, therefore, U.S. neutrality is not an option. Through his statement, Awad (re)presented support for freedom and human dignity as fundamental aspects of what it means to be a Muslim American.

Calling for the United States to support the “masses’ demands for human dignity and freedom” is not a particularly controversial position to take. Calling for a direct U.S. intervention is, particularly in a post-Iraq war context. If we bear in mind what this dissertation argues, however, that through their foreign policy advocacy CAIR and MPAC are performatively constituting a particular Muslim American identity, their stance toward an American intervention in Syria becomes somewhat less of a puzzle.

Both CAIR and MPAC called for the United States to “act” and bring an end to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Whereas CAIR called for the Obama administration to “act without delay,” MPAC urged a limited U.S. intervention in Syria. In a policy paper titled “On Intervention in Syria” and presented on Capitol Hill, MPAC states its “support for [the] decisive and quick support for military intervention in Syria with important conditions [emphasis not mine].” Some of these conditions include no troops on the ground, executing the military strike in a way that will lessen civilian casualties, and a commitment from the international community to rebuild Syria after the conflict has ended.

MPAC argues that its recommendations are based on “the Islamic value of establishing justice and preserving human life,” arguing that the United States cannot stand by and allow al-Assad to continue his gross violation of international law. The claim being made is that, as the world’s superpower, the United States has a duty to uphold international law, which al-Assad flagrantly violated by using chemical weapons against his own people and crossing the “red line” drawn by President Obama. The United States is therefore called to act in order to fulfill its duties and bring an end to the suffering of the Syrian people. Perhaps aware of how potentially unpopular their recommendation would be among Muslim Americans and the broader American public, the attempt to differentiate the case of Syria from that of Iraq is a direct statement: “we must be clear: Syria is not Iraq”; although the Iraq war was based on lies, “with Syria, there are no such questions. The evidence has been clear and compelling.”

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67 Ibid.
How can we explain the fact that Muslim American interest groups are calling for the United States to intervene, albeit on a limited basis, in a Muslim majority country? In order to answer this question we must account for the ways in which Islamic values and jurisprudence are interpreted through these organizations’ discourse. Arab dictators who oppress their people, violate their human rights, and deny their dignity are presented as being in stark violation of both Islamic and international law. With Islamic and American principles established as being one and the same, these dictators are therefore also against American law and the core principles of freedom and respect for human dignity. Defining the Arab Spring as driven by people’s yearning for freedom and justice—rather than socioeconomic changes in the region or the geostrategic calculations of regional powers—allows Muslim American groups to more easily legitimize their positions as being against injustice and oppression. Further, they seem to make a distinction between violence to oppress (what Arab dictators have done, and what the United States did in Iraq) and violence to end suffering and oppression, which is what they call for in a U.S. intervention.

Interestingly, Muslim American interest groups are seeking to advise not only U.S. policy officials, but also officials of foreign governments seeking a “Muslim American” perspective. Perhaps as a way of responding to the uprisings, the Moroccan government invited a delegation of Muslim and Arab American organizations, scholars, and religious figures to discuss and advise the government about political reforms and democracy. As the announcement put out by CAIR points out, “James Gomez, a representative of Jesse Jackson … a government affairs consultant and former George W. Bush advisor also formed part of the delegation.”

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emphasizing the presence of even junior government advisors, CAIR attempts to endow the delegation and its role in it with some degree of institutional legitimacy.

One of CAIR’s representatives to the delegation, Omar Zaki, said during his visit to Morocco that the delegation “hope[s] to share what we have learned with our community and the larger [American] society.” Thus, members of the Muslim American community are constituted as having something meaningful to contribute regarding democratization and the role that Islam and Muslims can play in a democracy. This perception is also internalized by Muslim American elites: By agreeing to advise the Moroccan government about “political reforms and the process of strengthening democracy,” they are signaling that their position as Muslim Americans gives them a unique and potentially helpful perspective on issues of democratization (Grewal 2013).

Democracy and the Historical Narrative of Islam’s Founding

All discourse relies on a particular historical narrative in order to produce meaning. CAIR and MPAC’s representation of Muslim American identity functions by emphasizing a common Islamic history, and history has always to do with remembrance and memory (Halbwachs 1992). To understand and accurately examine a particular discourse, one must therefore take into account its sociohistorical context and the historical narratives it explicitly or implicitly relies on (Wodak 2009). Reference to the role democracy played in the history of Islam’s founding is a major theme emphasized by both organizations and an important practice through which meaning is relationally produced. CAIR and MPAC’s (re)presentation of Islam as inherently

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releases/11788-u-s-muslim-arab-american-delegation-visiting-morocco-to-discuss-political-reforms.html.

69 Ibid.
democratic is a central way through which their policy positions are legitimized, along with the
democratic, liberal, and pluralistic Muslim American identity that is being performed.

Organizational leaders often claim Islam’s democratic essence and its resulting natural place in American democracy. When describing what he perceived to be the role of Muslim Americans post-9/11, CAIR’s Corey Saylor said, “maybe this is conceit on my part, but I honestly and sincerely believe that in many ways the American Muslim community is now at the frontline of defending the Constitution from the forces that would erode it” (Corey Saylor, interview data, June 22, 2013). It is interesting that he begins his statement with “maybe this is conceit on my part,” a seeming attempt to minimize the formidable task he is imposing on Muslim Americans, while emphasizing that he “honestly and sincerely” believes his assertion. Saylor’s hesitancy indicates a degree of awareness that his claim may not, in fact, be representative of and accepted by those on whose behalf he’s speaking.

Laying claim to America’s racial history and discursively placing Muslim Americans within this history is one way through which the discourse of democratization relies on history and social context in order to produce meaning. This is what Fairclough refers to as “interdiscursivity,” the reliance on previous discourses in the articulation of a communicative act. All communicative events, it is argued, draw on previous events, thus rearticulating and redrawing the boundaries of any specific discourse (Fairclough 1992). In other words, history is inescapable. By positioning Muslims within American history, politics, and culture, Saylor contests the common misconception that Muslims are foreign to America and somehow a threat to its social fabric.

Democratization discourse further draws on a particular historical construction of Islam’s founding and of the role that democracy played in the religion’s establishment. Evidence of this
can be found by analyzing a 2005 United States Agency for International Development (USAID) forum, “Building a Democratic Future,” in which Muslim American interest groups and academics were invited to participate. In a panel on “Islam and Democracy,” MPAC’s then-National Director Ahmed Yonis emphasized “the intimate role that democracy played in expanding Islam in its early years.”

Yonis highlights the compatibility of Islam and democracy and simultaneously presents the two as inseparable, because, he argues, democracy allowed Islam to propagate and become the religion it is today. The panel further argued that early Muslims had a “fundamental need for consultation, negotiation, and due process in arriving at decisions that affected the entire community.”

Emphasizing aspects of participatory democracy that are readily associated with the United States—consultation, negotiation, due process—and discursively claiming them as “fundamental” for early Muslims and Islam is an attempt to define Islam in its original form as not only compatible with democracy, but also intrinsically democratic, even before the establishment of modern democracies.

Speaking about how to reconcile Islamic theology with secular forms of government, Salam Al-Marayati argues that Muslims must understand that the combination of religion and government is a bad mix, something he claims early Muslim theologians were acutely aware of. Furthermore, he argues that classic Islamic jurisprudence calls for the separation of religion and state: “Imam Ja’far, who was a great scholar of Islam, declined taking any power. He said the ‘ulema should be separate from the state. That classical Islamic jurisprudence understanding is missing today, that there needs to be a separation, a wall of separation, between religion and the state” (Salam Al-Marayati, interview data, June 2, 2013). Citing Imam Ja’far, a revered scholar

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71 Ibid.
for Shia and Sunni Muslims alike, is a way through which intertextuality is used to legitimize a particular discursive representation of Islam as inherently democratic—and secular.

It is important to note that this is, at least in our historical context, not the narrative most privileged by the majority of Muslims, including the Muslim Americans whom MPAC claims to represent. Corey Saylor argues that although the great majority of his American values are in agreement with his values as a Muslim, there are small differences, such as the fact that “in Islam there is not so much of an embrace of secularism.” Nevertheless, he argues that secularism is the right form of government, because when “faith communities have ran governments, they don’t really have a good track record, no matter what the faith” (Corey Saylor, interview data, June 22, 2013). Although both organizations embrace the discourses of democracy and secularism, it is interesting to see the different modes of rationalization through which they are manifested. On the one hand, Al-Marayati presents secularism as central to an accurate understanding of Islamic theology. On the other hand, Saylor argues that even though secularism is not necessarily strongly embraced in Islam, it is nevertheless the right form of governance, because when religion and governing collide, the result is disastrous for both.

In a March 2014 speech (“Is Sharia Compatible with Democracy?”), Saylor delves further into the theme of secularism, arguing that the term *sharia* has been hijacked by popular discourse, which erroneously defines it in opposition to American law. To define and explain *sharia* law, Saylor quotes from an American constitutional law and Islamic law professor at the University of Wisconsin, Asifa Quraishi-Landes, highlighting the fact that she has a “doctorate

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72 Corey Saylor, “Is Sharia Compatible with Democracy?” speech delivered at the University of Maine, March 24, 2014.
from Harvard Law School, among other honors.\textsuperscript{73} Drawing from, and highlighting, the legitimacy of one’s source is a way through which legitimacy is gained tangentially, a further example of Fairclough’s principle of manifest intertextuality (Fairclough 1992, 117). Her definition is worth citing, because it highlights, as Saylor does in his speech, the fundamentally interpretative nature of \textit{sharia} that this discourse of Muslim American organizations relies on:

\textit{Sharia} refers to the way that god has advised Muslims to live, as documented in the Quran and exemplified in the practices of Prophet Muhammad. In other words, \textit{sharia} can be understood as the Islamic recipe for living a good life. But of course, no one can taste a recipe. We can only taste the product of a chef's efforts to follow one. In addition, different chefs can follow the same recipe and still come up with quite varied results.

Saylor dedicated the remainder of his speech to dissecting this definition and examining its compatibility with Western democracy. He argues that Muslims understand that “the process of understanding God’s will is ongoing” and that “there is the ideal of divine law, and the reality of human interpretation.” Further, relying on Quraishi-Landes’ metaphor, he states that \textit{sharia} is a recipe, but different people will create different dishes from it. Saylor emphasizes that the term “democracy” is similarly contested and open for interpretation, but that, nevertheless, if one examines the basic guiding principles of both \textit{sharia} and democracy, one finds them to be not only compatible but also equivalent. Citing Islamic jurisprudence and the Declaration of Independence, Saylor finds the following guiding principles in both documents:

\begin{itemize}
    \item The right to the protection of life.
    \item The right to the protection of family.
    \item The right to the protection of education (intellect).
    \item The right to the protection of property (access to resources).
    \item The right to the protection of human dignity.
    \item The right to the protection of religion.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
There is no dissonance between *sharia* and democracy; in fact, both are fighting the same enemy, “extremists who claim Islam motivates them,” who, by doing so “provide the breeding ground for much of the anti-Muslim extremists we are living through today.” By linking Islamic extremists to the anti-Muslim extremism they engender, Saylor is positioning Muslims not only as perpetrators of extremism, but also as victims of it—presumably in the form of Western Islamophobia—arguing that rather than “adopting an ‘us [Americans] vs. them [Muslims]’ attitude, we can adopt a ‘we are all in the struggle against violent extremism together’ approach.”

**Countering Violent Religious Extremism**

In the aftermath of 9/11, religious extremism provided MPAC and CAIR with a key site in which to demarcate the differences between Islam and Muslims and violent extremists. Since the attacks, MPAC claims to have “doubled its efforts to both understand what drives people to commit acts of violence in the name of Islam and also what drives people to spread Islam’s message of equality mercy and justice.”

What is interesting is the juxtaposition between “people who commit acts of violence in the name of Islam” and “Islam’s message of equality mercy and justice”: violence is not a message found in Islam, but an act committed in its name; the message that is found—and, thus, presented as inherent to Islam—is that of equality, mercy, and justice. MPAC further claims that whereas law enforcement should not criminalize thought, community leaders “must focus on extreme ideas that may cause a person to eventually pursue

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74 Saylor, Corey, “Is Sharia Compatible with Democracy?” speech delivered at the University of Maine, March 24, 2014.

violence.” MPAC presents the Boston Marathon attacks and the Tsarnaev brothers as a case study, and asks whether local mosques and community leaders could have intervened to rectify their behavior and dissuade them from the path of extremism that culminated in the attack.

The report’s intended audience is described as the “American Muslim grassroots leadership,” positioning MPAC as a national representative of Muslim Americans with the legitimacy to speak to, and advise, local and grassroots leadership. The report argues that fighting violent extremism is “what God commands us to do,” because the Quran mentions that if anyone murders a person, it is as if he has murdered all of humanity. Arguing that violent extremism is a “backward ideology” that is inherently against the teachings of Islam—quoting the sayings of Prophet Mohammad as further evidence—is a way to disassociate violent religious extremism from Islam, the majority of Muslims, and Muslim Americans. If we agree that meaning is produced through opposition, referring to extremism as a “backward ideology” is one of the ways through which mainstream Islam is performatively (re)presented as modern and progressive.

MPAC’s three-step approach\(^{76}\) to dealing with extremism, which includes prevention, intervention, and ejection, places great emphasis on understanding the community’s specific problems and contexts that may be conducive to extremism. Interestingly, the report highlights as a major problem the fact that most U.S. mosques are understaffed and lack a full-time imam, leading to a dependency on untrained and unqualified volunteers who can—often inadvertently—promote a misguided version of Islam. The reliance on foreign-born imams is also highlighted as a potential problem, because these leaders “may be disconnected from certain segments of their congregations [and] unaware of or unable to constructively address

\(^{76}\) See: MPAC, Safe Space Initiative: http://www.mpac.org/safespaces/.
contemporary issues affecting their communities such as drug/alcohol use, gangs, non-marital sexual activity, internet safety, etc." Foreign-born imams are thus constituted as being concerned with archaic rather than “contemporary issues,” and out of touch with the perils of modern Western society—presumably because these are not issues they would face in their home countries.

The more recent example of the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is vehemently criticized by Muslim American organizations—and most Muslims around the world—with CAIR describing it as “un-Islamic and morally repugnant.” CAIR also supports the U.S. decision to bomb ISIL fighters in Northern Iraq (yet another intervention in the region), asserting their support for not only this “limited” intervention but for further U.S. “actions” in the Muslim world.

We applaud the humanitarian effort to assist those surrounded by ISIL extremists in Iraq and hope the compassion expressed for Iraqi civilians will lead to similar actions to alleviate the suffering of civilian populations of Gaza, Burma (Myanmar), Syria, and the Central African Republic.

Whether the actions envisioned and encouraged are military or political is left unclear, but since “similar actions” as the U.S. bombings in Northern Iraq are encouraged, it is reasonable to deduct that further “limited” U.S. bombings for “humanitarian” purposes would not be opposed. Thus, CAIR is condemning the terror wrought by extremist Islamic groups, such as ISIL, while linking different forms of violence against civilians with extremist violence. The United States is commended for intervening on behalf of Iraq’s non-Muslim minorities and simultaneously chastised for not doing so on behalf of Muslims in other ongoing crises.

Ibid.


Ibid.
The irony of Muslim American organizations calling for further U.S. interventions in some Muslim majority countries has already been examined and will be explored in the following pages. It is worth emphasizing, however, that CAIR’s support for a U.S. intervention against ISIL reflects not only their strong rejection of the group and its goals, but also a critique of the United States’ erratic foreign policy. CAIR presents ISIL and extremist groups like it as grave threats to international security and human rights, but the lack of a U.S. response to end the suffering that authoritarian regimes impose on their own people is equally presented as a threat to international security.

U.S. drone strike attacks have become another important focus of CAIR and MPAC’s advocacy. In May 2013, CAIR presented a report to the first Senate Hearing regarding the constitutionality and counter-terrorism implications of drone strikes, arguing that although it supports “our nation’s war against al-Qaeda … we as a nation must ensure that the rule of law and respect for human life is preserved while responsibly targeting al-Qaeda.”

CAIR is careful to distinguish between a war on al-Qaeda, which it supports, and the broader “War on Terror,” which it opposes, arguing that its breadth has led to the targeting of a broad category of Muslim Americans both at home and abroad. Further, CAIR unequivocally condemns the targeting and extrajudicial killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, an American citizen suspected of terrorism killed by a drone strike in Yemen. Basing its claims on al-Awlaki’s Constitutional rights presents CAIR as a staunch defender of U.S. law. What CAIR is therefore signaling is that it supports the U.S. government’s war against al-Qaeda, as long as that war stays within the boundaries of what is legally and constitutionally permissible.

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Further, CAIR argues that the use of drones is a threat to U.S. “moral authority” and, as such, contradicts America’s long-term security interests. CAIR claims that “the U.S. cannot concede its moral authority by hastily using its lethal weapons and technology to needlessly take lives and injure civilians.” Emphasizing the causal relationship between U.S. policies and violent extremism is a way to communicate to both the policy establishment and the Muslim American community that it is not Islam, but misguided policies, that engender violent extremism. CAIR’s role is, therefore, to guide their government to pursue effective policies in dealing with the threat posed by violent extremists.

U.S. Policy Toward Iran: The Nuclear Proliferation Discourse

During the early months of 2012, a major U.S. foreign policy debate revolved around whether the United States should strike and attempt to annihilate Iran’s nuclear capabilities. CAIR and MPAC were vociferous voices in this debate, engaging policymakers and presenting policy recommendations to members of the military and security establishment (Haris Tarin, interview data, June 22, 2013). At the height of U.S.-Iranian tensions, MPAC asserted that its primary goal was “to serve [as] a voice of pragmatism and level-headed thinking during a time of excessively politicized debate about an issue which carries significant military, economic, and political consequences far beyond the immediate region.” Presenting itself as a “pragmatic” and “level-headed” actor implicitly represents decision-makers as misguided, impulsive, and irresponsible. Defining those charged with making the decision to strike Iran as irresponsible

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also constitutes MPAC as a rational actor whose objective is, above all else, to avoid a potentially disastrous decision for the United States.

In addition to presenting its policy recommendations on Capitol Hill,\(^3\) MPAC made a number of media appearances critiquing U.S. policymakers who called for war with Iran. During a roundtable discussion on Russia Today, for example, Salam Al-Marayati argued that although nuclear proliferation by Iran or any other nation is a threat to a “safe and more secure American and global society,”\(^4\) that threat can only be addressed through diplomatic engagement. It is important to emphasize that although MPAC opposes a military strike against Iran, U.S. national security is the main lens through which Iran’s actions are seen and measured. By linking the security interests of the United States with those of “global society,” Al-Marayati presents the United States as the global superpower and the guarantor of global stability. Thus, both Iran’s nuclear proliferation and a U.S. attack on Iran are threats to long-term U.S. interests and, consequently, to the global order.

In a rare instance where a political mobilization strategy is pursued, MPAC issued an action alert to its members—through its listserv and website—urging “all concerned citizens” to contact their elected officials and ask them to vote no on Resolution 362, which called for war with Iran.\(^5\) The action alert provided suggested talking points, including the need to give diplomacy a proper chance, as well as the potential security and economic repercussions a strike

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\(^4\) Russia Today, Cross Talk, Taunting Tehran, January 18, 2012 video can be seen at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6tj9HHgNQA.

on Iran can have on the United States. Through a direct call to political action, MPAC is not only telling Muslim Americans what policy toward Iran the United States should pursue, but also engaging and empowering them as active citizens and participants in their country’s democracy. The effects this can have on the way a politically disenfranchised minority perceives itself and its relationship to its government cannot be overemphasized. These organizations are framing what issues should concern Muslim Americans and telling them exactly how they should understand their position on policy issues and act based on those modes of understanding.

For example, MPAC claims that its opposition to a military strike against Iran is based on the “security, economic, and political ramifications” it would have for the United States; arguing that a military strike would not further American interest, MPAC called for a diplomatic, rather than a military, solution to the conflict. Nevertheless, its opposition to a military strike should not be seen as acquiescence; on the contrary, MPAC is highly critical of the Iranian regime, arguing that it opposes “on religious grounds, both the theocratic and authoritarian nature of the current Iranian political system.”

Framing their opposition “on religion grounds,” is a way of demarcating what is legitimately within the borders of Islam and, therefore, what falls outside of it. Further, it (re)presents theocracy and authoritarianism as anti-Islamic forms of government, something that is perhaps difficult to perceive when looking at the political map of the Muslim world. Defining what Islam is against, and what Muslim Americans oppose, is a primary way through which CAIR and MPAC performatively constitute Muslim American identity. Thus, if support for

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authoritarian and theocratic governments is fundamentally against Islam, then support for regimes that respect the rights and freedoms of citizens—and are secular—is what defines Islam.

Similarly, Nihad Awad’s statement following the Nuclear Agreements deal, signed by Iran and the United States in Geneva, states that while Muslim Americans welcome this move and hope it will lead to an easing of the decade-long conflict between the two countries, they “call on Iranian leaders to realize the un-Islamic nature of their massive political, military, and financial support for the brutal Syrian dictatorship.” Through the practice of interdiscursivity, which, as previously mentioned, relies on the articulation of different discourses in a single communicative act (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002), Awad is linking the authoritarian and theocratic nature of the Iranian regime with the perpetuation of the Syrian conflict.

**Foreign Policy and Muslim American Identity**

Through their advocacy on issues of U.S. foreign policy, these organizations are actively performing, negotiating, and delimiting the contours of Muslim American identity. The very act of engaging policymakers and presenting the Muslim American perspective is an act of creating, establishing, and grounding Muslims as an important, albeit small, American minority. Further, Muslim American interest groups are attempting to claim their place in America by presenting themselves as a constructive voice and a part of the solution to the foreign policy problems plaguing the United States, rather than a source of those problems. As demonstrated in this chapter, however, the identity that these organizations are performatively constructing through

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their foreign policy discourse is one that, like all identities, privileges certain narratives and ways of being, while marginalizing others.

Regardless of how one may perceive the secular, liberal, and democratic Muslim American identity these organizations are performing, this representation can be alienating to Muslim Americans who may not accommodate this narrative. As was previously argued, that which is difference is never neutral, but always inferior to the values one assigns to oneself (Derrida 1978). Thus, “fringe Muslims,” the “other” against which Muslim American identity is oppositionally constituted, are represented as backwards, misguided, unable to understand the core message of Islam, and, therefore, not really belonging to the Muslim community. Foreign policy advocacy becomes a way through which a distinctive American Islam is presented and, in the process, communicated as superior to a variety of foreign (and corrupted) interpretations of Islam.

The policy issues examined in this chapter comprise major discursive sites in the construction of Muslim American identity and highlight how discursive practices are performed and, thus, continuously recreated. As previously mentioned, however, one of the foreign policy issues that has engendered the greatest degree of involvement from the part of Muslim American interest groups is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Rather than naturalizing their engagement on the conflict, the following chapter will seek to explain why, even though the majority of Muslim Americans have no direct connections to the conflict and are not directly affected by it, it is one of the foreign policy issues that most drives CAIR’s and MPAC’s advocacy.
Chapter Four

Policy Activism Toward the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

One of the most important issues to us is, of course, the Palestinian-Israeli issue because this is central to what America is in the Middle East and the Muslim world.

—Salam Al-Marayati

The construction of a shared narrative, imagined past, and collective struggle is key to engendering the emotional attachments that drive individuals to identify with a collective identity. The historical accuracy of a particular narrative is not important; what is important is the process through which the latter comes to be accepted, internalized, maintained, and, when called for, reimagined (Ricoeur 1988; Bhabha 2013; Ram 1998; Wodak et al. 1999). This chapter argues that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the most important foreign policy issues engaging Muslim American organizations and, as such, is a crucial part of the narrative through which Muslim American identity is being constituted.

Through this narrative a unifying grievance is constructed—mainly the United States’ biased support of Israel; those culpable are located—U.S. policymakers; and a way to remedy the situation is provided—pressuring policymakers to shift their strategy. As will be shown in this chapter, one of the master frames in the construction of this narrative is the pursuit of justice frame (Snow and Benford 1992). What Muslim American organizations are seeking is not
simply an end but a just resolution to the conflict. As this chapter will describe, this discursive frame plays a central role in the narration of Muslim American exceptionalism.  

Although polling data measuring the importance of the conflict for Muslim American organizations vis-à-vis other policy issues is lacking, qualitative data here examined—including elite interviews, speeches, publications, and social media announcements made by MPAC and CAIR—highlight the discursive prominence of the Palestinian Israeli conflict. As MPACs president Salam Al-Marayati explains:

Palestine is an issue that unites Muslims because the issue goes back to the beginning of colonial rule in the Muslim world and is the longest ongoing occupation of our time. The conflict also relates to Jerusalem, a city that historically has been shared by and is significant to Muslims, Christians and Jews. Now its shared status is threatened by occupation and the incessant desire of the West to control the Muslim world by striking at its heart, Palestine.

Thus, Palestine is represented as “the heart” of the Muslim ummah—its most vital and important part. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a symbol of the long history of Western colonial meddling: its last visible, palpable, unapologetic remainder.

Evidence of the conflict’s centrality can also be gauged by examining the discursive emphasis Muslim American organizations grant it vis-à-vis other international issues. On its website’s “About” page, for example, CAIR uses 1,480 words to describe its policy work on the Palestinian-Israeli issue, compared with 415 words for its work on Iraq; 84 words for its policy efforts toward Iran; and 96 words for its advocacy surrounding the U.S. war on Afghanistan. Presenting its policy positions (albeit superficially) on a variety of foreign policy issues is a way

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for CAIR to assert its relevance to the U.S. policy establishment. Nevertheless, compared with other foreign policy issues that have a more immediate impact on the United States, such as the war in Afghanistan, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is granted a disproportionate degree of attention. Explaining the reasons for these organizations’ emphasis on the conflict is, thus, this chapter’s central aim. From the 801 Twitter messages sent by CAIR during the height of 2014 Gaza conflict, 91 more than 50 percent (405 messages) used the word Gaza either in the text of the tweet, or in the hashtag “GazaUnderAttack.” 92 Since the social media spike took place during a time of acute crisis, these numbers cannot be considered representative; nevertheless, these organizations’ social media activism and their emphasis on the dissemination of information related to the Israeli invasion, at the very least, suggests that they consider the narrative of the conflict to be of particular importance. Their social media activism is thus a way through which they engage in the narration and representation of the conflict.

Similarly, the conflict is the only issue that merits a specific paragraph on the foreign policy page of MPCA’s website. 93 Even though the organization has published 10 policy reports dealing with a variety of foreign policy issues, the only policy report mentioned by title in this section is “Envisioning Peace: a Muslim American Perspective for Dealing with the Palestinian Israeli Conflict.” Although polling data is needed to more precisely measure the weight these organizations give to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the qualitative data indicates that both CAIR and MPAC place greater discursive emphasis on the conflict relative to other foreign policy issues perceived to affect the community. The degree to which this emphasis, as well as the

91 Messages examined were from July 22 to August 23, 2014.
92 This data comes from a content analysis I conducted.
93 See: http://www.mpac.org/issues/foreign-policy.php#.U_uQCUu5fwI.
policies and tactics pursued by these organizations, reflects the attitude of the wider Muslim American community, is an important question, which will be examined in Chapter Five.

The goal of the chapter at hand is to examine the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a discursive site in the construction and negotiation of a Muslim American identity. It focuses on how the conflict is defined through CAIR and MPAC’s engagement, and how these organizations legitimize their engagement by claiming the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a Muslim American issue. The goal of this chapter is not simply to examine the positions of these organizations vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but to examine how, through their policy engagement, positions, and demands, they attempt to perform a unified Muslim American identity and, thus, draw the boundaries of Muslim American identity.

**Defining the Conflict**

In a prelude to one of its reports, MPAC refers to the conflict as “one of the most complicated and intractable of our time,” because it can be alternatively defined as a religious clash, a dispute over land, or the last remnant of colonial policies. This is an interesting way of introducing the conflict, since it presents it as being, in part, a conflict over narrative, meaning, and interpretation. MPAC claims that since there is no basic agreement regarding the nature and root-causes of the conflict the first struggle is to define, and thus frame, what the conflict is about. As social movement theorists remind us, frames are contested processes where actors struggle over meaning and identity (Benford and Snow 2000). Frames are often developed with particular target audiences in mind; however, frames developed with a particular audience in

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mind can unintentionally alienate other potential target audiences (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2011).

This insight is consistent with MPAC’s framing of the conflict, which is aimed primarily at the U.S. policy establishment. Whether this frame represents or alienates the broader Muslim American public is an important question, which the following chapter attempts to address.

Frames are also representations of an organization’s identity; they are “ways in which movement activists seek to construct their self-presentations so as to draw support from others” (Oliver and Johnston 2000, 1). Thus understood, MPAC and CAIR’s framing of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is primarily a way through which these organizations define and perform their own identities as policy advocacy groups in front of their audience—the policy establishment. Thus, what is important to emphasize for the purpose of this research is that the way in which MPAC defines and frames the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is, fundamentally, a way through which the latter performs its own identity as a rational and secular American policy advocacy group.

Having established the existence of a number of possible interpretations and perspectives, MPAC defines the conflict as one of territory, arguing that “from the perspective of the Muslim American community … the Israeli Palestinian issue is perhaps most fruitfully understood as a strenuous struggle between the national aspirations of two peoples particularly over land, the same land, Palestine.”95 As such, the narrative of the conflict that is privileged is a secular and territorial one between two national groups, not a religious and primordial one between Muslims and Jews. The report also claims that American religious communities, including Christians, Jews, and Muslims, play an important role in promoting peace. Thus, while defining the conflict in secular terms, the impact that religious minorities can have is discursively emphasized, serving to legitimize the policy activism of Muslim American interest groups. MPAC claims that

95 Ibid.
their engagement with the conflict is the arduous path to pursue, because it provokes the hostility of government officials, the “Israeli lobby,” and even some members of the Muslim American community. Further, it acknowledges how difficult it is for Muslims to “get past the sense of injustice that accompanies not only the details of the conflict, but also the denigration of Islam and Muslims by some political partisans of Zionism.”

Although the report begins by defining the conflict in secular terms, it makes ample reference to the effects the conflict has had on Muslims (as opposed to Palestinians/Israelis). It argues that a first step is for Jews and Muslims to recognize each other’s histories and collective pain: Just like it is important for Muslims to understand the history of Zionism and the significance of Israel for Jews, the Jewish community must understand “the importance of Palestine, Jerusalem, and the collective pain our community feels.” The community that is represented here is not only Palestinians, who suffer as a consequence of being denied their territorial rights, but all Muslims who suffer and feel the collective pain of this injustice. Highlighting Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam, serves to further link Palestine with Muslims, thereby making Muslims protagonists in the conflict.

The association between the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Muslims is important for two reasons. First, identifying as a victim of the conflict—even if indirectly—grants Muslims American interest groups legitimacy to speak about the issue to policymakers. Second, it signals to the broader Muslim American community that this issue affects them, and should, therefore, concern them. If we recall the Chapter One discussion regarding the immense ethnic, religious,
and ideological diversity among the Muslim American community, developing this collective narrative becomes a crucial step in the construction of a pan-ethnic Muslim American identity.

MPAC further argues that although it is difficult for Muslims to get past the pain and sense of injustice (again linking Muslims with Palestinians and the conflict), too few Muslims understand the history of European/Christian anti-Semitism that the Jewish people have suffered. Thus, the report acknowledges the suffering of the Jewish community and the importance of the Zionist project in providing salvation to European Jews, while placing the blame for their collective suffering on European/Christian anti-Semitism. The underlying message is that Palestinians and Muslims have nothing to do with this historic injustice for which they are now paying the price.

Another interesting technique is the reliance on international law as supporting evidence for the arguments and claims being made. The major laws that these organizations refer to in order to substantiate their positions are the Fourth Geneva Convention, which establishes the constraints and obligations of occupying powers, as well as United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which call for Israel’s withdrawal from territory captured during the 1967 War and thus form the legal basis for a two-state solution. In one of its major policy reports on the conflict, “Envisioning Peace: A Muslim American Perspective on the Israeli Palestinian Conflict,” MPAC claims that “we” acknowledge the existence of Israel as a viable, independent state and support the rights of Palestinians to return based on U.N. Resolution 242. “We” in this case can be construed as MPAC and the Muslim American community it claims to represent.

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99 Ibid.
Acknowledging the existence of Israel and its right to exist as a viable state is a way to differentiate Muslim Americans from other Muslims who may not explicitly acknowledge Israel.

Thus, Muslim American interest groups are positioning themselves as reasonable and mainstream voices in the conflict, whose aims are to promote the consensus of the international community, not question or contest that consensus. Working to uphold international law positions these groups as “insiders” to the system of international law and civilized international community. It also distinguishes them from Muslim groups that condemn, question, or dismiss international law and espouse armed resistance instead.\(^{100}\) The degree to which the broader Muslim American community accepts, shapes, and is shaped by this narrative is yet to be examined.

Citing the Geneva Convention, MPAC states its recognition and support for the right of people living under occupation to resist their occupiers. It equally recognizes the limitations to various forms of resistance, especially in dealing with civilians and non-combatants. They base this recognition on international laws protecting civilians, but also on Islamic law, arguing that, “the traditional understanding of Islam prohibits suicide and killing civilians.”\(^{101}\) Once again, by claiming that their policy positions are based on the “traditional understanding of Islam,” MPAC is both privileging and defining what traditional understanding of Islam is, thus positioning itself as a mainstream organization speaking for the majority of mainstream Muslims. Further, discursively linking the principles of Islamic and international law subverts the purported

\(^{100}\) Hamas, for example, at least rhetorically claims to seek the establishment of a Palestinian state in all of historic Palestine (and has yet to officially recognize the State of Israel), which is inconsistent with international law and a two-state solution. Other groups, such as Islamic Jihad, view armed struggle as the only option available for the Palestinian people.

incomparability between Islam and the West. There may very well be other interpretations and understandings of Islam, but MPAC is saying that these other understandings are fringe elements outside any traditional and accepted understanding of the religion. Basing its policy positions on the principles of both international and Islamic law also constitutes MPAC as a legitimate voice in the dialogue (Snow and Benford 1992).

Further, these organizations critique current U.S. policy toward the conflict for not promoting what is in the best interest of the United States. The argument made is that, as the leader of the free world, the United States has a vested interest to uphold and promote international law and that it should therefore support a two-state solution for its own national interest. Reminding U.S. policymakers of their responsibilities as key members of the international community constructs these organizations as a voice of reason holding U.S. policymakers accountable to their declared principles. Claiming that violating international law hurts US national interests is a way they perform their role as defenders of the nation, driven by their duties as citizens to promote what is in the best interest of the United States. As MPAC’s Maher Hathout puts it:

As Muslims we are supposed to be persons of integrity and of truth and so we are very critical about the blind support of the United States to Israel, and we always clarify: not the support, the blind support! You support a country against the interests and the values of the United States, so somebody should have to say, “stop it” for the sake of America (Maher Hathout, interview data, June 2, 2013).

CAIR similarly frames its policy advocacy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a duty to protect America’s national interests. In a message sent through its listserv, CAIR shares an op-ed, originally published in The New York Times, in which Stephen Walt responds to critics of his

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and Mearsheimer’s *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. 103 Walt emphasizes that blind support for Israel hurts U.S. national security and dis-incentivizes Israel from seeking a peace agreement, jeopardizing the long-term prospects of the Jewish state. In other words, U.S. support of Israel benefits none of the actors involved. By sharing this letter through its listserv and publishing it on its website, CAIR is discursively associating itself, and its positions, with those of Walt’s. Further, adopting the argument that unqualified U.S. support of Israel is against U.S. (and Israeli) interests presents CAIR as an advocate of a long-term solution to the conflict that seeks to benefit all parties involved.

Both CAIR and MPAC strongly opposed the decision, made by the United States and Israel, not to recognize the Hamas government following the 2006 elections, and criticize what they view as policies aimed at punishing Palestinians for voting democratically. Through their critique, they are not only stating their unequivocal support for democracy, no matter the circumstances and condition; they are holding the United States and Israel accountable for violating the democratic principles they claim to uphold. In so doing, they are defining themselves as staunch supporters and protectors of the democratic values fundamental to the identity of the United States, thus highlighting and emphasizing their American-ness. As argued in Chapter Three, framing Muslim Americans as the protectors of American values is a major way through which CAIR and MPAC are performing Muslim American identity.

Through their policy engagement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, CAIR and MPAC constitute Muslim American identity, while consequently being constituted by this discourse. Their policy advocacy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not developed in a vacuum, but relies

on intertextuality; the principle that all discourse, whether written texts, spoken language, or imagery, incorporates elements from previous discourses, forming an “intertextual chain” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2003; 73). As previously examined, these groups’ policy stances and positions toward the conflict incorporate and are thus linked to other discourses, especially those found in international law, Islamic jurisprudence, and American values and interests. However new meaning is created through the very process of interpretation and selection. One way to conceptualize this is the way in which writers quote previous authors in order to legitimize the claims they put forth, “chaining” their thoughts, arguments, and texts with those of previous authors while, in the process, creating something new (Wodak, 2001: 87).

Seen as such, intertextuality is a producer of both stability and change. It allows meaning to be recreated and reconfigured, but the fact that we must rely on preexisting discursive practices in order to make our claims results in a degree of stability and permanence of discourse and of the knowledge structures it creates (Fairclough 1993, 137). CAIR and MPAC’s advocacy on U.S. foreign policy, particularly on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, is illustrative of this fact. Through the various policy reports, papers, and education campaigns aimed at policymakers, these groups are aiming to question, influence, and potentially change U.S. policy toward the conflict. Simultaneously, however, their reliance on a particular set of practices, mainly those of policy advocacy, democracy, and international law, delimit what can legitimately be said and argued, thus guaranteeing a degree of stability. In other words, these groups are also themselves being shaped and constituted by the discourse they must rely on in order to make their claims.

Thus, rather than viewed in instrumental terms, the democracy and international law discourse is best understood as a force shaping how these organizations have come to define themselves, their identities, and their goals. This is because discourse is always in a “dialectical
relationship with other social dimensions [it] does not just contribute to the shaping and reshaping of social structures, but also reflects them” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, 61).

Proposals for Solving the Conflict: Promoting Change, Reflecting Stability

As self-described advocacy organizations, MPAC and CAIR have both proposed a number of specific steps for the United States to bring a resolution to the conflict. Addressing their proposals directly to U.S. policymakers and elected officials positions these organizations as insiders with access to government. In turn, this has influenced the kinds of demands that they make as well as the tactics they use to achieve them. Closely examining their policy positions104 will help explain how their organizational identities are influenced by their attempts to position themselves as policy insiders. Through their performance of a Muslim American stance vis-à-vis the conflict, these organizations are also delimiting what solutions are within the realm of what can be potentially imagined and, therefore, pursued.

The most basic and reiterated of their demands are “mutual recognition” and the creation of a viable Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The demand for recognition to be “mutual” is important, because it both challenges and adds to the common demand for Israel’s recognition. Thus, Muslim American organizations are challenging the discourse that demands Palestinian recognition of Israel and demanding, instead, the recognition of both Israel and Palestine’s right to exist. Similarly, they argue that for a two-state solution to be feasible, the United States must demand the dismantling of all settlements in the

104 Although minor differences exist, the policy stance of MPAC and CAIR are cohesive enough to comprise a unified Muslim American organizational stance. To the degree that they exist, differences on specific policies will be highlighted.
West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights.\textsuperscript{105} It is important to emphasize that these messages are aimed at a dual audience: the U.S. policy establishment, but also, indirectly, the Muslim American public. The implicit claim is that what is in the best interest of the Muslim American community is also in the best interests of the United States.

U.S. policy toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is thus implicitly linked to one of the gravest threats to U.S. national security: violent religious extremism. This is because “long-standing conflicts, and particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict [are] the main source of Anti-American feelings in the Muslim world.”\textsuperscript{106} Framing their engagement toward the conflict around U.S. national security serves to constitute Muslim Americans as patriotic citizens working to advance their nation’s interests. Through their policy advocacy, interest groups are also signaling their commitment to a struggle that holds important emotional significance for the community they claim to represent.

Muslim American interest groups are acutely aware of the conflict’s symbolism and the emotional attachments Muslim Americans feel toward it (Wood 2001). Thus presenting current U.S. policy as biased, futile, and dangerous signals and constitutes it as a moral outrage, or as Haris Tarin put it, the “great moral failure of our generation” (Haris Tarin, interview data, June 22, 2013). This is an important legitimation tactic. Just as emotional incentives can motivate individuals to join movements (Wood 2001; Goodwin et al. 2009), it can motivate them to support the interest groups that claim to be working on their behalf. Thus, the reclamation of moral dignity is an important component of these interest groups’ positions toward highly


symbolic issues, such as Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the Separation Wall, and the status of Jerusalem.

A good example of the moral claims made by these organizations can be seen in MPACs stance toward the Separation Wall. MPAC condemns the Wall as a grave violation of Palestinians’ human rights and an obstruction to any peace prospects. Although Israel and the United States justify it as a security barrier against terrorism, MPAC claims its real purpose is to “annex large tracts of Palestinian land [which] separates people from their land [and] severely breaches their right to freedom of movement, their right to property and their right to gain a livelihood.” What stronger way to speak as Americans than to echo that most American of sentiments: “that all men are created equal and independent, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The discursive construction of the Wall as a threat to the inalienable human rights articulated in the U.S. Constitution, and granted to all men, signals that rather than being a foreign concern, it is one that should concern all Americans.

Although the major policy stances of MPAC and CAIR toward the conflict converge, CAIR pursues a slightly different advocacy strategy, focusing on the more immediate violations of U.S. law and American citizens. This is best understood to result from an organizational decision, particularly following 9/11, that legal advocacy would be the most efficient way to challenge government policies. In fact, according to Corey Saylor, legal advocacy comprises the

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107 Israel began building what it refers to as a “security barrier” in November 2002. From Israel’s perspective, the barrier is intended to stop Palestinian attacks. Palestinians see the barrier, or the Wall, as an Israeli attempt to usurp more Palestinian land, thus obviating the prospects of a Palestinian state. On July 9, 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled that the Wall was in violation of international law and called for its dismantling.

core of his organization’s efforts—an effort for which it employs nearly twenty-five full-time attorneys and legal experts (Corey Saylor, interview data, June 22, 2013).

CAIR’s discourse surrounding the Palestinian Israeli conflict is thus more directly concerned with violations of U.S. law. The organization’s legal advocacy has sought to contest Israel’s narrative of victimization and present Israel not as an indispensable ally of the United States, but as a foreign country pursuing its own best interests. Further, CAIR has “repeatedly questioned Israel’s apparent violation of America’s Arms Exports Control Act of 1978,” arguing that the act requires “foreign governments receiving American weaponry,” to use those weapons only for internal security and legitimate self-defense. Hence, discursively framing its opposition to Israel, a foreign government potentially violating U.S. law, while claiming its rightful position as an American organization speaking in defense of American law and values. CAIR, Muslim Americans, and those who criticize unconditional U.S. support of Israel are not un-American, as often charged, they are American patriots seeking what is best for their country—as opposed to Israel, a foreign government seeking its own self-interests.

In fact, American citizens are constructed as direct targets of Israeli violence. CAIR’s demands are centered not only on protecting the lives of innocent civilians, but also “the lives of American civilians living in the Occupied Territories.” During the Israeli Hezbollah conflict of 2006, for example, CAIR demanded that the United States safeguard the lives of more than 25,000 of its citizens living in Lebanon, arguing that “if a call for the full cessation of attacks on the civilian population of a U.S. ally is too much to ask for, at least we can demand that Israel stop its bombing campaign long enough to evacuate American citizens. The highest duty of any
president is to protect the lives of Americans.”109 American citizens, including Muslim American citizens living in or visiting Lebanon, are thus presented as targets of Israeli violence The main responsibility of the United States, therefore, is to protect its own citizens from the conflict and, implicitly, from Israeli violence. Claiming that “our” main duty is to protect “our” own citizens against a foreign threat discursively shifts the source of threat—from Palestinian (and Muslim) violence to Israeli violence waged upon American civilians living in the region—and decisively asserts the belongingness of Muslim Americans to the American nation.

Although CAIR focuses a great degree of its policy advocacy toward the conflict on the more immediate violations of U.S. law, both organizations agree on the major policy positions espoused by international law: the establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one, the right of return for all Palestinian refugees and their decedents, and the rights of the occupied to resist their occupiers. MPAC is clear in referring to the right of return as a non-negotiable principle, arguing that, it “recognizes, in accordance with UN resolution 194 the right of return for all Palestinian refugees to the land from which they were expelled.”110 Similarly, CAIR describes the right of return as “a common position among those seeking justice for Palestinians.”111 Emphasizing the right of return as an issue of justice and a concept at the core of Islamic theology, as well as international law, legitimizes their demand on legal and moral grounds.

Finally, MPAC explicitly supports the right of Palestinians to resist the occupation, basing its support on the Geneva Convention, which grants “the right of occupied people to resist occupation” (MPAC 2007, 6). However, its support extends only to what it perceives as legitimate types of resistance, in particular non-violent resistance, which it promotes as “the most recommended course of action.” Hence, Palestinians have a right, derived from international law, to resist occupation, but the type of resistance recommended by MPAC is inevitably reflective of its position as an American institution, embedded in American civil life, and influenced by the narrative of American civil rights movements. I do not mean to suggest that non-violent resistance is an exclusively American form of resistance. What this does suggest, however, is that the limits of what can be envisioned and promoted as legitimate resistance is determined by the specific institutional context in which these organizations function and the fact that they are positioning themselves as American institutions working within the American political system.

Thus, the context in which these organizations function limits the kinds of demands they can legitimately make and the degree of change they can legitimately pursue. Although their goal is to change U.S. policy toward the conflict—and, therefore, the status quo—the demands they make are based on a broader framework of understanding that guarantees and reproduces policy stability (Farjoun 2010). In other words, these organizations’ position as advocacy groups that seek to reach policymakers establishes the limits of what can be reasonably demanded, meanwhile preventing other alternatives from being imagined. Their policy demands seek a change to the status quo, while re-inscribing the relatively stable proposals for bringing about that change—proposals that revolve, primarily, around a two-state solution.
Dilemmas of Engagement: Advocacy, Protest, and the 2014 Gaza Conflict

Although distinguishing between social movement organizations and interest groups can be difficult (McAdams, Tarrow, and Tilly 1996; Burnstein 1998; Burnstein and Linton 2002), it is broadly agreed that whereas social movement organizations must involve collective participation and a unifying ideology (Tilly 1984; Tarow 1994; Diani and Bison 2004), interest groups require neither and are often established and managed by policy specialists and private foundations seeking to influence public policy (Walker 1991). Taking this basic distinction into account, this study has conceptualized CAIR and MPAC as interest groups. These organizations are neither membership based nor rely on collective participation; they were established by individuals and are run by policy specialists, and they pursue standard interest group tactics, such as lobbying and litigation. More importantly perhaps, they self-define as advocacy organizations and promote engagement from within, rather than pressure from below, as the most effective strategy to effect change. The goal, according to MPAC’s senior advisor, Dr. Maher Hathout, is:

To make our voice heard as much as we can, and we do that by being around the table. We don’t want to stand out and shout and protest. We are a non-protesting group; we want to engage. All I want from you, Mr. policymaker, is [for you] to listen to the other side of the story. I have a narrative that you didn’t have a chance to hear, so let me give it to you and alsalam alaikum [peace be upon you]. We found that this is much more effective than all the demonstrations and picketing and shouting and screaming. We want to engage, educate, empower, not to protest or object (Maher Hathout, interview data, June 2, 2013).

Nevertheless, even while they attest to its futility in driving policy change, social protest is often promoted by these organizations, which suggests that it may serve a different purpose. I argue that rather than a tool for driving change, mass contestation can also be seen as a discursive tool through which these organizations signify the importance of their demands, substantiate their inclusion in the policy process, and legitimize their roles as representatives of
the Muslim American community. Thus understood, social mobilization serves to performatively constitute CAIR and MPAC as legitimate representatives of Muslim American interests.

Take, for example, CAIR’s “letter-writing” campaign, which encourages Muslim American constituents to sign and send a prewritten letter to their elected representatives, calling for an immediate end to Israel’s targeting of civilians. The letter was written by the organization and distributed (by hand) by CAIR staff and volunteers to members of the Muslim American community during Ramadan events.\textsuperscript{112} It is interesting to note that rather than being encouraged to individually write letters voicing their concerns—which may have led to a far more heterogeneous sample of opinions and demands being voiced—Muslim Americans are provided with a prewritten letter in which their concerns are, in a very literal sense, constructed by CAIR. This serves to present a homogenous Muslim American position, while positioning CAIR as the champion and protector of that position. Although by signing the letter Muslim Americans acknowledge and accept its content as their own, they are nevertheless relegated to a passive role of signing (or refusing to sign), as opposed to actively voicing their own demands.

In an action alert sent through its listserv, MPAC encourages Muslim Americans (and “all people of conscience”) to participate in their “10-10-100 for the people of Gaza” campaign. In an interesting convergence of interest group and social mobilization tactics, MPAC argues that although thousands have participated in pro-Palestinian demonstrations, “making change on a

policy level requires direct engagement with policymakers.” The campaign calls on people to pray for peace in Gaza throughout the last ten days of Ramadan, contact ten public officials and demand an immediate cease fire and humanitarian aid to Gaza, and donate $100 to “vetted charities” with proven records of working to help Palestinians—hence the campaign’s name: 10-10-100.

Activism toward the 2014 Israeli war on Gaza is justified by the organization in the same terms that policy engagement toward the broader Palestinian-Israeli conflict is justified: a threat to U.S. national interests and a violation of our rights as Americans. A press release issued by CAIR states it succinctly: “[Y]our tax dollars are being used to pay for Israel’s killing of more than 1,900 people, mainly civilians, in Gaza.” Speaking at a D.C. rally co-sponsored by CAIR, Executive Director Nihad Awad declared, “I am upset with my government, because my government does not represent the values of America of peace, justice, and equality for all,” claiming that the Israeli Defense Force should be renamed the “Israeli Offensive Against Civilian Population Forces” and that Israel’s targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure is “in defiance to what we stand for as Americans.”

Awad presents elected officials, and Congress in particular, as working against the interests of the American people, thus distinguishing the American public, who are presented as fundamentally supportive of Palestinian rights, from their elected officials, who are presented as subservient to the State of Israel. Further, Awad argues that “Israel has become a strategic

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115 CAIR Director Speaks at D.C. Rally for Gaza, August 2, 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRvFVJIrRbtY.
liability on the United States.” The implicit message, of course, is that our government is putting the interests of Israel before those of the United States. What better proof of this claim than the case of Tariq Khdeir, a young American of Palestinian descent who, while visiting family in Palestine—and allegedly attending a rally to protest the brutal murder of his young cousin—was detained and severely beaten by Israeli soldiers. In another action alert, CAIR demands an immediate U.S. investigation and urges Muslim Americans to “make their demands heard” by signing an online petition that will be forwarded to elected officials. The action alert includes a link to the video of Khdeir’s beating. The message is clear: Even when one of our own—“an American-born citizen,” as emphasized in the alert—is harmed by Israeli action, the United States fails to act.

But why would our elected officials support Israel at the expense of American interests? The answer, according to Awad, ironically lies in the corrupting role that interest groups have on the policy process: “AIPAC should have its hand off the United States Congress … they have corrupted our foreign policy. They have corrupted our political leaders.” The only way to remedy the situation is for political leaders to “reclaim their allegiance to America and American values” as opposed, it is to be assumed, to AIPAC and Israel. Muslim Americans, as well as the rest of the American public who are critical of U.S. policy toward Israel, are thus the true American patriots; American leaders who uncritically support Israel are the group whose allegiance is questionable.

A similar point is made by MPAC in a press release, “America’s Shameful Lonely Vote,” which criticizes President Obama’s national security advisor, Susan Rice, for remarks she

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117 Ibid.
delivered to the National Jewish Leaders Assembly. Rice’s comments are described as “one sided” and reflective of the Administration’s pitiful concern with “maintaining Israel’s approval of us.”^118 The motivation for the specific policy being discussed^119 is not the pursuit of U.S. interests, but the pursuit of Israel’s approval. Because of this, the vote is a “stain on our record and a breach of trust with the American people,” who reasonably expect their government to seek their best interests, and not those of a foreign country.

In a separate statement, MPAC adds that it would be a “travesty for our government to turn a blind eye to collective punishment, illegal settlements, and disproportionate use of force against an occupied people,” adding that “if our government is truly the ally to Israel it says it is, let it be the first to call out Israel’s unacceptable actions.”^120 Hence, MPAC presents Palestinian, American, and Israeli interests as fundamentally linked and based on a just resolution to the root causes of the conflict (i.e., the occupation). According to CAIR and, even more directly, MPAC, the conflict will end—and thus Israel, the United States, and Palestinians will find long lasting peace, security and stability—only with the creation of an independent Palestinian State.

In another press release, “What [John] Kerry Should do During his MidEast Trip,” issued on July 22, 2014, MPAC argues that the United States has been anything but a fair broker to this conflict and that if “Kerry wishes to be effective this time around, he would do well to advocate a just and peaceful resolution to this obscene conflict.” Further, he is specifically urged to be


\[^{119}\text{The US casted the sole vote against a UN Human Rights Council resolution, proposed on July 23, 2014, to investigate potential Israeli human rights violations during their attack on Gaza.}\]


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“honest and assertive” in pushing for three immediate actions: a ceasefire; the pledging of international humanitarian aid to rebuild Gaza; and Egypt’s reopening of the Rafah border. MPAC urges the then-U.S. Secretary of State to pursue these policies in response to the immediate humanitarian conflict, but claims that addressing the root causes of the conflict is ultimately more important. The US should pursue “fairness” and push for a “just” resolution to the crisis not only because it is the moral thing to do, but also because it is the soundest policy to pursue. Directly addressing the Secretary of State is a way through which MPAC asserts its position as an advocacy group, speaking directly to the echelons of the U.S. policy establishment; even though its advice is unlikely to stir the Secretary of State, practices such as these help position MPAC as a legitimate representative of Muslim Americans.

Social Media and the Construction of an Imagined Community

Social media is a major site for the performative construction of individual and collective identity. It provides a forum through which individuals can purposefully express (and suppress) the norms conventionally associated with a given salient social identity (Sassenberg 2002; Klein, Spears, and Reicher 2007). Further, it is a site where individuals can connect to a vastly wider audience, and signify, negotiate, and continuously redefine their collective identities. Studies examining the individual construction of the self through social media have found that the online construction of the self is an extension of the offline experience. Hence, the “foundations of identity do not drastically change … social identity remains strongly in place, but instead may be mediated in new ways” (Ginger 2008, 36). Social media is thus not only a forum through which information is communicated and disseminated, but also a site through which unconnected and somewhat disparate individuals can begin to think of themselves as a collective group,
connected—in a very tangible way—to other members of this imagined community (Anderson 2006).

Not surprisingly, social media has played an important role in the performance of Muslim American identity. It has allowed both MPAC and CAIR to reach a wide number of Muslim Americans, signify the issues that should concern them and, thus, actively perform a specific Muslim American identity. Although both organizations have had a social media presence since 2008, the 2014 Gaza conflict brought their social media activism to a level not previously seen. Both organizations used activism on Facebook and Twitter to counter the prevalent U.S. narrative of the conflict—which blamed Hamas’ rocket attacks on southern Israel for inciting Israel’s response—and to pressure the U.S. government to demand and end to Israel’s attack on Gaza. As such, social media became an important site through which Muslim American organizations discursively constituted the war on Gaza as a Muslim American issue; constructed a unified Muslim American plan of action; and were thus constituted as the representatives of the community’s interests.

Through a content analysis of social media discourse surrounding the Gaza Conflict, I find that these organizations use Facebook and Twitter communication, mainly as a way to publicize their policy activism and signal the significance of their work and roles. As such, social media becomes an important claims-making forum, allowing MPAC and CAIR to articulate and share a set of demands constituted as Muslim American demands. The audience reached through this social media activism is clearly not policymakers—toward whom the demands are ultimately addressed—but rather the broader Muslim American community “following” these organizations on social media. Thus, articulating a set of “Muslim American” responses and demands toward
the Gaza conflict becomes a way in which these organizations (re)present the very Muslim American collective identity on whose behalf claims are made.

Take for example MPAC’s #ISpeakOutBecause Campaign, which asks participants to “speak out against injustices that we are witnessing in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, China, and around the world!” encouraging them to “use Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to speak out for the Truth!” The campaign was launched on August 7, 2014 as a direct response to the Gaza Conflict and the constrained U.S. public discourse surrounding the conflict, and particularly, criticism of Israeli policies. Thus, according to MPAC:

[M]any public figures have spoken out against the ongoing injustices in Gaza, only to face sharp criticism and pressure to retract their statements. Intimidation has led many people to practice self-censorship on topics deemed taboo out of fear of ramifications. When we are intimidated into censoring ourselves, our right to free speech is threatened … now more than ever we must raise our voices collectively to speak out for human rights …

Through the campaign, the Gaza conflict and the violence experienced by the civilian population in Gaza were also discursively associated with the police violence inflicted on predominantly African Americans in the city Ferguson, Missouri, following the killing of Michael Brown, hence framing Gaza and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination as issues of basic human rights—readily understood by those familiar with the American context. This image, tweeted by MPAC, serves as a striking example of this discursive tactic:

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The photo is accompanied by a caption stating: “#ISpeakOutBecause their screams for justice aren’t being heard. These young men deserve to live #Gaza #Ferguson.”123 The next image, shared on MPAC’s Facebook feed, demonstrates solidarity as well as the figuratively central role the Palestinian-Israeli conflict plays in the organization’s activism, on and off social media. The caption “only one notification in my heart … is about Palestine,” combined with the position of the red notification icon, visually replicates the claim, that Palestine is the “heart of the Muslim ummah,” made by the Muslim American elites interviewed for this study.

As previously discussed, CAIR’s emphasis on the illegality of Israel’s actions and the violations committed against American citizens, is also manifested through their social media activism. In addition to calling on the U.S. State Department to investigate the beating of Tariq Khdeir\(^{124}\) and holding a press conference on the topic,\(^{125}\) CAIR was active in publicizing the teen’s plight through social media. The image of Khdeir’s beating was shared on social media multiple times, and often juxtaposed with an image from before the beating, visually emphasizing the brutality of the violence committed against him. The following image, for example, posted on CAIR’s Facebook page on July 4, 2014, was captioned: “Israeli Army brutally beats Florida High School student.”

Fig. 4

Social media communication was also intended to signify solidarity for mass action. Rather than necessarily pursuing a social movement tactic of contentious action, CAIR and MPAC both used social media to demonstrate symbolic support for those engaged in oppositional tactics. These symbolic demonstrations of support are important, because as interest groups pursuing a strategy of policy integration, these organizations are often met with criticism.


for collaborating with the government, rather than “fighting” for the rights of the Muslim American community. Thus, sharing information about upcoming protests as well as images of people protesting was a way for both CAIR and MPAC to associate themselves with the protests without necessarily supporting the tactic of mass contention.

Fig. 5

The sharing and re-tweeting of news articles concerning the conflict was another tactic commonly used by both organizations. The news articles that were shared helped construct a narrative of unilateral Israeli brutality, U.S. acquiescence, and Palestinian victimization. Sharing information about the conflict is a way through which these organizations signal to their audience what narratives to consider adequate and reliable. Substantiating their policy positions with information from reputable news sources—such as BBC, The Guardian, and Reuters, and the UNHRC, whose stories were most often shared or re-tweeted—becomes a way through which these organizations legitimize their engagement and demands.

Whether the narrative presented by these organizations as well as their policy positions are generally accepted by Muslim Americans is a question that remains to be examined. Although polling data specifically gauging the relationship between Muslim Americans public opinion vis-à-vis the policy positions of CAIR and MPAC is lacking, the following chapter is an
attempt to begin exploring whether the identity that is being performed by CAIR and MPAC is in fact at all reflective of the Muslim American community whose interests these organizations claim to represent.

**Chapter Five**

**Whose Interests Do CAIR and MPAC Represent?**

Thus far, this dissertation has examined the Muslim American identity that is being constituted through CAIR and MPAC’s policy discourse. However, little has been said as to whether the majority of Muslim Americans either agrees with, or feels accurately represented by these organizations. Because identity performance does not take place in a vacuum, but rather shapes and is shaped by bottom-up discursive practices, examining how the policy discourse of MPAC and CAIR is received is important to understanding the Muslim American identity being communicated by these organizations. In other words, Muslim Americans are not mere recipients of institutional discourse; they interpret, negotiate, and influence the discourse that these organizations produce. In order to understand the impact of Muslim American elite discourse on the people these groups claim to represent, it is central to examine how it is received, interpreted, and contextualized (Bernstein 1997; De Cilia, Reisigl, and Wodak 1999).

This chapter examines the available polling data on Muslim Americans in order to examine whether the identity that is being constituted through CAIR and MPAC’s discourse is reflective of Muslim Americans, and whether the foreign policy advocacy of these organizations actually represents the interests and opinions espoused by the majority of this group. Scholars interested in the study of Muslim Americans are well aware that very little empirical data exist regarding this group (Pew 2007; Barreto and Dana 2010). Nevertheless, in the past decade a number of efforts have been made to better gauge the attitudes and beliefs of this community. In
particular, Gallup and Pew Research Center have conducted nationwide surveys of Muslim Americans that provide scholars with rich, albeit still limited, sources of information to draw from. In addition to these two polls, I also draw on the Muslim American Survey conducted by Georgetown’s Muslims in the American Public Square (MAPS) and Zogby International. The MAPS survey data was collected within a six-week period, from August 5 to September 15, 2004, and therefore lacks longevity; however, its findings overall corroborate those of the Pew and Gallop surveys. Taken together, these three national surveys on Muslim Americans provide valuable information regarding the community’s political views, attitudes and interests.

As this study has illustrated, CAIR and MPAC are actively engaged in U.S. foreign policy advocacy, particularly toward the Middle East. I have argued that foreign policy activism must be understood as a site in which Muslim American collective identity is being performatively constituted. Through their policy positions, Muslim Americans are differentiated from “other” foreign Muslims, which serves to define and demarcate the contours of a unique Muslim American identity. An important question to ask, however, is, whether foreign policy is only the concern of these organizations and political elites, or something that Muslim Americans are also interested in. In fact, the response to the 2014 Gaza-Israeli war, examined in the previous chapter, raises a number of questions. First, are the foreign policy positions of CAIR and MPAC representative of Muslim American public opinion? Further, to what degree, if any, is their policy discourse successful at influencing the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of Muslim Americans? In other words, does the identity that these organizations perform have a reality?

I argue that CAIR and MPAC are acutely aware of the need to negotiate with their constituency what the proper Muslim American stance should be vis-à-vis U.S. foreign policy toward issues perceived to affect them. It is through this process of negotiation and contestation
that the borders of Muslim American identity are being delineated, thus defining who belongs inside and who falls outside the boundaries of this community. Using public opinion data on Muslim Americans, this chapter examines how reflective CAIR and MPAC’s positions are of the Muslim American public. The increased visibility that national interest groups received in the post-9/11 context was an opportunity to position themselves as the official representatives of Muslim Americans’ interests. The opening created by the post-9/11 backlash also allowed them increased access to an audience, which they used to make their demands heard and contest the discourse of Muslim Americans as other. Nevertheless, because these organizations speak on behalf of a highly fragmented, diverse, and divided group, their policy advocacy has played a major role in the construction of Muslim American identity.

But how representative is the Muslim American identity being constituted through CAIR and MPAC’s discourse? A first step toward answering the question is to examine how Muslim American public opinion is formed and the factors that may influence it. In other words, how do Muslim Americans develop their attitudes, and what can we learn by examining these attitudes? I begin this chapter with a brief discussion of public opinion formation in general, followed by an examination of Muslim American public opinion. I pay special attention throughout to the dialectic between Muslim American public opinion and the advocacy of the interest groups that claim to represent them.

I argue that there is a degree of dissonance between the opinions held by a majority of Muslim Americans and the policy goals promoted by CAIR and MPAC: Although these organizations performatively constitute Muslim American identity, the existence of a collective Muslim American identity cannot be assumed. Fluidity is an aspect of all identities (Foucault 1972; Butler 1990; Campbell 1992), but as a relatively recent community (i.e., post-1965)
predominantly comprising immigrants, the construction of a unifying collective identity is something that must be explained. At the community level, many Muslim Americans continue to identify with their countries of origin, their ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and a broader Muslim identity (i.e., as Muslims, rather than Muslim Americans). This is not surprising, taking into account that 65 percent of them are foreign born. These attachments can, therefore, influence how Muslim Americans perceive U.S. foreign policy.

Interest groups, on the other hand, are aiming to present a cohesive and unified Muslim American identity; thus, to dampen the influence of these factors on public opinion. In other words, (re)presenting Muslim American as a unified collective increases these groups’ relevance, particularly in front of the U.S. policy audience to whom their demands are made and who guarantee their position and identity as advocacy groups. MPAC’s Salam Al-Marayati puts it best, arguing that Muslim Americans have the opportunity to escape the “cobweb of Middle Eastern rivalries and politics … of Sunni-Shia rivalries and sectarianism [and] show that Islam and Muslims can be part of a pluralistic society” (Salam Al-Marayati, interview data, June 2, 2013). Hence, Islam and Muslims in the Middle East are constructed as victims of sectarianism and political rivalries; Muslim Americans, however, need not be trapped by that “web,” but can, rather, demonstrate that Islam can embrace diversity and thus belong to a pluralistic society.

I do not claim that identities are mutually exclusive, or that one must choose between a religious Muslim identification and an ethno-national one. As discussed in the previous chapters, identity is fragmented, fluid, and in constant flux, and Muslim Americans, like most people, hold multiple identities (Talhami 2013; Tajfel 1982). I do claim, however, that it is possible for one

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identity to become more salient than others. As Chapter Two illustrates, identity salience depends on the social, historical, and often specific psychological conditions the individual is facing (Malouf 2003; Talhami 2013). Real or perceived threat to an identity will often lead it to become more salient, because “people will rally behind any identity when it is assaulted” (Talhami 2013: 27).

Thus, I argue that in the post 9/11 context, a number of factors have coalesced to increase the salience of Muslim American identity. As discussed in Chapter Two, these factors include the American public’s view of Muslim Americans as a cohesive group, government policies that have targeted Muslim Americans—further strengthening the in-group/out-group perception—and the global discourse on the “War on Terror” and “Islamic fundamentalism,” which also functions by highlighting Muslim religious identities. In short, the post 9/11 backlash appears to have generated a perception among Muslims, globally and in the United States, that Muslim identity is being assaulted, thereby leading to its increased salience (Peek 2005; Read 2008). In addition, the discourse espoused by Muslim American political elites, particularly following 9/11, has increased the salience of Islam as an identity marker.

**Identity and Public Opinion Formation**

Even though public opinion has been a major subject of research, particularly for those studying democratic systems in which public opinion is believed to affect policy, debates continue about how public opinion is formed and what motivates people to act on their attitudes (Shapiro 1987; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). What is known is that people’s beliefs and perceptions about the world around them are fundamental in shaping their attitudes. What can also be ascertained is that people’s opinions are not formed in a vacuum; rather, “self-
identity is critical to understanding where opinions originate and how deeply forged they are” (Telhami 2013, 12).

Research in the field of social psychology also suggests that emotions play a major role in the development of attitudes, opinions, and behavior (Eagly and Karau 2002). Hot cognition theory, for example, contends that any object—political actors, policy issues, and social groups—triggers automatic responses based on a person’s experience and evaluation of the object. Subsequent evaluation and opinion is therefore path-dependent and most often consistent with the initial evaluation/reaction (Lodge and Taber 2005). Hot cognition theory would therefore view the current attitudes and opinions of Muslim Americans regarding U.S. policy as deeply influenced by their past exposure to, and evaluation of, American foreign policy—in other words, by their previously held perceptions.

However, because the theory’s emphasis is on the consistency and reinforcement of attitudes and opinions, it can tell us very little about how public opinion can change. If we are interested in examining if and to what degree the identity being performed by CAIR and MPAC is reflective of Muslim Americans’ beliefs and attitudes, our analysis must include a theory that can explain how previously held beliefs can be questioned, challenged, and ultimately transformed. Affective intelligence theory attempts to explain attitude shift by distinguishing between two emotional systems/responses, which the theory refers to as “disposition system” and “surveillance system” (Marcus, Neuman, and Mackuen 2000; Brader et al. 2008). Whereas the former refers to positive emotional responses that often lead to reinforcement of previously held belief, the latter refers to emotional responses that trigger anxiety and fear, which in turn encourages information seeking, increasing the chances of learning and persuasion (Valentino et al. 2008).
Although counterintuitive at first, emotional responses of fear, anxiety, and perceived threat are the most conducive to attitude change, because they persuade people to seek relevant information as a way of dealing with the threat (whether real or imagined). Access to new information can serve to disrupt previously held beliefs and, thus, lead to attitude change. This insight is in line with the argument that threatened identities often become the most salient (Maalouf 2001). In fact, some scholars have gone as far as to argue that the cohesion of Muslim Americans—at both the institutional and group level—is itself a post 9/11 phenomena, one resulting from their sense that Muslims and Islam were under attack (Peek 2005).

Although countless variables have been found to influence attitudes and beliefs, this chapter focuses on the role that identity and emotions play in shaping public opinion. Identity functions not only as a filter through which people perceive the world, it also leads to the adoption of certain opinions, which, in turn, can drive policy preferences. Regardless of the issue, people’s identities directly influence the policy preferences and opinions they hold. It is often “the desire to protect one’s sense of identity [that] drives his or her opinions on the issue” (Schildkraut 2005).

It is almost a truism in public opinion research that individuals spend little time examining and rationalizing their political attitudes, and “often arrive at judgments without devoting much attention or efforts to learning, remembering, and sifting through details.” Rather than arriving at their attitudes by careful scrutiny, people “are guided instead by ‘gut’ reactions and habits of mind” (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008, 963). Implicit in this view of public opinion is the assumption that the development of opinions and attitudes is the result of an internalized and habitual process (i.e., “gut reactions” and “habits of mind”). It is through this
internalized sense of self and identity that individuals experience, and make sense of, the world around them.

Individuals develop attitudes and beliefs by interacting with their social surroundings, but not all interactions have the same degree of influence in shaping opinion. Perhaps not surprisingly, people are more easily persuaded by members of their in-group, even when the in-group is presenting a contrary opinion (Mackie, Worth, and Asuncion 1990; Anastasio, Rose, and Chapman 1999). This can explain why public opinion is so easy to reinforce but so difficult to change. As this dissertation argues, political elites play a crucial role in communicating identity and providing the cues, or signals, that individuals rely on in order to arrive at their opinions. Further, the public often takes cues from elites regarding not only values and norms, but also specific policy stances (Gellner 1983; Zaller 1992; Brubaker 1996; Snyder and Valentine 1996; Mendelberg 2001). In other words, scholars generally agree that publics respond to and are influenced by elite discourse; whether this insight applies to Muslim Americans and their interaction with CAIR and MPAC’s policy discourse is a question that elicits further research on Muslim American public opinion, and, thus, future research must examine.

**Muslim American Identity Salience and Public Opinion**

Immigration and religious identity salience, which refers simply to “the self ascribed importance of religion to an individual,” are intrinsically linked (Hoge and de Zuleta 1985; Alper and Olson 2013). Religious identities often become more important for people’s sense of self after the experience of migration, especially when migrating to a country where their religion holds minority status (Duderija 2007). Muslim religious identity, for example, has been found to become more salient when Muslims move from their home countries to the United States (Peek
2005). This can be explained, in part, by the fact that becoming a religious minority means people can no longer take their religious identities for granted, as they may have done while living in a country where they belonged to the majority religion. The same trend can be seen among other religious minorities in the United States, including Chinese Buddhists (Yang and Ebaugh 2001) and Jews living in American cities with insignificant numbers of Jews (Alper and Olson 2013).

When polled, 80 percent of Muslim Americans acknowledge the importance of faith in their lives, and 76 percent say their faith is involved in every aspect of their lives (Gallup 2009). It is worth noting that the only other American religious minority more likely than Muslims to say that religion plays as important role in their lives are Mormons, at 85 percent (Gallup 2011, 28). Ethnic and socioeconomic differences seem to have little impact on the importance Muslim Americans assign to their faith (Gallup 2009, 12). Identification with the U.S. and Islam seems to be roughly the same. When asked, 69 percent of Muslim Americans say they identify strongly with the United States, and 47 percent say they think of themselves as Muslims first. In comparison with Muslims in other Western countries, Muslim Americans identify strongly with their country, leading one to conclude that they are a relatively well-integrated minority. Eighty-one percent of British Muslims, for example, say they think of themselves as Muslim first, instead of as British first (Pew 2007, 3).

These numbers reflect that Muslim Americans identify almost equally with their national and religious identities. The only other religious groups for whom these two identities are almost equally important are Mormons. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish Americans all identify significantly more with the United States (91 percent, 88 percent, and 86 percent, respectively), than with their religions (70 percent, 55 percent, and 49 percent). Hence, it could be said that the religious and national identities of Muslim Americans are almost equally salient.

Interestingly, at 57 percent, Muslim Americans are the most likely among all religious groups to say they trust U.S. democracy, including elections and the judicial system. Belief in the inherent justice of the democratic system seems to be central to how Muslim Americans understand themselves. There is a degree of dissonance, however, between trust placed on the principles of U.S. democracy, and the specific institutions—and policies—of the state, particularly those perceived to be the driving force behind the War on Terror. The opinion and attitudes Muslim Americans express on a number of different issues must, therefore, be seen as driven, at least in part, by this aspect of their identity: believing in the principles of U.S. democracy and justness, while mistrusting specific U.S. policies and institutions.

Muslim American Identity and Attitudes toward Foreign Policy

As for most Americans, domestic issues—including the economy, employment, and healthcare—are the most important drivers of Muslims’ voting behavior. Where Muslim Americans differ from the broader American public is in that 92 percent of them see foreign

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132 Ibid.
policy as very important to how, and for whom, they vote. In comparison, only an astounding 11 percent of Americans said foreign policy was a major voting consideration (Pew 2010).

Muslims are the most ethnically diverse religious community in the United States. As previously mentioned, 65 percent of the community is foreign born, and a disproportionate number, 24 percent, are from Arab countries (Pew 2007). Muslim Americans from South Asia, including Pakistan, make up the second largest group, at 18 percent. By the mere fact of its composition as a relatively large and recent immigrant community, it is no surprise that Muslim Americans would demonstrate interest in foreign policy. However, one must be careful not to presume that, as immigrants, Muslim Americans are simply interested in U.S. policy that affects their countries of origin. Although this is part of what drives their concern with U.S. foreign policy, it is by no means the only impetus for their engagement. In fact, non-immigrant Muslims—including second-generation and converts—also follow international news disproportionately and show a higher level of knowledge regarding U.S. foreign policy (Barreto and Dana 2008).

This concern with foreign policy can be partly explained by the fact that Muslims have been discursively associated with Arabs and the Middle East going back to the era of Western colonialism, something more recently illustrated through the post-9/11 backlash and the discourse surrounding Muslim Americans’ foreignness. The Middle East also holds religious significance for Muslims “as it is the origin of Islam and houses the holy sites that Muslims are required to visit [Mecca and Medina],” which can lead to a degree of emotional attachment and, therefore, an interest in events and policies perceived to impact the region (Barreto and Dana 2008).

Lastly, the War on Terror and the perception that Muslims inside and outside the United States are targets of U.S. policy means that U.S. foreign policy is not foreign to Muslims, but part of their daily realities and experiences. “As a result, issues, news, and politics of Muslims who live outside of the U.S. became of concern to Muslims inside the United States. Their fate had become connected” (Barreto and Dana 2008, 8).

**Muslim American Opinion on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict**

The vast majority of Arabs and Muslims around the world rank the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as one of the issues that is most important to them personally. In some Muslim Majority countries, people rank it as more important than the economy, employment, and education (Telhami 2013). Although this may seem surprising to those not familiar with the historical and cultural significance of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it is “not uncommon for a people to have a significant historical experience, intense and painful enough to help shape perception” (Telhami 2013, 73). For many within the Jewish community, for example, the memory of the Holocaust continues to be the lens through which current events and experiences are perceived. Further, for many Muslims, the Palestine-Israeli conflict has come to symbolize the West’s greed and deceit, as well as the painful history of failure, defeats, and humiliation Muslims have suffered, not only at the hands of the West, but also because of the corruption and ineptness of their own leaders.

Muslim Americans are not impermeable to the attitude of the broader Muslim ummah. As previously mentioned, emotional incentives such as the assertion of dignity (Wood 2003) can wield important influence over how people relate to and interpret a conflict. Further, the attachment that many Muslims feel toward Jerusalem as “Islam’s third holiest city, after Mecca
“and Medina” also serves to construct the conflict as one that concerns all Muslims (Telhami 2013; 75). Lastly, the Crusades continue to be part of the broader narrative through which Muslims see their encounter with the West, particularly because the Muslims were ultimately victorious and succeeded in expelling the crusaders from Jerusalem in the battle of Hattin in 1187 (Mamdani 2003; Ibid., 76).

Muslim Americans have strong attitudes regarding the Palestinian Israeli conflict and what they perceive to be the United States’ responsibility toward solving it. The overwhelming majority, 85 percent, favors a two-state solution and envisions an independent Palestinian state coexisting alongside its Israeli neighbor. Their position seems to be in agreement with that of American Jews, the other American religious group most closely associated with the conflict, 78 percent of whom also support a two-state solution (Pew 2011, 29).

However, their opinions are in stark contrast to those of Muslims overseas, the majority of whom believe that a two-state solution is neither possible nor would guarantee the rights of Palestinians. Only 26 percent of Muslims in Indonesia, 23 percent of Muslims in Pakistan, and 14 percent of Muslims in Jordan, for example, strongly believe in a two-state solution (Pew
This may not necessarily mean that they disagree with the principle of a two-state solution, but it indicates that they are highly skeptical about its feasibility.

Regardless of the reasoning, Muslim Americans are more likely to accept, both in theory and in practice, an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, than Muslims in Muslim-majority countries. If we look more closely at the data, we also find that education, more than any other variable, positively affects Muslim Americans’ view of a two-state solution. Whereas 74 percent of college-educated Muslim Americans expressed positive attitudes toward a two-state solution, only 51 percent of non-college graduates did the same. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no statistically significant difference between the opinions expressed by U.S.-born Muslims and first generation immigrants. If we look at region of origin, however, we see that Muslim Americans from South Asia are more likely than Muslim Americans from the Arab region to believe in the feasibility of a two-state solution. Sixty-seven percent of Pakistani-American Muslims and 59 percent of Muslims from other South Asian countries say that Israel and Palestine can coexist peacefully, but only 49 percent of Muslim Americans from the Arab region say the same (Pew 2007, 55).
Hence, even though there is a large degree of consensus regarding the conflict, differences of opinion among Muslim Americans do exist. It is these differences that provide a window for CAIR and MPAC to communicate to Muslim Americans how the conflict should be perceived. By overwhelmingly supporting a two-state solution, these groups are signaling to the community what the appropriate Muslim American attitude toward the conflict is. The degree to which they are actually able to influence and change the perceptions of the roughly half of Arab Muslims who do not believe in the feasibility of a two-state solution remains to be seen and measured.

One way to contextualize the importance the Palestinian-Israeli conflict holds for Muslim Americans is to gauge their voting behavior. When vetting candidates during the 2012 presidential election, two-thirds of Muslim Americans said the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was
something they considered “very important” in their selection.\textsuperscript{134} The only foreign policy issue Muslim Americans ranked of higher concern to them was counterterrorism and the American “War on Terror,” arguably because they feel immediately affected by it.

Table 4

The United States has a long history of involvement with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and is perceived by many—not only Muslims—around the world to be biased toward Israel and to have perpetuated the conflict through its involvement (Telhami 2013). However, the majority of the American public agrees with their country’s support of Israel. In fact, only 22 percent of Americans think the United States is “too supportive of Israel”; the remainder thinks that U.S. support of Israel is “about right” (41 percent) or not strong enough (25 percent).\textsuperscript{135} Also telling is that the majority of the American public believes that the reasons Muslims around the world hold


a negative view of the United States is due not to a dislike of its values, but to what they perceive as its unfair foreign policy.

Although there is no quantitative data measuring the attitudes of Muslim Americans on U.S. policy toward the conflict, the data examined in the previous chapter illustrates that both CAIR and MPAC present a highly critical and negative view of U.S. policy toward the conflict. They represent U.S. policy as unfair, misguided, and disproportionately biased in favor of Israel, which functions against America’s long-term interests. Other scholars who have collected focus-group data, interview data, and small-scale surveys have consistently found that Muslim Americans view U.S. policy as overwhelmingly biased in favor of Israel (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). As illustrated in Chapter Four, the perceived U.S. bias toward support of Israel—and the unsound policies that result from that support—is an important engenderer of CAIR and MPAC’s policy advocacy. Thus, with respect to U.S. policy toward the conflict, Muslim American interest groups seem to be largely reflecting the opinions of the broader Muslim American public.

Against Terrorism, Against the War on Terror

Since the attacks of 9/11, there has been a sharp increase in Muslim American concern with Islamic extremism around the world. In 2011, 76 percent of them claimed to be “very or somewhat concerned” about the rise of extremism and the potential of future terrorist attacks against their nation (Gallup 2011). Tellingly, a much smaller number fear the rise of Islamic extremism in America, which means that the majority of Muslim Americans view the problem of Islamic extremism as a foreign one. Their concern, does not translate into support for counterterrorism policies, however, especially the U.S.-led War on Terror. Only 26 percent
believe the War on Terror is a sincere effort at confronting and addressing the threat posed by Islamic extremism.

Polling data indicates that Muslim Americans are overwhelmingly skeptical about U.S. military interventions; 87 percent of those polled believed that going to war with Iraq was the wrong decision (Gallup 2011). Muslim American opposition to the war is thus clear. They are the religious group most likely to cite the war as a mistake, followed closely by American Jews, 74 percent of whom opposed the war, and atheists and agnostics, 67 percent of whom were against the war (Gallup 2011). However, as the analysis conducted in Chapter Four illustrates, CAIR and MPAC have both supported U.S. interventions under limited and specific circumstances, with MPAC initially supporting the U.S. decision to depose Saddam Hussein and both organizations calling for the U.S. to play a more active role in the Syrian civil war. CAIR and MPAC legitimize what they understand to be a largely unpopular position by distinguishing between using force to oppress, which, they argue, is what dictators in the Middle East have
done, and using force to end oppression, which is what a limited U.S. intervention can accomplish. Although the disparity between Muslim American public opinion and the policy positions of CAIR and MPC may seem perplexing, the argument made throughout this dissertation can help explain this apparent aberration.

Because Muslim Americans are not these organizations’ primary audience, the fact that they are highly critical of U.S.-led wars and interventions has little impact on the organizations’ policy positions. The positions and recommendations CAIR and MPAC make are geared toward the policy establishment (broadly defined as elected officials, decision-makers, established think tanks, institutional elites, and influential journalists). Hence, the Muslim American identity that these organizations are performing is performed, primarily, for this audience’s consumption and with the goal of achieving greater institutional legitimacy and, therefore, integration in the policy process.

Although a plurality of Muslim Americans opposed the war on Iraq, Muslims born in the United States expressed far larger opposition to the war than first-generation immigrants to the United States do. Further, U.S.-born Muslims are also far more likely than the foreign-born to oppose the War on Terror and to claim that it is not a genuine effort to deal with terrorism (Pew 2007). What explains the disparity in opinion between American and foreign-born Muslims? As this works argues, identity is key to understanding people’s beliefs and the opinions those beliefs generate. To begin with, U.S.-born Muslims have a more secured legal status in the United States—both legally and culturally—in addition, as citizens they (at least theoretically) have a Constitutionally protected right to free speech, allowing them to voice opposition to their government’s policies. On the other hand, many foreign-born Muslim Americans lack the institutional and cultural guarantees that come with American citizenship and long-term
habitation and, as foreigners, have a greater need to demonstrate that they belong inside the cultural boundaries of the American community. Supporting the government is thus a way through which they attempt to demonstrate their loyalty and, therefore, belongingness.

![Chart showing support for Iraq and U.S.-led wars among U.S.-born Muslims, foreign-born Muslims, and the broader American public.](image)

Table 6

U.S.-born Muslims have at least a basic knowledge of their civil rights, and are thus less likely to fear repercussions for speaking against their government. On the other hand, because the government’s counterterrorism policies disproportionately targeted foreign-born Muslim Americans, it is reasonable to expect the latter group to be more restrained in voicing negative opinions toward their government, for fear of becoming targets. This becomes especially plausible if we recall that these opinion polls were conducted over the telephone, which often complicates polling and data collection efforts, especially in cases where participants have reasons to hesitate to speak about these issues to someone they are not seeing face-to-face.

One issue where there is little disparity between native and foreign-born Muslim Americans is their opinion of al-Qaeda (Pew 2007). Sixty-eight percent of Muslim Americans view al-Qaeda unfavorably, and only 6 percent have a favorable view of the terrorist group (the
remaining 24 percent of those polled refused to answer or were not sure). However, when asked to assign responsibility for the 9/11 attacks, only 40 percent of Muslim Americans said they believe “a group of Arabs” carried out the attacks. Twenty-eight percent do not believe that Arabs carried out the attacks, and 32 percent declined to respond. Only 8 percent believe that the attacks were a U.S. or Jewish conspiracy (Pew 2007).

The fact that 60 percent of Muslim Americans either do not believe that “Arabs” carried out the attacks, or refused to speculate about the culprits behind 9/11 requires further scrutiny. Although a vast majority is opposed to Islamic extremism, a majority is also hesitant to identify those behind the 9/11 attacks as Arabs (and presumably fellow Muslims). Although only 28 percent do not believe that the attacks were carried out by Arabs, the refusal to answer the question by 32 percent of Muslim Americans may signal a discomfort in being loosely associated with the perpetrators of the attacks. In other words, when asked broadly about their opinion toward Islamic extremism, Muslim Americans voice their overwhelming opposition; however, they are ambivalent to assign responsibility for a specific act carried out by Islamic terrorists.

The limited data available helps shed some light on the complex attitudes of Muslim Americans toward U.S. policies surrounding the War on Terror as well as their broader opinions regarding Islamic extremism and terrorism. What is clear is that little support exists among Muslim Americans, both U.S. and foreign-born, for Islamic extremists, including al-Qaeda. What is also clear, is that this opposition to al-Qaeda and Islamic extremism does not translate into support for the U.S.-led War on Terror including the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Muslim Americans are highly suspicious of their government’s motives and doubt that its counterterrorism policies will do anything to deal with the threat posed by extremists (Pew 2007).
The Arab Spring

Although the War on Terror and the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan were the major foreign policy issues concerning Muslim Americans in the past decade, since 2011 the so-called Arab Spring has taken center stage. It can be reasonably expected that since a large majority of U.S. Muslims are either first- or second-generation immigrants from the Arab region, the Arab Spring and related U.S. policy would rank high among their foreign policy concerns. Unfortunately, however, there is a dearth of data on the public opinion of Muslim Americans vis-à-vis the Arab Spring. The little data that exists comes from the 2011 Pew Research Center report cited throughout this chapter, and surveys conducted by Muslim American organizations, resulting in a number of reliability issues.

The uprisings in the Arab region that became collectively known as the Arab Spring began in early 2011, a few months before the Pew poll was conducted. Not only were just a few questions regarding the uprising asked of Muslim Americans, no data has been collected on their attitudes since 2011. Much has changed as a result of the Arab Spring; it would therefore be beneficial to have more recent data on the Muslim American perception. Further, since the goal of this section is to understand the dialectic between the opinion of Muslim Americans, and their national organizations’ stance regarding U.S. foreign policy, relying on a poll conducted by CAIR is less than desirable.

What becomes clear from the little data available, however, is that there is a degree of dissonance between the Muslim American identity being performed by CAIR and MPAC and the opinions of Muslim Americans regarding the Arab spring. In fact, “Muslim Americans take a cautious view of the Arab Spring—as many say they support stable governments in the region,
even if that means less democracy, as say they support democracy, even if that means less
stability” (Pew 2011, 65). If we recall our previous discussion on the policy position of national
Muslim American organizations, both MPAC and CAIR have called for active U.S. support of
rebels fighting against the Arab dictatorships. Hence, whereas at the national level Muslim
American organizations appear to have taken a clear and strong position against the region’s
dictators, the broader Muslim American public remains hesitant about regime change in the
region and, when asked, is equally divided in its support of stability (44 percent) or
democratization (also 44 percent).

![Bar chart showing priorities for Muslim Americans and general American public regarding the "Arab Spring".]

Table 7

As can be seen in the above chart, although the Muslim American public is split equally
between their support of democracy and their support of stability, when compared to the general
American public, a larger percentage of Muslim Americans prioritize democracy over stability.
Exit poll data gathered by CAIR during the 2012 presidential elections confirms these findings.
When asked whether the United States is giving enough support to opposition groups in the Arab
world, 48.5 percent say “yes” and 51 percent say “no.” Hence, Muslim Americans are, within the
margin of error, equally divided on whether the United States should play a more active role in the Arab Spring.

Interestingly, when asked about specifics regarding the Arab Spring the opinions of Muslim Americans seem to more closely reflect those of their organized groups. Seventy-six percent of those polled said that NATO took the right decision intervening in Libya, whereas only 24 percent say it was the wrong decision. When asked whether the United States should provide support for “The Syrian people in their uprising against the Assad government” (CAIR 2012, 14), 68 percent said it should, and 32 percent said it should not. As in all surveys, how questions are phrased reflects the bias of the research, and can have an impact on the responses given. Asking whether the United States should support “the Syrian people” may elicit different answers than asking, for example, whether the United States should support the “Syrian rebels” or “Syrian fighters.” It also signals the democratic nature of the uprising, as one in which “the Syrian people”—not foreign powers or fighters—are struggling to overthrow an oppressive regime.

What these data indicate is that Muslim Americans are hesitant to express support for broad policy categories such as democratization or U.S. intervention. However, when asked about specifics, such as the NATO intervention in Libya or the U.S. role in Syria, they are more likely to express their support. Thus, whereas they are against the principle of forced regime change and foreign intervention, they are, to a greater degree, supportive of specific policy action. This is particularly the case in places that have gained the world’s attention, and sympathy, as a result of the brutality of the dictators in question.
Analyzing the Data: Interest-Group Advocacy and Public Opinion

Is foreign policy engagement merely an elite concern? The answer from the available polling data is a resounding “No.” Muslim Americans, regardless of country of origin, age, or economic status, collectively demonstrate a high degree of interest and engagement on issues related to U.S. foreign policy. For reasons explained in this chapter, some of their major foreign policy concerns revolve around U.S. policy toward the Middle East and the U.S.-led War on Terror. Unlike the broader American public, Muslims demonstrate a high degree of interest and knowledge of foreign policy, with 73 percent declaring international relations to be “very important” to them (CAIR 2012).

One thing that the data can unequivocally tell us is that foreign policy is not an isolated concern of advocacy groups alone, but rather is one that the vast majority of the community is engaged with. The harder question to answer, given the limited data, is whether the identity that is being discursively constituted through CAIR and MPAC’s policy discourse is reflective of the positions and interests of the broader Muslim American community. It is important to note that only 30 percent of those polled by Gallup in 2011 claimed that MPAC and/or CAIR represented their interests. Further, 55 percent of men and 42 percent of women polled claimed that there is no national organization that represents their interests. These numbers, and the fact that roughly half of those polled do not see the organizations as representative of their interests, problematize the assumption on which these organizations base their claim; mainly, that they are speaking on behalf of Muslim Americans. If only 30 percent of Muslim Americans consider these organizations to be their legitimate representatives the question that remains is, whose

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136 More people were familiar with CAIR, mainly because the latter has taken an active role in civil-rights cases and has taken individuals and the government to court on discrimination cases, many of which it has won.
interests do CAIR and MPAC represent? As this dissertation has argued, the audience for these organizations’ policy discourse is, primarily, the policy establishment. As such, through their positions, tactics, and strategies CAIR and MPAC communicate to their audience that they, too, belong to and share the goals of the policy establishment: to promote and protect the best interests of the United States.

Aside from the fact that only 30 percent of those polled see their interests as being represented by these organizations, the specific positions that CAIR and MPAC have taken on a number of issues are also reflective of the dissonance between these organizations and Muslim Americans. MPAC’s initial support of a limited U.S. intervention in Iraq is an example of this dissonance that has already been discussed. Another nuanced site where this dissonance is manifested is in these organizations’ criticism of “other” Muslims and Islam, particularly in the Middle East, and their attempts to differentiate Muslim Americans from these foreign Muslims and Islam (which, as discussed in Chapter Three, are discursively constructed as aberrations of “true” Islam). As the polling data illustrates, however, although Muslim Americans are overwhelmingly against terrorism, they are less likely to assign blame for those responsible for the terrorist attacks of 9/11. When asked whether they believed “a group of Arabs” carried out the attacks, only 40 percent of those polled agreed; the remaining 60 percent either disagreed or refused to answer the question. What this tells us is that CAIR and MPAC’s discourse (and, therefore, the identity that is constituted through that discourse), which relies on the principle of difference and differentiation in order to produce meaning and constitute a unique Muslim American identity, is less internalized and accepted by the Muslim American public. Whether the identity being discursively constituted through these organizations’ policy activism will, in
the future, result in the construction of a unified Muslim American collective identity is a question that remains to be seen.
Conclusion

The attacks of September 11, 2011, had a catastrophic effect on the Muslim American community. Muslims—and those perceived as Muslims—were classified as a potential threat and deprived of their most basic constitutional rights. A less-examined impact of 9/11, as this dissertation has argued, is the opportunity it engendered for Muslim American interest groups. The very grievances produced by the backlash substantiated the claims-making capacity of Muslim American interest groups, granting them both the perception of a unified community whose interests to represent and access to political space they previously lacked. They used this newfound opportunity to contest the government’s assault on civil liberties, pursue the broader interests of the community, and work toward the domestic integration of Muslims.

Nearly fifteen years later, their continued engagement in U.S. foreign policy is not so easily explained. If we understand lobbying on purely strategic terms as the pursuit of pre-established policy preferences, their foreign-policy engagement seems to contradict their interests, since it buttresses the perception that they are outsiders, more concerned with events happening in foreign places than in the United States. I have argued throughout this work that part of why their behavior is seen as puzzling results from how policy activism is traditionally understood: as the strategic pursuit of pre-established goals. This work has sought to problematize that assumption and to examine how Muslim American identity is performed and communicated through the policy-engagement actions of Muslim American interest groups.

Specifically, I have sought to re-conceptualize policy engagement as a discursive site where identity is constituted. One of the major ontological assumptions of this work is that identity is constituted through difference. The two key insights—that meaning is produced
through difference, and that policy engagement is a discursive site in which identity is constructed—are developed in Chapter Three, where the major argument of this dissertation is laid out: that, through their engagement in U.S. foreign policy, CAIR and MPAC are (re)presenting a specific Muslim American identity. Re-conceptualizing policy activism as not just a strategic pursuit of interests but a discursive practice helps explain the seeming puzzle of Muslim American engagement in foreign policy. The purpose of this engagement is not necessarily to change the policy preferences of the United States, but to define the contours of Muslim American identity.

Given all of this, why would a work on Muslim American policy activism begin with an analysis—as I have in Chapter One—of Muslims’ immigration, integration, and belonging in the United States? First, as I argue throughout this dissertation, policy activism is a product and a producer of Muslim integration in the United States. It is the result of a process of historical negotiation regarding Muslims’ place in America—and America’s place in Islam. Through their policy positions, CAIR and MPAC are speaking, positioning, and thus presenting themselves as advocacy groups, driven first and foremost by their duty to protect America’s national interests. Thus, their policy activism is best understood as part of a historical narrative of integration; it is a way through which their belonging to the United States is performed, negotiated, and constituted.

As the analysis in Chapters Three and Four illustrates, the Middle East is a central focus of these organizations’ work. This fact should not be seen as self-evident, however, since the majority of Muslim Americans are not from the region. I argue that their policy activism regarding the Middle East is best understood by accounting for the role that narrative and differentiation play in identity construction. As discussed in Chapter Three, the construction of a shared narrative, an imagined past, and collective struggles, are the key to engendering the
emotional attachments that drive individuals to identify as members of a collective group. Further, differentiating Muslim Americans from foreign Muslims is an important way through which the former is constructed as superior, thus establishing the uniqueness and exceptionalism of Muslim American identity. Throughout this work, I examine four major foreign-policy sites through which this identity is being performed and constituted: 1) the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; 2) democratization in the Arab World; 3) violent religious extremism; and 4) U.S. policy toward Iran.

To make this claim is not to suggest that these are all the discursive practices through which Muslim American identity is being communicated; rather, at any time in history and in any social context there are multiple discourses through which individual and social identity is performed (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). I argue that, in the post-9/11 context and the context of the wars and international conflicts that have followed, foreign policy has become one of the dominant discourses through which Muslim American identity is constituted—albeit not the only one. Because the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a focal point of policy engagement for these organizations, Chapter Four is dedicated to an in-depth case study of MPAC and CAIR’s policy engagement around the conflict, including a detailed discussion of their policy positions toward the 2014 Gaza-Israeli conflict. I find that the major framework for representing the conflict is around national interests and security. The major position of both organizations is that the United States’ failure to present an unbiased policy response to the events in Gaza, and its continued unconditional support of Israel, is a threat to long-term national security.
Purpose and Limitations

This study offers an explanatory critique (as defined in the introduction) of Muslim American policy activism and its relation to collective identity. This analysis is grounded on the logic of interpretation and motivated by questions of how agents and identities, often taken as the objective starting point of inquiry of empirical approaches, are constituted. As such, it is best placed among the critical constructivist literature of international relations, which has opened the field to questions regarding the construction of social knowledge, considered by structuralist theories to comprise the objective reality they examine. Constructivism has greatly expanded our understanding of the state and political actors as social constructions that are constituted and maintained through certain social and political discourses.

As a result of this study’s aim and ontological grounding, it could be critiqued by those committed to an epistemology of realism for its inability to generate testable hypotheses. I have attempted to address these perceived limitations by clearly delineating the aims of this study, as well as the ontological assumptions on which it is grounded, which I state in the introduction and emphasize throughout the narrative. Like others interested in a post-structuralist understanding of politics, I do not claim that reality does not exist and that all is language; rather, I contend that our access to reality is mediated through discourse, which makes the study of discourse a relevant subject of analysis.

Critical constructivists may critique the emphasis this study places on elite-discourse and its focus on top-down identity performance. The argument laid out here is not intended to suggest that Muslim American interest groups are consciously engaged in a deliberate construction of Muslim American identity. This would suggest that these individuals and organizations function outside of discourse and are not constituted through it. As I have argued
throughout and examined specifically in Chapter Five, the construction of Muslim American identity is best understood in terms of the dialectics between top-down and bottom-up discursive practices. Far from simply following the lead of interest groups, Muslim Americans negotiate and recontextualize elite discourse, signaling to elites what issues are of importance and the limits of what will, and will not, be accepted. Thus, relying on the little public opinion data that is available, in Chapter Five I examined how elite discourse is received and (re)interpreted by the broader Muslim American public; however more data on Muslim Americans is needed in order to examine whether the Muslim American identity that is performed by CAIR and MPAC’s advocacy is influencing the development of a unified Muslim American community.

This study’s third potential limitation stems from its focus on elite discourse, which limits the examination to CAIR and MPAC, the only two organizations that fit the definition of Muslim American interest groups. Although this limitation enables an in-depth study of these organizations and their policy activism, one of the limitations of relying on these two organizations is that it makes large-scale analysis and comparisons difficult. A cross-regional analysis of Muslim interest groups in Western democracies could greatly expand upon the analysis presented in this work and add a greater understanding of the structural factors that influence the advocacy tactics, and the identity that is performed, by Muslim interest groups across different contexts.

**Significance**

Despite these acknowledged limitations, this study has sought to expand how policy activism is currently conceptualized. Briefly stated, policymaking is commonly seen as a bargaining process between government and private actors, each pushing for its preferred policy
outcome. This particular understanding results in the privileging of certain academic questions (mainly concerning strategy and policy outcomes) over others (mainly concerning the construction of policy actors and their interests). My study adds to this literature by examining how the policy process shapes, influences, and constitutes participants’ identities and, therefore, their behavior.

As such, it suggests that policy engagement is not necessarily about the pursuit of pre-established interests; it may be a way through which the collective identity of those whose interests are supposedly being represented is performatively constituted. By reconceptualizing policymaking, this study suggests that interest-group behavior (and that of other actors engaged in the policy process) may not be the result of strategic calculations, but a central way of being and becoming.

By focusing on the policy activism of a relatively understudied group, this dissertation also provides insight regarding interest-group formation. Thus, this study can help explain the policy activism of other interest groups, particularly those that claim to represent the interests of an ethnically, culturally, or nationally diverse community. What is often understood as a concern with “homeland” politics may actually be a concern with their belongingness and integration in the United States; after all, what greater proof of integration than participating in formal politics? An interesting and fruitful comparison to pursue would be the case of the so-called “Latino lobby” in the United States (de la Garza et al. 2000).

As Muslim Americans, Latinos are a highly diverse, fragmented, and in many ways divided group. In fact many contest the usage of the term “Latino” to identity this group, since it suggests a unified cohesive group, when indeed many argue there is not one. Asides from the ethnic, national, religious and cultural diversity of this group, there is a great variation in their
political and ideological affiliations (de la Garza et al. 2000). As with the case of Muslims, differences also exist between U.S.-born and immigrant Latinos, especially on issues of immigration where U.S.-born Latinos have been found to support more limitations on undocumented immigrants.\(^{137}\)

Thus, applying the approach of this study and examining the foreign policy engagement of Latino groups as a performative site through which a unified Latino identity is constructed, could help expand this analysis and bear fruitful insights and comparisons. Generally, this research suggests that analyses of interest groups could benefit from including questions of how policy activism is received, interpreted, and negotiated by the collectives that are, arguably, being represented. This changes the subject of inquiry from the relatively straightforward question of how much impact these groups have on U.S. policy to the more complicated and fundamental question of how much impact these groups have on the identities (and thus, on the shaping of interests) of their respective constituents.

Lastly, this work contributes new understanding to the study of Muslim Americans’ political engagement. This contribution is important for a number of reasons: first, the majority of the political science research on this community has been motivated by the post-9/11 backlash and its impacts on the community. As a result, there is a tendency to emphasize questions of civil and political rights and examine Muslims as victims of these policies. Although this is highly relevant and needed research, Muslims have made tremendous political progress in the thirteen years since the attacks; however, current frameworks neither focus on nor account for the community’s political maturation. By focusing on Muslim American interest groups and their

policy engagement, this dissertation sheds light on Muslims as policy actors, rather than as purely victims of government policy. Although Muslim Americans have been largely unable to influence U.S. policy in any meaningful way, CAIR and MPAC have taken advantage of the structure of opportunity engendered by 9/11 and used their access to the policy process to further promote their community’s social and political integration and, in the process, establish themselves, and those they claim to represent, as an American minority.
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