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Beyond the Backlash: Muslim and Middle Eastern Immigrants' Experiences in America, Ten Years Post-9/11

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Beyond the Backlash: Muslim and Middle Eastern Immigrants' Experiences in America,

Ten Years Post-9/11

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

     I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Laura, whose support and patience with me has truly been unrelenting. I also want to dedicate this to the Muslim and Middle Eastern communities of the Tampa Bay area, of whom so many were willing to share with me their incredible stories.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the perceived character of Islamophobia in American society, and how Islamophobia is embedded in the everyday lived experiences and identity negotiations of a sample of Middle Eastern immigrants, ten years post-9/11. Data consist of 13 qualitative interviews with first-generation Middle Eastern immigrants, including Muslims, Christians, and those who claim no religion. Findings suggest that perceived discrimination and cultural hostility vary across both gender and religion. Women who cover with the *hijab* perceive far more discrimination and humiliating experiences than men or women who do not cover in the sample. Iranians also receive extremely poor treatment, especially from border patrol agents in airports, regardless of religion. Overarching themes of identity negotiation include: (1) a Muslim First identity; (2) the individualizing of the Muslim faith through modified religious practices and diverse social networks; and (3) negotiating the Iranian vs. Persian identity. I conclude that while overall trends of discrimination are perceived to be receding from their peaks in the 9/11 backlash; there is a real possibility for sustained hostility towards those who are visibly Muslim, particularly for women, which has implications for trends in identity negotiation.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1996, five years before the tragic events of 9/11, esteemed Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington wrote in his national bestseller, *The Clash of the Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*:

> The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West (Huntington 1996:217-218).

One reason these words are striking is that they hint at the perceived tensions between the West and Islam at a time when many social scientists considered Middle Easterners to be largely "invisible" in American conversations of race and ethnicity (Jamal and Naber 2008; Naber 2000).

Yet another reason is that Huntington verbalizes, or even foreshadows, the sentiments in the minds of many Americans that *seemed* to be validated by the actions of the 9/11 hijackers and reports of those in the Middle East who in turn "celebrated in the streets" (Peter 2009:396), as well as the severe backlash suffered by Muslims and other Middle Eastern groups immediately after 9/11 (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Peek 2010).

Huntington's basic premise is that in the post-Cold War era, people's diverging religious and cultural identities would be the source of most international conflict. However, the claims demonstrated above are argued in essentialist terms that pit the "civilization of Islam" against the "civilization of the West." The fact that racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity is prominent in both the West and the Middle East is mostly unaddressed.

Islam has a long history in the West, dating to at least the introduction of the North American slave trade (Rana 2007). Likewise, current yearly proportions of Muslim immigrants outnumber all Protestant immigrants, and Muslims have the highest fertility rates of all religious groups in the United States. (Skirbekk, Kaufmann, and Goujon 2010). It is currently the second largest religion in Europe (Hunter 2002) and will also soon be, if not already, in the United States (Williams 2009)—in both cases behind Christianity as a blanket religion. Similarly, the Middle East is home to a medley of ethnic and religious groups. In other words, "the West" and "Islam" are not, and have not been for at least hundreds of years, mutually exclusive. And over time, through the above mentioned modes and the forces of globalization, sociologists expect the two to become even more enmeshed and embedded in each other.

Within this complexity lies the purpose of this thesis. Specifically, I use interview data with Middle Eastern immigrants to the U.S. to explore two related phenomena: (1) how immigrants perceive the current state of Islamophobia in the United States as it relates to daily interactional experiences with discrimination and cultural hostility, and (2) how Middle Eastern immigrants negotiate the post-9/11 environment in constructing and reconstructing their identities.

Before addressing these questions in later chapters, however, we will examine how the status of these groups has evolved in U.S. society since Arabia's earliest documented wave of mass immigration just before the beginning of the twentieth century. While these earlier trends are at times perhaps limited in their potential to extrapolate to the individual lived experiences of Muslims and Middle Easterners in the U.S. today, we see how stereotypes, stigmas, and group identities are in a constant state of "becoming"—affected by events both domestically and globally. We also see more specifically how social remnants of past events are embedded in present stereotypes and modern constructions of race, ethnicity, and religion.

Chapter 2

Historical Contexts and Current Trends

Early Immigration Trends and Social Consequences

Although the present political and media discourses of the Middle East and Middle Eastern immigration usually center along the motifs of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, immigrants from this region of the world hold an enduring, dynamic history in the United States. Scholars tend to view Middle Eastern immigration to America as happening in two distinct periods, pre- and post- World War II (Aguirre and Turner 2010; Feagin and Feagin 2011; Marvasti and McKinney 2004).

As the early wave began in the late 1800s, most Middle Eastern immigrants to America were from the Greater Syrian and Mount Lebanon regions. Many were fleeing the Ottoman Empire, seeking religious freedom and economic opportunity, and identified as "Syrians" (Aguirre and Turner 2010:281). Most of these early immigrants arrived poor, uneducated, and mostly illiterate (Marvasti and McKinney 2004; Naber 2008; Suleiman 1999). While Middle Easterners today are almost exclusively associated with being Muslim, these early immigrants were predominantly Christian, but also Jewish and Muslim (Aguirre and Turner 2010).

Immigrants from the Middle East region who arrived to the U.S. before 1905, and the vast majority of those who followed until World War I, sought to generate a moderate amount of economic wealth and return home within five years, orienting them towards a

sojourner mindset (Naff 1985). A sojourner is a particular kind of immigrant who migrants temporarily, often with motivations of earning economic capital to improve one's quality of life in the country of origin.

Because of their economic and educational disadvantages, they tended to gravitate towards peddling, and the more affluent opened up small shops, cleverly taking advantage of many American's desire to "shop the Orient" (Gualtieri 2009:48). Entrepreneurial professions were also seen by these early immigrants to be more liberating and conducive to an independent lifestyle, and more profitable than a factory job (Houghton 1911)—a trend of occupational niche and employment pattern formation which still characterizes many of today's Arab and Middle Eastern American communities (Cainkar 2006). This also facilitated the wide population distribution of Syrian immigrants well beyond the initial colony in New York (Gualtieri 2009), which is still very evident today (Cainkar 2002).

Many Americans saw little difference between peddling and begging, often resulting in the perception that Syrians were of low class and stature (Houghton 1911), but their sojourner orientation kept motifs of social status from being too pressing of a concern in the community. As with most *sojourners*, their political, social, and economic preoccupations were by and large tied to their native lands, rather than to their social conditions in the United States (Naff 1985).

By the 1910s, however, as these immigrants and their children gained knowledge of the English language and grew more acculturated as a community to domestic society, many Syrian families' orientation had begun turning from sojourner towards permanent residency (Naff 1985).

This proved problematic because of a post- Civil War law that explicitly extended naturalized citizenship solely to individuals of "white" or African ancestry, but no "in-between" ancestries (i.e., Hispanics, Italians, Asians, etc.) (Tehranian 2009:39). Also during this time, there existed a rapidly intensifying nativist and more general anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the United States.

North Carolina senator F. M. Simmons perhaps captured the essence of the times when he claimed that the newly arrived immigrants were the "spawn of the Phoenician curse" (Higham 1955:165), as much of the anti-immigrant rhetoric indeed made reference to inherent, "biological" differences between Anglo-Saxons and the Italian, Eastern European, and Syrian immigrants who were seen to possess ambiguous racial status—not cleanly fitting into the strict racial hierarchy of early twentieth century America (Gualtieri 2009). Some writers of the time described Syrian immigrants as "Mongolian plasma" and "parasites in their peddling ways" who were "attempting to contaminate the pure American stock" (Naber 2000:39).

Syrians responded to the anti-immigrant rhetoric and in hopes of gaining "white" status by appealing to the notion that their Semitic roots in Mount Lebanon with Christianity and the Holy Land not only made them compatible with Western civilization, but also "within a branch of the 'white race'" (Gualtieri 2009:57). Indeed, the vast majority of the arguments for "whiteness" from the early Syrian community argued a religious connection with white Americans to the Holy Land rather than claiming any special racial phenotype (Bishara 1914; Feagin and Feagin 2011; Gualtieri 2009). Although this argument alone did not hold up in court, it became the pillar of the Syrian case for "whiteness" and community self-construction (Gualtieri 2009). These events,

however, did not keep Syrian immigrants from advancing socioeconomically, as by 1911, the median salary of a Syrian household was only slightly lower than that of a native-born white household (Marvasti and McKinney 2004).

In the midst of World War I and extreme domestic nativist movements, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917, which essentially barred immigration from most of Asia, including from much of what is traditionally known as the Middle East (Love 2009). Congress later passed the Immigration Act of 1924 (National Origins Act), which further impeded immigration, putting annual entry limits at 2% of the specific ethnic population from the 1890 census (Fuchs 1990). As result of these legislative acts, the number of immigrants from the Middle East permitted to enter the United States was reduced from the earlier pre-war peaks of 9,000 to a mere few hundred—a figure which remained relatively stable for many decades (Samhan 1999).

With the circulatory migration patterns effectively closed, the Middle Eastern communities in America were in many aspects socially cut-off from their former homelands. This furthered an already-growing orientation towards social and political inclusion (Suleiman 1987). For many second generation Middle Eastern Americans who were quickly approaching and achieving adulthood, aspirations to return to the homeland faded, often leaving in its place a desire to assimilate with American culture and society.

This process, however, would prove to be extremely challenging, as the legal status of Middle Easterners according to naturalization laws was still highly ambiguous. Until 1920, the U.S. Census identified Middle Easterners as "Turks," much to the dismay of many who had deliberately fled the Ottoman Empire to escape persecution (Marvasti and McKinney 2004:9). Between 1909 and 1944, at least eight court cases ruled on the

legal status of Middle Eastern Americans, and whether or not they could be considered "white," with four cases falling on each side of the argument (Feagin and Feagin 2011:350). However, by the 1930 U.S. Census, over half of the foreign-born Syrian population had naturalized as U.S. citizens (Gualtieri 2009).

Many also made strides to erase manifest cultural differences between themselves and the general white American population, sometimes refusing to continue teaching Arabic to their children in favor of English, and abandoning most cultural and heritage education in the community (Suleiman 1999).

By World War II, later generations of Middle Eastern immigrants in the U.S. were practically culturally indistinguishable from the larger host American society, and were declared by the Census Bureau "to be treated like Italian-Americans, Greek-Americans, and some other European-American communities" (Hassan 2002:20). After the war, returning soldiers who had been raised with their parents' more traditional traits and values effectively dropped those not compatible with the more "American" perspective and raised their own children according to more local conventions (Naff 1985).

"Whiteness" had not only been attained legally, but also *culturally*—more quickly than their Polish, Italian, Czech, Hungarian, Lithuanian, and Russian Jewish immigrant counterparts arriving to the United States during roughly the same time period (Marvasti and McKinney 2004; Massey 1995). Of today's Arab American population, about half trace their families back to this first wave of immigrants from Greater Syria (Marvasti and McKinney 2004).

Immigration Reform, Conflict, and Identity Crisis

Until the late 1960s, immigration to America from the Middle East was regulated by the earlier discussed Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924, which severely impeded or completely stifled immigration flows from the area. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, implemented fully in 1968, abolished the discriminatory quota-based system that was partial towards immigrants from northern and western European nations, and effectively ended the ban on Asian immigration (Massey 1995).

This new piece of legislation opened the gates for a fresh wave of Middle Eastern immigration that was distinctive from the earlier wave in several regards. The first wave of immigrants were primarily from the Mount Lebanon and Greater Syria regions, but migrants in this new wave came from at least 20 unique countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa (Feagin and Feagin 2011).

Whereas the first migrants were predominantly Christian, the latter wave was made up of more Muslims, but also Christians, and Jews (Aguirre and Turner 2010). Immigrants in this second wave shared the desire for economic opportunity and the saw the attraction of a major industrial economy, but were often driven from their homes as result of regional political conflict or civil war. The Lebanese civil war in the 1970s and the Israeli invasion a decade later; the Iraq-Iran war; poverty and civil war in Yemen—all brought changes in their homelands that made life difficult, especially for the wealthy and the middle class (Feagin and Feagin 2011; Marvasti and McKinney 2004). Many from these wealthy and middle classes fled their homelands in search of a democratic haven where they could escape political and economic harassment. Compared with the earlier

wave of Middle Eastern immigrants, most of the new arrivals were very highly educated and relatively well off—engineers, doctors, lawyers, and professors.

Most scholars point to the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict as the turning point for the Arab-American community and Arab-American ethnic identity (Marvasti and McKinney 2004; McAlister 2001; Naber 2008). The Arab armies had been soundly defeated by the Israelis in seven days, and Arabs and Arab Americans generally felt let down, humiliated, and bewildered by the unconditional support of Israel by the American government, media, and citizens (Suleiman 1999). Perhaps Gary Awad (1981) best captured the sentiment when he writes,

> The shock of Arab Americans was not so much the defeat of Egypt,
> Jordan, and Syria in 1967, but the way it was received in the West and
> especially in the United States, where strong, derogatory, racial overtones
> in the media toward the Arab contributed significantly, for the first time,
> to a growing political and ethnic awareness in the Arab American
> community (31-32).

The extreme pro-Israeli American media coverage of the war, and the bombardment of the Israeli point of view, "was perhaps without comparison in its extent and intensity" (Suleiman 1988:37), greatly enhancing Israel's power and influence in the region. American media coverage attributed almost no "good" qualities to the Arabs, while the Israelis were portrayed as nearly completely blameless (Suleiman 1988). Mere Arab opposition to what they saw as illegal Israeli military occupation constructed Arabs

to be inherently at odds with "the essential values of the United States" (Cainkar 2006:247). During and directly after the 1967 war, Arabs were effectively dehumanized throughout the American press. Crude jokes and cartoons with racist anti-Arab overtones began to appear in magazines and on television, all in a time period when, ironically, multiculturalism as a movement was expanding, and messages of ethnic, racial, and religious tolerance were widely gaining momentum (Suleiman 1988).

These widespread American beliefs about the innate differences between Arabs and Americans "erected social boundaries around Arab Americans not of their own creation" (Cainkar 2006:247), which had a profound effect on the social organization of the ethnic community. Activists and scholars point to a pan-ethnic "Arab American awakening" (Naber 2008:33) in the early 1970s, in response to their increasing social isolation and negative characterization in the media. Even the third and fourth generation descendants who had for decades thought of themselves as near-wholly assimilated, began to identify with the term "Arab," and initiated a process of "de-assimilation," or separating from "mainstream" America (Feagin and Feagin 2011; Marvasti and McKinney 2004). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) refer to this process as "reactive ethnicity"—the process whereby overt outside discrimination towards an ethnic minority group facilitates the reactive formation of an ethnic identity to promote ethnic group solidarity and political mobilization.

This coincided with the creation of several organizations devoted to the advancement and protection of Arab American interests (Naber 2008). The same year as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG) was formed, seeking to represent the diverse aspects of the Arab American

11

community. Unable to gain much traction with the extremely unwelcoming and partisan

U.S. political system, the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) was formed

in 1974 as a lobbying firm dedicated to the advancement of Arab issues in general

(Suleiman 1999).

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, various events taking place in foreign countries

and continuing negative press and media coverage produced further social exclusion,

prejudice, and discrimination of Arab Americans. After the Middle Eastern oil crisis of

the 1970s, the image of the "oil sheik" began to supplement the already negative images

circulated about Arabs (Love 2009). The anti-Arab rhetoric and images in the mass media

undoubtedly made an impression on Americans. Pollsters Lipset and Schneider (1977)

found in the late 1970s that Americans' attitudes towards Arabs were indeed "negative,

close to racist" (22), and Slade (1981) wrote that Arabs were "one of the few ethnic

groups that can still be slandered with impunity" (143) in the post-Civil Rights era. Even

inside the inner circles of the U.S. government, there existed reports of mid-level aides in

the 1980s making casual comments about Middle Easterners as "sand niggers" (Bell

1988:103-105).

The Iran hostage crisis of 1979 also had a profound and lasting effect on many

Americans' sentiments towards Iran and Iranian-Americans. Random acts of violence

and hate crimes were committed against Iranians in America and many Iranian businesses

were boycotted, vandalized, or even set ablaze (Parrillo 2000). Although Iran is not an

Arab country, there is evidence that Americans did not differentiate Middle Easterners

who were Arab or non-Arab, and took out their hostility on anyone who appeared to be

Arab or Middle Eastern (Frenkel 2004), suggesting the beginnings of a more pan-ethnic construction of various Middle Eastern ethnic groups in the minds of many Americans.

Immediately following the hostage crisis, it may come as no surprise that the image of the gun-toting or bomb-strapped Middle Eastern terrorist became just as common in the media as the former "oil sheik" (Love 2009), and was buttressed through Hollywood's numerous terrorist caricature portrayals in big-budget movies such as *The Siege*, *Iron Eagle*, and *True Lies* (Shaheen 2003). It is important to note that these images were not associated with any one nationality or religion, but rather an association with the Middle East in general, and many Middle Eastern American communities (Love 2009).

Both the first Gulf War in 1991 and the first bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 served to reinforce these negative images and stereotypes, and each of these incidents were followed by waves of hate crimes, vandalizing of mosques, discriminatory job dismissals, and random violent assaults on the streets (Marvasti 2005).

These racialized stereotypes became so pervasive by the mid-1990s that after the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed in 1995, several investigators and journalists prematurely pointed their fingers at "the Arabs" as probable culprits before it became known that the main perpetrator was a discharged U.S. Army veteran from rural Michigan (Michel and Herbeck 2001). These ignorant and whimsical accusations had severe implications, as more than two hundred occurrences of harassment or vigilante violence against Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans were recorded in the week after the April 19 bombing, many due to the media's false reports of "Middle Eastern-looking men" and Islamic Fundamentalists" as perpetrators (Peek 2010:24). Even the U.S. government responded by passing the Comprehensive Anti-

Terrorism Act of 1995, which included a special measure calling for the deportation of "alien terrorists" (Peek 2010:24), even though the assailants in the bombing were white and American-born and raised. Similarly, after the 1996 crash of TWA flight 800 off the shores of New York, officers almost immediately blamed "Arab terrorists." Airline passengers fitting the "profile" were subject to "harsh questioning, demeaning treatment and intrusive searches of their personal possessions and bodies" (Swiney 2006:23). However, the crash was ultimately blamed on faulty wiring.

In the 1990s, the social and cultural constructions of Arabs and Middle Easterners as "violent and backwards" (Cainkar 2006) went through yet another transition. The global phenomenon of Islamic revivalism has been well documented (Cainkar 2002; Kepel 1997), and American-born, second generation Arabs were not immune to the movement. As more of these youth chose Islamic religious engagement over secularism (Cainkar 2004), and numbers of religious Middle Eastern immigrants who were predominantly Muslim continued to increase, the social construction of Arabs the Arab-American community was almost completely extended to Muslims (Cainkar 2006). The same images and cultural representations were utilized, but instead of pertaining to "Arabs" or "Middle Easterners," the focus was on Islam and its "flawed civilization." Islamophobia, it would seem, was in full force well before the events of September 11.[1]

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[1] Throughout this paper, I utilize the terms "Arabs," "Middle Easterners," or "Muslims" distinctly. "Arab is a term that is highly contested, but I use it to refer to someone is from, or whose ancestors are from, an Arab country (Naber 2008). In the same way, the "Middle East" is a contested word, but I use it to refer to someone who is from a Middle Eastern country, or South Asia. This is often referred to as "the Greater Middle East" (Baroudi 2007). Muslims are follows of the Islamic faith. In this paper, I refer more to "Middle Easterners" than "Arabs," as the Middle East is a more inclusive term in the context that I use it.

Islamophobia in Post-9/11 America

The backlash Muslim and Middle Eastern Americans faced following the events

of September 11, as we have seen, was not unexpected, nor was the backlash drawing on

unique and new stereotypes or hostilities. The framework for a cultural backlash against

Muslims, Arabs, and other Middle Eastern communities was well in place beforehand

(Love 2009; Peek 2010). Muslim Americans had been living for quite some time with

their faith being viewed as "different, strange, foreign, violent, oppressive, and

threatening" (Peek 2010:59). Middle Eastern Americans had grown accustomed to over

three decades of negative stereotyping by the American public, unfavorable imagery in

the mass media, and being cast as a social out-group.

As Americans were inundated with "Us versus Them" (Marvasti and McKinney

2004:67) messages from the media and politicians following September 11, the social

landscape turned ripe once again for overt acts of discrimination, harassment, and hate

(Disha, Cavendish, and King 2011). Bryan notes, speaking of her research in Jersey City

after September 11, that "nearly all of the Muslims I interviewed mentioned [felt]

hostility from employers, coworkers, store clerks and bank tellers, police officers,

neighbors, random passerby, and even former friends" (Bryan 2005:143). This section

will explore the wide literature that has documented this trend in various public,

workplace, and educational contexts.

Discrimination in Public Places

Public spaces such as city streets, restaurants, hotels, and public transportation

represent some of least-protected areas in our society from discriminatory acts (Feagin

and Sikes 1994). As an individual from a marginalized group moves from the physically

and socially protected home environment, vulnerability to discriminatory acts increases as one is much more likely to encounter members of more dominant group(s), who may react to members of lower status groups on the basis of ascribed (usually negative) characteristics (Feagin 1991). Members of marginalized groups in society are most often identified by various "group membership" markers. Previous studies show that visible membership status to a lower status group in society is a major determinant of discriminatory acts (Aguirre and Turner 2010). For Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans, these may include religious symbols (such as women who wear a *hijab*, or men who with beards or Islamic style dress), cultural symbols (Arabic-sounding surnames or speaking in Arabic or other regional languages), and organizational memberships (attending a mosque, cultural center, or cultural events) (Peek 2010).

Participants in Marvasti and McKinney's study (2004) spoke of how once-safe public spaces, such as neighborhood streets and parking lots, turned into threatening places after intimidating verbal or physical confrontations with strangers. Participants described a sense of bewilderment and vulnerability that such malicious acts could be happening towards them, and in such familiar places. Peek (2010) reported that participants in her study were subject to intense, hostile looks or "stares" (71) as they moved through public spaces. To be sure, many Muslim Americans who frequently wear culturally or religiously identifying markers have grown accustomed to receiving confused or even curious looks when in public; but after September 11, these looks changed from inquisitive to hostile. Indeed, many scholars point out that the "hate stare" is a very common, racist technique that dates back centuries (Feagin and Sikes 1994). John Howard Griffin (1996), a white journalist who darkened his skin to experience "the

South" as a Black man in the 1950s, wrote that in one specific public encounter, a white lady "glared at me with such loathing that I knew I was receiving what Negros call 'the hate stare'" (50).

Airports and airplanes have been perhaps the most notorious places where Islamophobic discrimination often rears its head. In February 2002, *Arab-American Business* magazine published a set of special "safety tips" for Arab-American travelers, presumably to save them the time delay and embarrassment of being subject to special racial profiling techniques that have come to be widely known colloquially as "Flying While Arab", or FWA (Cainkar 2002:27).

It is worth emphasizing that many other religious groups and ethnicities have been targeted as "Arabs/Middle Easterners/Muslims" following September 11, including Hindus, Sikhs, Latin Americans, Arab Christians, and others (Joshi 2006). Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) spoke with a Sikh leader in Brooklyn who reported being yelled at to "go back [home]" (144) regularly when in public. Some participants in Peek's (2010) study had similar experiences. One participant, who was Hispanic and Catholic, actually received a face-to-face death threat while being misinterpreted as an Arab, Muslim, or perhaps both.

Discrimination in the Workplace

Because many American adults spend a great deal of time working, discrimination in these realms can be especially stressful, particularly for people of color, as reactions to one's race or ethnicity seem completely out of one's control (Feagin and McKinney 2003). Obtaining entry to the job market itself can be very challenging to maneuver for many Middle Eastern Americans who have Arabic-sounding names in post-

September 11 America. After numerous reports of job market exclusion by some Middle Eastern Americans, the nonprofit Discrimination Research Center investigated by sending 6,000 fictitious job resumes to various employers in California, with names that were "identifiable" as white, African American, Asian American, Arab American, and South Asian (Peek 2010; Semuels 2006). The results indeed showed that Arabic-sounding names received fewer responses than those that sounded European or African American. The name "Abdul-Aziz Mansour" received the lowest response rate in the study. Perhaps for this reason, it is common for Middle Easterners to "Anglicize" names that sound too Muslim or Arabic (Marvasti and McKinney 2004; Nagel and Staeheli 2005).

Inside places of employment, workplace discrimination in the form of unabashed forwarded email jokes, cartoons, and short stories depicting racist images of Muslims and Arabs can be prevalent (Marvasti and McKinney 2004; Peek 2010). Avoidance is a common method of mediation, as confrontation could jeopardize one's job or future job opportunities (Marvasti and McKinney 2004). While workplace discrimination is a common theme with many minority groups, Islamophobic-themed discrimination became so commonplace after 9/11 that the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission published a special document outlining for employers the workplace rights of Muslims, Arabs, South Asians, and Sikhs (Love 2009), even though these rights have been officially federally protected since the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Still, advocacy groups have been called in for support and legal counsel in thousands of complaints filed since September 11 where employers either "unlawfully fired, refused to

hire or failed to accommodate employees properly with regard to their religious or ethnic background" (Love 2009:416).

Middle Eastern-owned businesses that were readily identifiable as such were often subject to active and passive "boycotts" (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009:148) from disgruntled Americans. Since a large proportion of Middle Eastern-owned businesses have always been independent and self-owned, a moderate loss of revenue can have dire consequences, and many were put on the verge of bankruptcy. Gupta (2004) makes the case that even New York City taxi drivers, a majority of which are immigrant Muslim, have also been victim to increasing verbal attacks from customers, and some drivers have even reported being physically assaulted and cheated of fares.

Discrimination in Schools

The major problem faced by young Muslim and Middle Eastern students is lack of knowledge and respect for Islam and Middle Eastern cultures in general by teachers, administrators, and fellow classmates (Aguirre and Turner 2010). Perhaps following cues from the government, many school administrators and teachers are ignorant to the fact that Middle Eastern youth come from very diverse backgrounds. They are also often viewed as "token" Muslims or Middle Easterners, that they somehow represent their homeland regions (Marvasti and McKinney 2004:135).

Conflations in the media and elsewhere in public of Middle Easterners and Muslims with terrorists and terrorist groups are often attributed to students by administrators, teachers, and other students. This exacerbates the more general lack of knowledge and pervasive stereotyping of these groups. Also, especially since 9/11, Middle Eastern students must be more on guard against threats or even violent attacks.

However, discrimination is far from a novel phenomenon for students of Middle Eastern decent, as Marvasti and McKinney (2004) reported accounts of similar patterns in schools following the Iranian Hostage Crisis, and the first Gulf War.

On college campuses, some Muslim college students in the U.S. felt subjected to hostile comments from professors and instructors (Peek 2010). Similar to employees subjected to discrimination, students often feel powerless because their grades are often dependent on their relationships with their teachers. Reports of Muslim students feeling that they had to defend their religion from being inaccurately portrayed by educators or other students also abound (Peek 2003, 2010).

Post-9/11 Ethnic and Religious Identity Trends

The present study does not solely document the experiences of cultural hostility and discrimination that a sample of Muslims and Middle Easterners experienced in the context of a post-9/11 America. It also explores how the Islamophobic social climate has affected the processes of identity negotiation for this group of new immigrants.

When studying identity, researchers often focus on how individual identities are constructed and negotiated through everyday interactions and experiences of inclusion and exclusion, influenced by both internal and external factors (Gamson 1997). This makes immigrants an especially interesting and relevant group for scholarly research of identity construction. Movement and settlement across national borders often forces the decoupling of the contexts of place, belonging, and culture from an immigrant's society of origin, and fundamentally throws previously held conceptions of identity into question (Killian and Johnson 2006). Additionally, an immigrant must negotiate new stratifications in relation to race/ethnicity, class, and gender that exist in the host society.

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The experiences of Middle Easterners in America present a particularly salient case for social researchers of immigrant identity. Especially since 9/11, the disparate ethnic, cultural, and religious labels of "Arab," "Middle Easterner," and "Muslim," have become conflated (Cainkar 2006; Suleiman 1988) into a single label for "persons who appear to be 'Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim'" (Volpp 2003:152). This term has in turn been used as code language for "terrorist" by various government initiatives (Volpp 2003). These conflations which are extremely prevalent in American society may compel an immigrant from this region to negotiate these meanings in relation to their identity in unique ways.

Much of the traditional research covering immigrants from the "Muslim World," especially prior to 9/11, focused on "Arab Americans" (For a discussion of these "naming" issues, see Love 2009; Naber 2008). However, the word "Arab" is hotly contested, and seems to be exclusionary of many non-Arab groups from the Middle East and South Asia that are highly affected by the post-9/11 Islamophobic environment. People who trace their heritage to the Middle East, but do not identify as being Arab, include Iranians, Turks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Kurds, Copts, and many other ethnicities, nationalities, and religions (Love 2009).

Arabs and other Middle Easterners are only recently receiving moderate attention in the vast social science literature on ethnicity or immigration.[2] This lack of attention is perhaps in part due to their lack of official minority status, being legally classified by the U.S. Census Bureau as "white." This classification is the result of the early Arab immigrants' successful lobbying efforts to resist being categorized as "nonwhite" in the

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[2] Even *Immigrant America* by Portes and Rumbaut (2006), now in its third revised edition, thought by many in the field to be the most popular textbook on American immigrant communities and immigration, pays very little attention to Middle Eastern groups or Muslims.

context of the rigid, institutionalized racial hierarchy of early twentieth century America (Gualtieri 2009; Tehranian 2009). More recently however, this "white" classification status has been labeled a kind of paradox as numerous Middle Eastern communities, especially later immigrants of more varied backgrounds, often fail to see themselves as "white" (Cainkar 2006; Read 2008). This has caused many from inside various Middle Eastern communities to express a shared feeling of "invisibility"—victims of hostile public and private discrimination, increasing in recent times, while largely unable to reap much of the benefits of the civil rights legislation of the past fifty years or have their collective voices heard through various national surveys and studies (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Naber 2000; Samhan 1999; Tehranian 2009). This invisibility is also seen in the classification of hate crimes by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). According to Disha, Cavendish, and King (2011), the FBI does not keep track of hate crimes motivated by a racial bias against those who are Arab. Among the categories available to law enforcement agents responsible for recording hate crimes are white, black, Hispanic, and Asian, but not "Arab." As a result, law enforcement officers are often forced to classify hate crimes motivated by racial bias against Arabs in the "other" category, which can render these forms of hate crimes invisible.

But the complexities of identity go much further than the U.S. government's classification patterns of Middle Eastern Americans. The term "Middle Eastern American" itself seems to be problematic, as it is a specifically American construct, representing a vast amalgamation of groups who themselves or whose ancestors came from the region known throughout the English-speaking world as "The Middle East" (Stewart 2009) and who now reside in the United States. Indeed, it is a panethnic term,

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much like the terms "Latino/a Americans" and "Asian Americans" (Feagin and Feagin 2011:347) which seems to be more ascribed than subscribed (Marvasti and McKinney 2004). Nonetheless, just as Asian Americans became less reluctant to identify in panethnic terms in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Marvasti and McKinney 2004), researchers are starting to explore a potential ethnogenesis among various Middle Eastern groups (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Marvasti and McKinney 2004). Ethnogenesis refers to the gradual combining of old and new ethnic practices and identities to create new ethnic forms—or sometimes, panethnic identities (Greeley 1974). This new identity may be developing because of the feeling of shared experiences of hostile racism and discrimination, felt by groups of people that fall collectively under the ascribed umbrella term "Middle Eastern" (Naber 2005).

South Asians fall into perhaps an even more paradoxical position that Middle Easterners. South Asia is made up of the countries of Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and sometimes Afghanistan and Iran. South Asians appear to make up the largest proportion of Muslims in America (Love 2009), but overwhelmingly do not identify as Middle Eastern (Marvasti and McKinney 2004). However, especially since 9/11, there is evidence that parts of South Asia are beginning to be grouped with the Middle East through the usage of the term "the Greater Middle East" (Baroudi 2007; Olivier 2005). This could have social consequences for later generations of South Asians in America, just as later generations of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other Asian immigrant groups came to be less opposed to identifying as "Asian Americans."

Among some Arab Americans who identify as Muslim, researchers have pointed to an emerging "Muslim First, Arab Second" identity orientation, especially among the

youth (Naber 2005). Naber explains that this identification pattern serves as a vehicle to oppose the "hegemonic discourse casting everything that is "*Muslim*" in opposition to everything that is "*American*" (494, emphasis in original). It was the emergence of the "Arab" pan-ethnic label in the 1960s that served as a platform for the emergence of this "Muslim First" category (481). In the context of the global Islamic revival movement of the 1990s, many of the organizations that were once devoted to "Arabs" became organizing vehicles for Muslims. This momentum caused somewhat of a polarization among "Muslim" and "Arab" groups and individuals, with the former becoming more religious and politicized, while the latter became more secular. Naber writes of one participant, torn between the two groups, wearing her hijab to Muslim organization events, only to remove it later in order to fit in better with the Arab groups. Interestingly, Naber's research took place in San Francisco *before* 9/11, hinting at how these processes have long been at work.

Since 9/11, Muslims and Middle Easterners in general have faced biting attacks in American media and political discourse, which have been in part fueled decades of negative stereotyping, scapegoating, and a growing anti-Muslim sentiment across the country, increasingly referred to as *Islamophobia* (Cainkar 2006; Kaplan 2006; Love 2009; Suleiman 1988). These complexities have institutionalized several "obstacles" which Muslims or persons of Middle Eastern descent must negotiate in twenty-first century, post-9/11 America.

Other commentators have noted the possibility that Muslims have become more cognizant of a shared *umma*, or collective consciousness of a global Muslim community, in the context of non-Muslim, Western societies (Malik 2004). In highly diverse Western

societies, *umma* is seen as a possible identity-link between all Muslims, specifically immigrant Muslims, who may be Arab, Turkish, Persian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, or African. However, one reason for this may be because the villages, communities, and countries that were formerly associated with immigrants' identities become less salient for everyday life. This is presumably more often the case for children of immigrants, who might have even fewer links with the former country, or their parents' country of origin (Malik 2004).

Indeed, the theme of Muslims coming together in the wake of 9/11 was commonly found among social researchers. As one participant in Lori Peek's 2010 book, *Behind the Backlash*, stated, "when you attack some group, they are going to reaffirm who they are…they're going to come together to try to prevent themselves from being attacked. The more people attack Muslims, the more we're going to come together" (141). In this way, Muslims "coming together" can be seen as a method of protecting themselves from the larger, hostile American society. What happens in the wake of this "coming together" has been a point of contention among Muslims. A great deal of this contention surrounds the question of how Muslims and Middle Eastern immigrants fit into the American pluralist society. And although there exists a wide array of opinions on this matter, two overarching themes begin to develop: (1) a reactive, political Islam which seeks to emphasize a Muslim identity and promote traditional Muslim values, and (2) a pluralist Islam which not only wishes to be more included in the vision of multicultural America, but also to pluralize Islam itself, and to recognize and confront ethnic and gender inequalities within Islam. In this way, pluralist Islam seeks to be included, but also be more *inclusive* (Haddad 2011).

The first of these two themes is perhaps best captured by Nagra (2011), who uses Portes' concept of reactive ethnicity to explain the post-9/11 changes in Muslim identity negotiation. Reactive ethnicity is what Portes saw emerging among Cuban Americans in Miami in the 1980s (Portes and Stepick 1993) and among mostly young Mexican American children of immigrants in California (Portes and Rumbaut 2001) in response to intense, targeted discrimination. This process consists of a de-hyphenating of identities and exerting one's non-American ethnicity, which is seen as being under an unwarranted attack.

Nagra documented that Muslims in Canada were going through a similar identification process, asserting a specific "Muslim" identity in response to being associated with the 9/11 hijackers through religious affiliation. The fact that Islam was being closely associated with the 9/11 hijackers caused many of Nagra's participants to reclaim the Muslim faith rather than distance themselves from religious violence.

Cainkar (2004) frames this phenomenon as part of the larger, globalized Islamic Revival movement that began in the 1990s. The appeal of Islam to participants in her study is its ability to explain the meaning behind daily experiences of social marginalization and stigmatization, where they are often portrayed as barbaric by textbooks, Halloween costumes, video games, and movies. Islam offers hope in its message of justice and equality, in a way that American secularism does not. This is one possible function of Islam is very similar to that of the Nation of Islam, the African American sect of Islam which was formed, in part, to help improve to social, political, and economic situation of African Americans.

However, as mentioned earlier, Islam is a very diverse religion, with a wide array of possible identities and religiosities. Duderija (2007a) writes about the changes in identity construction patterns of Muslim immigrants specifically in Western societies and how they attempt to recast Islam from its status as a stigmatized identity. He emphasizes that migration and settlement in a non-Muslim, Western society decouples the previously connected notions of territory, culture, and religion, permitting the Muslim immigrant a certain amount of agency in constructing a new religious identity that may range from the symbolic (Gans 1979) to the "ultra-orthodox" (Duderija 2007:153).

In this way, he widens the theoretical spectrum in which we see Muslim identity being affected by the post-9/11 climate. He pays special attention to a group whom he coins as "Progressive Muslims," denoted by their individualistic expression of Muslim identity, resulting from what he calls "the Protestantization of Islamic faith and practice" (148), referring to the relegation of religious faith to the private sphere only, and away from the public sphere. Sociologists also commonly refer to this process as the *privatization* of religion (Luckmann 1990). This group of Muslims, he writes, while holding a salient Muslim identity, changes the *meaning* of Islam to better "fit" in more liberal, Western democracies. This is accomplished by shunning what is seen as pre-modern religious rituals and ideology, and an increase in general religious eclecticism based on individual choice.

The specific motivation or source of inspiration behind this movement is, not surprisingly, in dispute. Proponents claim it is the social progression of religion in society, much like Christianity and Judaism have gone through in the West (Duderija 2007a). Milton Gordon or Herbert Gans might say that it is simply the assimilation

process in action, or the softening of religious differences in society. Still other, more conservative, Muslims might be hesitant to call these individuals Muslims at all, as they give up some of the practices or behaviors that have traditionally guided the Islamic faith. This thesis hopes to speak to these complexities and contentions.

Research Questions

The present study asks two principle questions based on in-depth interviews with Middle Eastern immigrants to the United States. First, what are immigrants' perceptions of the current state of Islamophobia in the United States as it relates to their daily interactional experiences with discrimination and cultural hostility? I also ask how these perceptions differ across gender, immigration status, and religiosity. This will contribute to what we already know about the backlash against Muslims and Middle Easterners in post-9/11 context as documented by Peek (2010), Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009), and Cainkar (2009), among others. In other words, many studies explored the backlash in the wake of 9/11; this study aims to find out the qualitative state of this backlash, ten years later.

Also, this study will ask how Middle Eastern immigrants negotiate the post-9/11 environment in terms of constructing and molding their identities. How do they negotiate the intersection of ethnicity and religion, one or both of which may or may not be stigmatized in U.S. society? Do they see an "incompatibility" with America and their own religious, cultural, or national identities? Answers to this will contribute to what we know about how the Islamophobic climate post-9/11 shapes the identity negotiation process for immigrants.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

The data for this paper consist of thirteen qualitative, in-depth interviews with first-generation immigrants from Muslim-majority Middle Eastern countries. Notably, my research questions lend themselves specifically to qualitative interviewing methods. For example, I am not only asking "if" someone has experienced discrimination, which would require a simple "yes or no" answer, but also "how" and "why." I am also not only inquiring about the more salient form of identity that a person assumes, but more specifically, "why" someone identifies a given way, as well as the meanings attached to certain forms of identity.

By utilizing in-depth interviews, I am able to delve deeper into the research questions in hopes of coming to a more complete understanding of the processes of which I am inquiring. Additionally, in-depth interviews have proven useful for the study of opinions and experiences from members of marginalized groups, as they allow dissemination of their stories (Esterberg 2002). However, by including fewer respondents than is typical in survey research, this thesis carries the disadvantage of not being generalizable to the research population at large.

Sample Description and Participant Recruitment

The recruitment design is a convenience sample with a snowball component, as one interview was obtained through another participant. Because of this design, results cannot be generalized to any particular Muslim or Middle Eastern population or sub-population.

The population for this study is all first and "first and a half" (Zhou 1997) generation immigrants in the Tampa Bay area, who are from what has been termed "the Greater Middle East" (Baroudi 2007). "First and a half" is a term that is in contention, but generally describes someone who migrated to the United States before the age of 12. The "Greater Middle East" includes the North African states along the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, along with Sudan and Somalia; the Traditional Middle East (Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey); along with the Southwestern Asian states of Afghanistan and Pakistan (Olivier 2005).

The Tampa Bay area provides a demographically appropriate setting to carry out such a study, as there are several relatively large and active Muslim and Middle Eastern populations. The sizable Muslim population in the area is at least in part the reason that Tampa is home to one of the two Center of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) offices in Florida, the other being in Miami. There are two very active mosques in Hillsborough County, with one doubling as an Islamic Cultural Center, and four mosques in Pinellas County. Also, there are several Arab Christian churches, including two very large and active Egyptian Coptic Orthodox churches. Additionally, there is a very visible presence

of Muslim students on the local university campus, many of whom are international

students, along with a very active Muslim Students' Association (MSA).

In order to have a sample as diverse as possible, no religious affiliation was

necessary to participate in this study. In other words, participation was open to Muslims,

Christians, Jews, those who claim no religion, and any other religious identity. The age

range of the sample is 20-45 years old. As mentioned previously, the goal of this study

was to examine immigrants' perceptions of "post 9/11 America." As such, most of the

participants for this study will have spent the majority of their adult lives in post-9/11

America. The median age is 28, and only four were over the age of 30. Five of 13

interviewees were living in the United States at the time of 9/11, and only two of those

had been in the United States for more than a couple years. Of those, only one participant

had spent any significant time *in the United States* prior to 9/11. In other words, the

interviewees' experiences in this sample are largely those of a post-9/11 America.

There was considerable diversity among the interviewees in ethnic background:

three from Pakistan, two from Iran, two from Turkey, and one from Kuwait, Saudi

Arabia, Lebanon, Qatar, Egypt, and Syria. All were first generation, meaning foreign-

born. The participants ranged in age between 20 and 45. As far as religious status, nine

were Muslim, two were Christian, and two more claimed no religious affiliation. Table 1

presents the demographic information for each participant.

Participants were recruited through a variety of measures. After receiving Human

Subjects approval, I began posting advertisements on the "volunteer" section of the

website craigslist(dot)com. Three participants were recruited through this outlet. This

method of recruitment-advertising has several advantages over other outlets: (1) it is free

to use for the advertiser, (2) it is non-invasive, as people who encounter the post are most likely already seeking volunteer work, and (3) it is a highly utilized website nationwide, broken down into localities, and easily reaching a target local population.

Five participants were recruited through emails sent out by various organizations on my behalf, such as the Center for American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the center for international students at a local university. The organizations contacted were strategically selected as I assumed that they would have access to large email lists of potential participants. With each of these organizations, I approached them to request that they send out an email written by me, seeking participants for the present study (see Appendix A). All organizations who were contacted were willing and able to send emails to their members.

Two interviewees were recruited at local places of worship—one Christian and one Muslim—both of which I attended on several occasions. This aspect of recruitment proved to be perhaps the most challenging, as at times there existed tensions between various Middle Eastern religious groups—for example, between Egyptian Christians and Egyptian Muslims. I avoided this by framing my research as a nationality/ethnicity-based study when explaining it to the leaders of the religious groups. I had the greatest success at this avenue of recruitment when I had already attended services at the location for a few weeks before inquiring about participants. As a white non-Muslim, I did not want to come across as manipulative or purely self-interested. I preferred to paint myself as an individual interested in the group activities, and meanings attached to these activities. However, I also wanted them to be aware that I was not someone who was interested in

joining the group. In this way, a kind of relationship is built beforehand based on transparency, and my motivations seem more genuine.

Two more participants were recruited through my own personal social network of friends and acquaintances. I performed these interviews first, as I was able to more comfortably gain interview experience and ask advice on the wording of questions, questions to ask or not ask, and places to recruit other participants. One participant was recruited this way, giving the sample a snowball component.

Before the interview, all recruits were notified of a compensation of a ten dollar ($10) gift card to a grocery or department store of the participants' choosing. Interviewees were made aware that this compensation was optional, and it was refused only two times. In both instances, the participants refused because they felt the compensation was not necessary, and that they viewed the interview as helping advance the interests and general understanding of their community.

Interviews were conducted in public settings (e.g., coffee shop, library), always of the participant's choosing. This was done in order to give the participant a sense of control over the interview structure, and make them feel more comfortable. Interview time varied from 30 minutes to two hours.

Insider vs. Outsider Status

The question of whether it is more effective to conduct ethnographic field research as an "insider" or "outsider" has been the subject of much scholarly debate (Lofland 2006; McCorkel and Myers 2003). Specific to this study, I was usually an outsider in several regards—I am not Muslim, nor do I have familiar ties to the Middle East. And although I have lived and worked in several countries, I am not an immigrant,

which makes me largely an outsider to the everyday lived experiences of immigrants, particularly Middle Eastern immigrants in America.

This "outsider status" posed three related methodological risks. One was that I was viewed by my participants as untrustworthy or biased, even with some sort of hidden agenda. This could affect the integrity and quality of the data, and reduce the interviewees' willingness to divulge their experiences, feelings, and attitudes. My research design partially circumvented this risk. Being a convenience sample, potential interviewees were asked to contact me, rather than the other way around. This way, there was presumably already a willingness and sense of comfort with talking about these issues.

During the interview, I attempted to diffuse this risk by building a rapport with the interviewee prior to probing any potentially uncomfortable topics. I accomplished this by using "ice-breaker" questions to put the interviewee more at ease, with questions such as, "How did your family come to America?" or, "What are the biggest differences between [participant's country of origin] and the United States?" This process functioned to help me understand the conditions surrounding the participant's migration and gain a sense of their more general feelings toward life in America. It also helped to put the participant at ease. I made sure to go over in detail the IRB approval form and explain that I am a sociology graduate student who is studying anti-Muslim and Middle Eastern discrimination in American society. Finally, I talk about the various mosques or Muslim organizations that I have visited, in hopes of building some sense of a shared social network.

However, the convenience sample research design has drawbacks. My positionality most likely affected the data I was able to collect due to issues of access. For example, in any given social situation, I was probably able to gain access to the most socially "open" individuals, and perhaps to a less broad sample. It is also a possibility that some of the potential participants who felt the most discriminated against did not want to talk to me at all. I was told by a couple would-be-interviewees that on several occasions, outsiders had worn wires into Muslim student meetings or some other place in hopes of slandering the organization or for some other manipulative use. This is a legacy that I had to work with and accept, but also do my best to show that I did not have these intentions.

Finally, an additional issue could be raised in the interpretation of the data. Being an outsider, one could say that my interpretation will be ultimately filtered by my own positionality of being a white, non-Muslim, college-educated, male. I cannot refute this point. However, my own positionality also adds a unique and valuable context through which we can examine the lived experiences of Middle Easterners in America. Many, if not most, researchers who study Middle Eastern populations are of Middle Eastern background themselves. My point here is that the general "outsider" status, and my own specific positionality is a valuable and somewhat unique context from which to perform research of a particular social phenomenon. Perhaps Narayan best describes this when she writes, "To acknowledge particular and personal locations is to admit the limits of one's purview from these positions. It is also to undermine the notion of objectivity, because from particular locations all understanding becomes subjectively based and forged through interactions within fields of power relations" (Narayan 1993:679).

Even with the above-mentioned risks, I found most participants very eager and willing to express their views and experiences with discrimination and meanings attached to various notions of identity. Before the interviews started, and again before asking questions about religious identity or experiences of discrimination, I would reemphasize that we could skip any questions that the participant did not feel comfortable discussing. This only happened on a few occasions.

Data Analysis

Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Word. I analyzed the first four interviews in Fall 2011 for a pilot version of this study for a graduate course, looking specifically at patterns of claiming identity as a dependent variable. I later added nine more interviews for the thesis, and expanded the analysis to look at experiences of discrimination, as well. In this process, I utilized open and axial coding (Berg 2004). First, transcriptions were read and variables were freely generated and considered. In axial coding, I look for relationships among the variables identified, as well as for sub-components to the variables. For example, I found the variable of "gender" to be somewhat relevant for the analysis of "experiences of discrimination." This became illuminated through open coding. During axial coding, I found that the relationship revolved around the variable of "Islamic dress," which became a sub-category of gender.

The following analysis is organized into two chapters. In chapter four, I analyze the participants' experiences of discrimination and cultural hostility in American society. This is accomplished by looking at how experiences of discrimination vary across gender, but also how gender might be further embedded in everyday life, particularly for

Muslims. In chapter five, I look at patterns of claiming identity, particularly among

Muslims and Iranians.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Name	Age	Age at time of Migration	Gender	Occupation	Education	Country of Birth	Religious Affiliation	Immigration Status	Marital Status
Talitha	35	25	Female	Pre-school teacher	Bachelor's degree	Egypt	Eastern Orthodox Christian	U.S. Citizen	Married
Walidah	40s	late teens	Female	Financial Services	Bachelor's degree	Iran	Shiite Muslim	U.S. Citizen	Single
Shadee	27	25	Female	Graduate student	Graduate degree	Iran	no religion	International Student	Single
Mahir	early 30s	26	Male	Graduate student	Graduate degree	Kuwait	Muslim	International Student	Married
Selah	23	12	Female	College Student	High School	Lebanon	Eastern Orthodox Christian	U.S. Citizen	Single
Bahaar	26	~23	Female	Graduate student	Graduate degree	Pakistan	Muslim	Resident	Married
Siraj	28	10	Male	Financial Banker	Bachelor's degree	Pakistan	Shiite Muslim	U.S. Citizen	Married
Sabah	20	10	Female	College student	High School	Pakistan	Shiite Muslim	U.S. Citizen	Single
Abida	28	~26	Female	College student	High School	Qatar	Muslim	International Student	Single
Taja	28	26	Female	Graduate student	Bachelor's degree	Saudi Arabia	Sunni Muslim	International Student	Married
Essam	late 20s	4	Male	Information withheld	Graduate degree	Syria	Muslim	U.S. Citizen	Married
Shamil	25	15	Male	Electronics store employee	High school	Turkey	Muslim	not disclosed	Married
Dilek	early 30s	late 20s	Female	Graduate student	Master's degree	Turkey	no religion	International Student	Married

Source: Study data

Chapter 4

**Immigrants' Perceptions of Islamophobia in America: Cultural Hostility and
Experiences of Discrimination**

In this chapter, I examine immigrants' perceptions of the state of Islamophobia
today in American society, about ten years after 9/11. As previously discussed,
Islamophobia is a social phenomenon that affects not only Muslims, but also those who
are *perceived to be* Muslim or Middle Eastern. This form of racialization grew from the
constructed stereotypes of Arabs as being culturally backward and violent that became
heavily propagated by the American media during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and
perhaps even before (Cainkar 2009; Suleiman 1988). The literature previously discussed
documented the Muslim backlash that happened directly in the wake of 9/11 (for
example, see Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Peek 2010). I ask if this backlash is
perceived to still be in progress, and if so, how and in what realms of society.

This chapter speaks to these nuances by inquiring about Middle Easterner's first-
hand experiences with Islamophobia in American society. As we will see, responses are
wide-ranging; however, and trends begin to emerge. I will address this topic by
examining Muslims first, separated by men's and women's experiences, then Christians
and those who are not religious. In this way, we see how religious identity is related to
these perceptions of cultural hostility and discrimination.

However, I also must add a certain disclaimer here about generalizing or extrapolating findings from these social groupings. It is true that an entire study could be devoted to explore the experiences of immigrants in each of these social locations (i.e. Middle Eastern, Muslim, male; Middle Eastern, Christian, female; etc.), but the spatial and temporal limitations of this study effectively prohibited a robust sampling of each of these social positions for comparative purposes. Thus, this chapter is more exploratory in character, hopefully opening new avenues for research into Islamophobia in the coming years.

To inquire about these topics, I asked participants questions such as, "What is it like being a Muslim (or Christian) in America?" Or, "How do you feel your religion is viewed, generally, here in America?" To distinguish between the religious and nonreligious aspects of culture and nationality, I also inquired about what it was like to be of Syrian, Egyptian, Iranian, etc., background in America. If the interviewee was nonreligious, the questions concerning religion were left out, and I would focus my questioning around the lines of ethnicity or nationality. It must be said, however, that it may at times seem that I am attempting to distinguish between constructs that are highly interrelated, and very often conflated, even in the participants' minds. Indeed, even among sociologists, we often engage in haphazard "culture talk" in national terms, e.g. "Pakistani culture" or "Iranian culture," when these terms alone without further contextualizing are often nebulous, or worse, essentialist. However, my goal in asking a question such as, "What is it like being Pakistani in America?" is not to separate the notions of "culture" from "national identity"—an issue I explore in a later chapter. The goal in this chapter is to decipher the participants' experiences of Islamophobia.

Muslim Men

In this section, I discuss the general outlooks and attitudes of Muslim men living in the American society. I interviewed four Muslim men in this study. Two of these were naturalized U.S. citizens, one possessed an international student visa, and another refused to answer the question about citizenship status. All were young adults, between the ages of 25 and 35. As there are only four, I separate them by name.

Essam

Essam, who was born in Syria in the mid-1980s, came to the United States as a young child, and was raised in a highly religious family. He graduated from college, and also holds a graduate degree with steady employment. Both his mother and father were successful in their careers in upstate New York. He does remember his mother being treated unfairly in her job at times, not receiving due promotions and other benefits. He attributed this specifically to her being Muslim.

Since 9/11, he claims to be very aware of anti-Muslim discrimination and hostility in society, and could recall that on a few occasions, he had been treated unfairly. He recalled one specific episode, when stopped at a border station via automobile to be searched:

> …So I looked up at the border officer, and I asked, "So, you're racially profiling us, huh?" And he said, "Excuse me?!" And I repeated myself, and then he snapped, "Don't freaking talk to me!" And I said, "Hey, calm down, you're supposed to be serving us, we're citizens." You know, it's funny, when you travel to any other country, they generally welcome you into that country. And you're not even a citizen! So why here?... I mean they're supposed to be serving us! We are paying their money, I mean, that's how it is.

Essam is aware that he is being profiled in the situation, and assumes that it is because of his full beard that associated him with Islam. In fact, this set Essam apart in my study, as he was the only Muslim man who was visibly Muslim in this regard, and also the only one to directly experience Islamophobic discrimination. It is interesting to note that Essam invokes his citizenship status as justification to why he should not be profiled. However, in this case, the visible marker of his beard overrides his legal claim to citizenship.

Essam is very aware of the prevalence of Islamophobic rhetoric in the political and media spheres:

> I do think that within the media and politics, there is a high level of tolerance for Islamophobic rhetoric. Things you can say against Muslims, and Islam, you would never be able to say against Jews or Catholics or African Americans. Someone was talking about Barack Obama the other day, I can't remember who it was, and someone asked him, "Do you think Barack Obama is a Muslim?" and he said, "No, Obama is a nice man." I mean, you could never get away with saying that about Jewish people! But for some reason, to say it against Muslims is okay.

In this case, Essam recalls someone in the media juxtaposing being Muslim with being "a nice man." Although Essam does not remember the exact details of the story, this would seem to line up with prevalent media stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims (Shaheen 2003).

It is clear that Essam and other members of his family have experienced first-hand the effects of Islamophobia in America society, especially since 9/11. For Essam, this experience came from a border patrol guard, whom he felt had profiled Essam based on his physical appearance, as he wears a beard. His mother, as well, was passed up for promotions and pay increases, which he attributes to her being Muslim.

He is also very cognizant of the prevalence of Islamophobic rhetoric in the media, and how Muslims are practically alone in that it is generally *not* bad politics to openly make anti-Muslim remarks. This cultural prognosis aligns with survey findings showing similar tolerance for anti-Arab rhetoric and attitudes in the 1970s (Lipset and Schneider 1977). However, when asked about his views on America as a place for Muslims to practice their religion, he held surprisingly positive and hopeful views:

> There is also this idea very prevalent in the Muslim community that you cannot be a successful American businessman or working professional while being also a traditional, practicing Muslim. I am really trying to break this notion down, which is why I wear the beard while also being a successful professional. I mean I am accepted as both an American *and* as a Muslim. We are America, we are very culturally diverse and promote this, kind of, "rugged individualism," so let's work with that. America is one of the most tolerant, free countries in the world. I mean I live as a free, active, visible Muslim without any major problems.

Essam acknowledges the attitude prevalent among many Muslims that one must choose between success in America and being a proud Muslim. He actively attempts to tear down these notions by setting an example of a successful, practicing Muslim—while also being an American. He achieves being an American by choosing to be an outwardly, proud Muslim, something which he sees as lining up with the larger American cultural theme of "rugged individualism," a theme which has often been politically mobilized in order to build bridges with more conservative demographics of American society (Hammerback 1972).

Similar attitudes were also found in Reynolds' (2006) study of how young black Caribbean men viewed success; namely, that it is important for a socially excluded group to achieve success while maintaining their identities, to show others that one does not have to choose between a socially stigmatizing trait and success.

Mahir

Mahir is a Kuwaiti international student who came to America for graduate school in 2006. He came here with almost no English ability, and spent his first year becoming fluent in English before embarking in his substantive studies. He married while still in Kuwait, migrated with his wife, and she lives in another U.S. state, also pursuing her studies. Mahir is in his early thirties, and both he and his wife plan on returning to Kuwait when they finish their studies. Also significant is that Mahir keeps daily contact with his friends and family in Kuwait, and actively keeps up with current events in the Middle East. This orients him towards a transnational identity, encompassing a social space that spans two countries. When asked about how his being Muslim affects how he feels he fits in American society, he responded:

> Islam very much agrees with equality. You know, there was a great Islamic thinker years ago, who after he traveled to Europe, he said, "I saw Islam in Europe, but no Muslims. And I saw many Muslims in the Middle East, but no Islam." This is a great expression. *[What does this mean?]* That is to say that these laws of equality, motivation, and hard work are now Western…American principles, but they are also in Islam, and have always been in Islam. I see these principles in my life here, the way people treat me, and each other. But for some reason, we do not live by these rules in the Middle East. We do not respect each other, and I do not know why. *[How do people react when you tell them you are Muslim?]* People here know that most Muslims do not agree with Bin Laden. They know that we are not him. So I find that they do not take things out on me. I have not experienced this "Islamophobia," although I have read a lot about it.

It is significant that Mahir brought up the specific term "Islamophobia" in his response to the question about discrimination. Although I use the term in this thesis, I did not introduce this term in the interview, or the informed consent form. This implies that he is well-informed of the purported hostility towards Muslims in the United States.

However, he sees very little hindrance in being a Muslim and living in American society or contrarily, living by what he views as American values. Similar to Essam, Mahir feels that Muslims fit the larger framework of American diversity. Perhaps ironically, Mahir feels more free to represent Islam in America than he would normally in Kuwait, and that he feels just as respected in America as he does in Kuwait. Although Mahir is an international student who has spent far more time in his country of origin than Essam did, and also plans on returning in the near future, his views of "American values" are not too far from those of Essam. Both view America as generally "welcoming" to Muslims. In these narratives, we see an emerging theme of Muslim men ascribing to the common masculine scripts of attaining success in America, specifically through "rugged individualism" and "hard work" (Peter, Bell, Jarnagin, and Bauer 2000).

Mahir's only experience with discrimination that came to his mind during our interview was through the experiences of his wife. He recalls that someone stopped her in a grocery store and said plainly, "Make your people stop." They did not respond to the comments, but it is interesting that, again, similar to Essam and his mother, a male participant is relating experiences of discrimination experienced through the females in his life—a theme worth noting and that will be explored later.

Siraj

Siraj is a 28 year old man from Pakistan, who came to America with his family in 1999 at the age of about fifteen. His father had a prestigious job with an American finance company, and was transferred to the United States, making his entire family eligible to immigrate and be on the path to naturalization. Siraj did very well in higher education and received a professional job in the same field as his father, and has plans of

returning for a graduate degree in hopes of moving up the corporate ladder, which he sees as a likely future scenario.

When asked about his experience as a Muslim in American society, Siraj maintains that he has not received any discrimination due to his ethnicity or religion. I probed further and asked if anyone in his family had experienced discrimination, which he also denied. In fact, he attributed much of the problems other Middle Easterners had faced, specifically in his line of work, to their inability to socialize with other non-Middle Easterners:

> People who come from the region that we come from, they are often not open to explaining themselves. Not that you have to explain yourself, but, for example, where I work there are a lot of Indians. They come in at 8:30 in the morning, or sometimes at like 6 in the morning. They leave at 7 or 8 at night, and don't talk to anyone. *[You mean they're not social?]* Not social at all. And you know, sometimes these things happen when you're not social. You're sort of coming off as a very weird person. You basically are giving people an opportunity to talk about you. And they're not calling you weird because you're wearing a scarf, maybe they're calling you weird because you don't talk to anyone.

Siraj alludes to his belief that the Indians at his place of work are marginalized because of their lack of sociability rather than the racialization of different dress or religious beliefs. Through his response, Siraj is able to socially distance himself from the Indians at his work, who he views as unsociable and culturally inept, and himself. It could be that Siraj is engaging in common stereotyping of Indian employees in American workplaces, which have been shown to be stereotypes of being highly competent, but less effective at working with others and less sociable (Post, DiTomaso, Farris, and Cordero 2009). This is similar to what Killian and Johnson found where Algerian immigrants reject the "immigrant" label by constructing "a positive identification of someone who is

well-adjusted, at ease, and/or doing reasonable well economically" (2006:75). In Siraj's case, he is perhaps distancing himself from the other Indian immigrants at his place of work, and thus avoiding being type casted as "a very weird person," as he describes them.

It is also worth noting, however, that Siraj is very private about his religious beliefs and rarely talks about them in public. Although he claims his reasoning for this is that he believes religion should be a private issue, the outcome of this behavior is similar to "passing," where an individual with a stigmatized trait acts in a way that either hides or downplays the stigmatization (Goffman 1963). Siraj also does not wear a scarf on his head as he says the Indians at his work do. Perhaps he is able to avoid being cast as "weird" at work by crossing some of the boundaries, religious and cultural, that might exist in other parts of society or if he was more outspoken about his religious affiliation.

I must contextualize their responses, as Essam, Mahir, and Siraj are all highly educated and successful in their respective fields—attributes which may indeed insulate that from much of the discrimination experienced by other Muslims since 9/11. Essam's work is largely involved in the ethnic and religious communities, and works in a field that is highly cognizant of existing hate-crime discrimination laws. The ethnic community as well might serve some protective function for him against potential discrimination. Mahir lives most of his life around people and events at the local university, which has been shown by previous research to be a relatively safe environment, even directly after the events of 9/11 (Peek 2003). Siraj has worked his way up in the corporate world, but emphatically leaves issues of race and religion out of work, therefore not necessitating a protective or safe social environment. However, it is worth emphasizing that all three view America largely as a welcoming place, and one which has facilitated their social

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and cultural freedoms and provided economic opportunity. This could be due to Tampa's sizable Middle Eastern communities and active Muslim mosques.

Shamil

Shamil is a 25 year old Turkish immigrant, who works in a local consumer electronics store. While he chose not to disclose his legal status, he has resided in the U.S. for over ten years, and plans on staying as long as he is able to support himself. His sister lives in the northeastern part of the country and is married with two kids, who he sees a couple times per year.

His father lives in Turkey, and his mother is in India. Shamil was actually born in India, and lived there until he was about twelve years old, before moving to England for a few years with his mother. Both parents identify as Muslim, as do he and his sister, but they "don't practice religion that much anymore." He graduated high school in New York City, and has lived in the Tampa area for several years. He is now married, and lives with his wife.

When I ask Shamil about the most difficult thing he has encountered about being a Turkish immigrant, he described how difficult it has been to find steady work. Shamil has mostly worked blue-collar jobs that he considers low-paying, tedious, and mind-numbing. He complains that he is constantly taken advantage of by his bosses, whatever the job, and being underpaid. "I know no matter how hard I work, my boss is going to barely pay me anything. Last weekend, I went to work and worked all day; I was busting my butt all day, for like nine or ten hours! At the end of the day, my boss paid me sixty dollars. I was so angry!" He says he is often asked to work long hours, but after years of working in various jobs has been unable to "get ahead."

What Shamil associates with being an immigrant is completely distinct from earlier Muslim male accounts documented here, and aligns more with the literature on workers in the secondary labor market (Spilerman 1977). The secondary labor market is characterized by low-skilled workers in which the company or management invest very little capital, and usually lack the protection of a powerful labor union. As such, these workers often make significantly less money than those in the primary market and change jobs more frequently.

Shamil is frustrated by his *economic* situation and social location as a downtrodden worker in the secondary job market—which in this case is not necessarily directly related to Islamophobia. Indeed, Shamil blames the current stagnant economic climate for his woes, not his religious or ethnic social locations.

Interestingly, however, Shamil was in New York City during 9/11, and remembers that while there, he and his friends were being "picked on" by local police in its aftermath.

> Oh, yeah. They would follow us around. They dragged a couple of my friend off to jail, for no reason! *[Well, do you think that was because of something in particular or do you think it was totally random?]* Yeah, they thought we were terrorists or something. It got so bad up there that I just left. So I came here. I came down here because a friend of mine, he had come down here to work in a restaurant, and we worked together for a little bit, but I hated that job. I quit after a couple months and found something else. *[And how are things down here?]* Things are better.

Shamil definitely does not consider America the warm and welcoming place that Essam, Siraj, and Mahir do, and he may be experiencing the first-hand effects of Islamophobia in his constant inability to hold a desirable job, but we cannot be sure, as this is a reality for immigrants of many varying backgrounds—especially at lower-income jobs (Menjívar

2000). The experience that he did have with police racial profiling in New York lines up with the findings of other researchers who have investigated the experiences of Arab and Muslim Americans in the aftermath of 9/11. However, since moving to Tampa, he has not experienced such treatment. This could also speak to the uniqueness of experiences in the Tampa area as compared to New York. Shamil's case also lends support to the research that argues that immigrants do consider relocation when they perceive that they are targets of discrimination (Aranda 2007).

Shamil's case stands out in my sample, especially from the other Muslim men in this study, for two main reasons. First, he is not college educated nor does he plan on attending college. Second, and perhaps because of his current job situation, his biggest struggles include finding steady employment and making an adequate income. Although Shamil has experienced institutional discrimination from police officers in the wake of 9/11, he now considers his biggest threat underemployment and underpayment. His being an anomaly in my study is partly due to my sample bias, but perhaps also due to the fact that Middle Easterners and Muslims in America are socioeconomically better-off than the average American, in terms of both household income and education (Zogby 2004). Shamil definitely represents a segment of the American Muslim population that is usually understudied and left unheard. Academic literature surrounding Muslim issues, particularly in the United States, typically revolve around the motifs of cultural exclusion and its embeddedness in everyday life. Shamil's case perhaps shows where this literature could be expanded.

Muslim Women

We now shift our attention to the experiences and perceptions of Muslim women. Muslim women have often been found to experience social life from a distinct social position than Muslim men. Several spoke of feeling as though they were constantly under the spotlight, often feeling as if they were suspect. I must point out that these female respondents were just as highly educated as the Muslim men in my sample, but they also employed some sort of Muslim dress, as is often customary for women in Islam, making them easily recognizable as Muslim. With the male respondents discussed above, being recognized as Muslim usually does not present a problem. The one respondent who did have negative experiences associated with Islamophobic discrimination viewed the United States as a friendly place. With women, however, Muslim dress has been shown to possibly be interpreted as a "foreign cultural threat" (Cainkar 2009) that requires "outcasting" (234), especially since 9/11. We see this in the cases of Abida, Bahaar, and Taja, women from Qatar, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, respectively, all who are outwardly practicing Muslims who choose to cover with the hijab. Abida and Taja wore full, traditional Muslim dress, while Bahaar only wore the hijab. Their views on how they represented Islam in everyday life were quite distinct from their male counterparts.

I interviewed five Muslim women in this study. Of those five, all were living in the Tampa area, and all were either enrolled in a university or had previously obtained a Bachelor's degree, making them as a group just as educated, if not more so, than the Muslim men in this study. All were between the ages of 20 and 28, except one. Two women were U.S. citizens, two were international students, and another was a permanent resident through marriage. Two of these Muslim women were married, and three were

single at the time of the interview. These women, as the men, were asked about their experiences and perceptions of discrimination and general cultural hostility.

Sabah and Walidah

We first visit Sabah and Walidah, who are both first-generation immigrants from non-Arab countries in the Middle East. Their stories are similar as both have retained their Muslim faith, but only on a more personal or emotional level rather than institutional. At the same time, both associate with mostly non-Muslims, even in their dating lives, and neither chooses to wear any form of Islamic dress in public.

Sabah is a 20 year old Pakistani student at a local university. She came to the United States with her family when she was ten years old and has since become a U.S. citizen. Although she recognizes that Muslims and Pakistanis can face discriminatory treatment in the United States, she claims to very rarely experience any discrimination for being Muslim or Pakistani, and cannot recall any specific time when she has felt treated unfairly. In fact, much like Essam who blamed the Indian immigrants' marginalization at his work on their unsociability, Sabah believes that maybe Pakistanis would face less unfair treatment if they would adapt more to their surroundings:

> The Pakistanis that I know, they're very nice people, and I'm kind of
> friends with them. But when it comes to these organizations and stuff,
> I feel like they become very extreme…and that's why there is a sort of
> backlash against them. When I'm with them… I can't share my
> opinions there, because I would feel a lot of resistance…. Either for
> the way I dress, or the way I talk, or who I hang out with, you know.
> Different little things like that... I'm just like, 'who cares?' you know?
> We live in America now! Go by where you live, not where you're
> from.

Sabah attempts to draw social distinctions between herself and the other Pakistani students by alluding to their being "extremist," while maintaining that they are "very nice

people." If the Pakistani students that she knows were to act more "American," as she does, Sabah thinks some of the bad opinions and unfair treatment would stop. It is telling indeed that she problematizes the actions of the Pakistani students who are in a sense remaining "too Pakistani" and "going by where they're from." However, Sabah has had a clear advantage in this arena, as she immigrated well before middle school, while the Pakistani students that she is alluding to are mostly recent immigrants or international students who have been in the United States for very little time and in fact may plan to return to Pakistan immediately upon graduating.

Walidah is in her forties and migrated to the U.S. in her late teens. She moved to the western U.S. to be with her sister for an undisclosed amount of time, during which the Iranian Revolution happened, and she never moved back. She retains her Shiite Muslim faith, as does most of her family as well as several converts who have married into the family, but explains her faith by saying, "we're Persian, we're Muslim, but we're modern. We're not some fanatics."

However, Walidah's experiences with law enforcement as an Iranian national at an American airport more than ten years prior to 9/11 give us insight to the historical roots of Islamophobia, and how it would later evolve. After being forced to briefly leave the United States in order to obtain a green card, which is a common practice among those wishing to retain a visa residency, she was pulled out of line when coming back with only a carry-on bag.

> They pulled me out of the line, and I thought it was strange because I didn't have any luggage or anything. But then they would go and do a full body search on me, they took my heels and were banging them up on the wall, and bending them. And they said, 'Now go!' And I said, 'What are you talking about?' And they said, 'Just go!' So I pretty much knew at that point that no matter what I did, I was never going to

be an American. Here I was with my green card and everything, I did everything the right way, and it didn't matter.

Although negative experiences with airport and immigration officials is an extremely common occurrence for Muslims and Middle Easterners in post-9/11 America (Cainkar 2009), these experiences should not be downplayed, as they are shown to have considerable consequences for an immigrant's affective attachments and how one feels towards the notion of becoming part of a given society (Aranda and Vaquera 2011). For Walidah, this is exactly the sentiment that we are left with—the brutal treatment she received from the security officers in the airport directly contributed to her feeling unwelcome, even though she had lived in the U.S. for over ten years at that point. Indeed, her experiences call to mind what Zhou writes as the experience of being "forever foreign" (Zhou 2004), where immigrants must continually prove their loyalties to the United States, in a continual cycle. Negative experiences with law enforcement was a theme that emerged in the data among Iranians, both religious and nonreligious. I revisit this phenomenon in a later chapter.

Abida, Bahaar, and Taja

Abida, Bahaar, and Taja are also first-generation Muslim immigrants. Abida and Taja are international students, while Bahaar is also a student but has married a U.S. citizen and plans to live here permanently. Their stories are similar in that all three choose to wear at least some Muslim dress, making them stand-out much more *visibly* in public. In this way, being Muslim is not only embedded in their personal identities, but also in their public identities through daily dress and first-impressions with strangers or acquaintances.

Bahaar is a 28 year old female from Pakistan who married U.S. citizen two years

ago. She is currently pursuing an advanced university degree. She has been in the U.S.

since 2008, and plans to live here permanently. Bahaar almost never wore the hijab

growing up in Pakistan, but soon after her move to the United States, she made the

decision to start wearing it with regularity. She says she did this because she wanted to

show camaraderie with other Muslims and also that she was very proud of being Muslim.

Below, she explains how she is perceived differently in public now that she wears the

hijab:

> You know it's strange, but I feel it is very similar to having a different
> skin color. I feel like it's racialized a bit. Before, people would look at
> me with curiosity, but now that I wear the headscarf, they know that
> I'm Muslim. They may not know where I'm from exactly, but at that
> point it doesn't really matter to them. It's a similar amount of scrutiny
> though. If my husband and I are together, then we definitely get the
> *Muslim stare*. But, you have to be nice, right? I feel that as a Muslim, I
> really try to be extra nice to everyone, and give everyone the benefit of
> the doubt. I let people cut in front on the road, because if I don't then
> there's definitely a higher likelihood of people being hostile towards
> me. I *always* feel like I'm representing.

Bahaar speaks of being stared at in public fairly regularly, and feeling like she is always

representing all Muslims. Bahaar calls this the "Muslim stare." Interestingly, the specific

term "the Muslim Stare," while not referenced in many scholarly publications, has often

been discussed by bloggers and social commentators on the internet (Sana 2007). This

finding lines up well with what Peek described as the "hate stare" (72-74) in her 2010

book, *Behind the Backlash*. This has been documented as a method of social distancing

by majority group members towards stigmatized individuals, much like what Griffin

experienced as a black man in Mississippi in the 1960s (Griffin 1961).

Taja is a 28 year old female who is also a student at a local university. She has come to the United States from Saudi Arabia with her husband, and plans on returning after both obtain their graduate degrees. She spends most of her free time with her husband, or her other married Saudi friends, from whom she obtains a huge amount of social support. Most of her interaction with non-Muslim Americans is in her various classes, where she reports to have had relatively positive experiences. She says she has been treated well by classmates, and they often stop to make sure she understands the course content in class and on the out-of-class assignments. With strangers, however, there have been a few occurrences where she has received a similar stare as described above by Bahaar:

> *[Do you ever notice people staring at you?]* Yes, I sometimes see people staring at me, American people. They see me, and they turn and talk to each other. When I first arrived, I felt very strange about this, because this is new to me. But I realized that if I smile at someone who is …um… staring at me, they will usually smile back, and it is ok. It changes… they change their idea about me. *[Why do you think this is?]* I think they want to know that I am a friendly person.

Both Bahaar and Taja imply or refer directly to the sentiment that they feel as if they are representing both Islam and all Muslims. Even Taja, who has only been in the U.S. for a short time and rarely interacts with American citizens outside of class, is intuitive enough to realize that, as a covering Muslim, she is perceived by others to be inherently unfriendly. She speaks of wanting to "change their idea" about who she is. For the male interviewees mentioned above, the notion of representing Islam was very much in agreement with succeeding in American society. They spoke of employing American "rugged individualism" and the principles and values of "equality, motivation and hard work." In short, the Muslim men often alluded to "blurring" or "shifting" (Zolberg and

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Woon 1999) the boundaries between what is thought to be "American" and "Muslim," so that American society would be more inclusive, or at least tolerant, of Islam.

However, for Bahaar and Taja, it means something quite different. Both feel they must compensate for being Muslim by always appearing happy, smiling, and giving people the benefit of the doubt, effectively forcing them to engage in impression management and emotion work (Hochschild 1979) in order to evade racialization. Rather than wanting to exemplify that one can be both Muslim and *American*, Bahaar and Taja feel the need to show that one can be both Muslim and *nonthreatening,* through the manufacturing of specific emotions to disarm the perceived threat that they convey through their dress. For them, the social boundaries separating Muslim and being American are much brighter than for the men.

Abida is from Qatar and has come to America with the rest of her family. She plans on obtaining at least a Bachelor's degree here, and likes the idea of pursuing an advanced degree as well, but is not sure if she will at this point. She is single, and spends most of her time around her family, who is highly religious. This is in contrast to both Taja and Bahaar, who are married to co-ethnics of the same faith and have large, tight-knit, compatriot social networks.

I asked Abida how people reacted to her being Muslim. She explains:

> People always say, "Oh, you're Muslim? You must love Osama Bin Laden." This is not true, but they don't believe that. I feel like I have to speak for all Muslims, all the time, and always talk about how I disagree with Bin Laden. I feel like I have to always explain and make excuses for my religion to someone!

Abida's experience stands in stark contrast to Mahir's experiences, who says that Americans "know that most Muslims do not agree with" Osama Bin Laden. Abida feels

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that she is constantly viewed as suspect and that she has to reassure those around her that

she does not "love Osama Bin Laden."

On the subject of cultural tolerance in America, Abida's response is equally

telling:

> I think Americans accept *any* culture, but not Islamic culture. Really.
> For example, I see Americans laughing and talking with Chinese
> people, with Indian people, but *never* with a Muslim person. Maybe if
> I am a Muslim, but don't wear a hijab, it would be different… I think
> after 9/11, it got bad… There is even a similar conflict in Egypt
> between Muslim and Christian people, and they are both Arab and
> Egyptian! But really, I think it's true what I tell you, *any* culture is
> accepted in America, anyone except *Muslims*.

Her narrative of American diversity is much in line with Essam's, who spoke of diversity

as being part of the collective American identity. However, she also sees herself and

other Muslims to be largely excluded from this notion of acceptance and tolerance,

especially if a Muslim wears a hijab.

In my study, among Muslim women, the act of wearing the hijab held severe

consequences for one's daily interactions in public. Abida alludes to this above. She also

told stories of more direct confrontation and humiliation over the hijab:

> Sometimes I feel also like people sometimes make fun of me to my
> face. The other day I was in the bathroom, putting the hijab back on
> my head, and a girl came to me and said, "Oh…you have hair?!" And
> then they all laughed very much. I said, "Of course I have hair." And
> they said, "Oh, I thought you wear that scarf because you didn't have
> any hair." I mean, that really made me hurt. I cried a lot that day. I hate
> to hurt people, so I also hate when people hurt me.

In Abida's case, even the "private" sphere becomes an unfriendly space, where one must

be on guard to acts of humiliation. This is particularly significant, as this incident took

place in the open part of a bathroom with non-acquaintances, which according to Cahill

et al. (1985), goes against the prescribed social norms of a public bathroom. In the public

bathroom, Cahill et al. found that two unacquainted persons typically perform "civil inattention" (1985:41), which Goffman (1963) described as when someone visually acknowledges another's presence, and at the same time, provides them a right to privacy by not paying attention to them. The fact that this social norm was so clearly and blatantly violated gives us a hint as to where Muslim women, specifically Muslim women who cover, stand in society.

Abida also spoke of extreme difficulty in finding an isolated place to pray during the day, and being made fun of when she did this and was walked in on by other university students. In both of the above cases, Abida was left unable to practice full cultural citizenship (Pakulski 1997; Rosaldo 1994) in a place of higher education. Following Rosaldo, Pakulski writes that cultural rights are essential in a functioning, multicultural society so that the rights or cultural practices of a minority or individual are not dwarfed by whoever may be the majority at a specific time, place, and context. These complaints by Muslims, particularly practicing Muslim women, have become more commonplace as the diversity of the local university has increased, and many now opt to partake in daily praying activities away from the public student body, where the script of cultural citizenship is less stigmatizing.

In this section, we see that Muslim women, particularly women who wear some form of Muslim dress, experience far higher levels of marginalization and stigmatization is society, particularly at places of higher education. This may go against what may at first seem logical, as all the 9/11 terrorists were male, almost all prominent terrorists abroad are male, and males tend to be more often involved in hate crimes both as victims and perpetrators (Dowden and Bennan 2012).

However, there is a burgeoning literature on the *cultural* threat that Muslim and Arab women present in American society, rather than the violent or terrorist threat that often takes a male-gendered contextual form. In Louise Cainkar's 2009 book, *Homeland Insecurity,* she wrote that women were more often perceived as potential threats because the hijab "symbolized and embodied the perceived threat to the neighborhood's moral fabric" (230). These notions derive from the Western narratives of Muslim women as oppressed and male-dominated. Because America supposedly represents an oasis of gender-equality, these "oppressed" women *should* feel grateful that they now do not have to abide by the oppressive expectations to cover. Muslim women who continue to cover are perceived as showing a clear rejection of this freedom, behavior that is indeed perceived to be insulting by many in American society. It is not the fact that these women are Arab or Muslim *per se*, but that that they wear the hijab that places them "at odds" with American society—openly rejecting the notion of American society as somehow "liberating."

The three women who chose to wear Islamic dress experienced cultural ostracism and humiliation, particularly when this action was not countered with the emotional work of presenting oneself as happy and nonthreatening. Bahaar indeed spoke of having to be "extra nice" to people. Taja detailed how she would often receive the "Muslim stare," that she actively tried to diffuse by smiling as a response—both forms of emotion management that serve to diffuse perceptions of them being threatening. Abida, who did not speak of partaking in this emotion work, but in fact often felt compelled to defend her views and her religion, was met with further antagonizing and humiliation.

Non-Muslim Middle Easterners

This section will focus on the experiences of discrimination and cultural hostility of respondents who were non-Muslim. These respondents broke down into two basic groups: those who grew up in Muslim households but have since become nonreligious, and those who grew up as part of a Christian minority in a Middle Eastern country. All four were female, which limits any gender comparisons, but leaves open this avenue for future researchers.

Two participants in this study fell into each of these groups. Dilek, a Turkish woman in her early thirties, and Shadee, a 26 year old Iranian woman, had become nonreligious while growing up in predominantly Muslim countries. Both had come to the United States as international students in their twenties. The fact that Iran and Turkey are non-Arab countries aligns with earlier studies that document higher rates of religious identity primacy in Arab countries as opposed to non-Arab countries in the Middle East (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007).

Dilek reported that she had experienced very low levels of discrimination, and struggled to even think of a situation in which she felt she had been treated differently because of her race, religion, or immigrant status. But she also attributed this to the fact that she was, in fact, nonreligious:

> I think stereotypes come from how you look. I had a friend who
> was from Turkey who covered her head, and I think she
> experiences these kinds of things more. But I feel like I never
> experience anything like this. I never feel this attitude from
> Americans, and I never feel like I'm treated differently at all.

Dilek's intuitions align with the data presented earlier of women who cover experiencing much higher levels of discrimination in public. In addition, Dilek and her

husband spend almost all of their time at the university and around other students at the university, who she is quick to point out may insulate her from these experiences. Shadee, who is Iranian, feels the same way about the university environment. She calls the university campus "a much safer place than off-campus." This too, however, could be at least in part a product of her not wearing the hijab, as Abida must have had a different attitude towards campus being safe.

However, Shadee spoke of extreme difficulty when having to encounter state officials, such as at an airport, especially when presenting herself as an Iranian national. She alludes to this when she says: "I feel discriminated against here, but I don't really feel it in my daily, day-to-day interactions. It's more with all the visa stuff and immigration stuff—traveling while Iranian. It's terrible." Shadee reveals that whenever she travels with her Iranian passport, it is a sure bet that she will be pulled out of line, searched, and have her bags gone through.

This sentiment is very similar to Walidah's, who was discussed in the earlier section of this chapter. Both Iranian interviewees detailed humiliating, highly ostracizing interactions with law enforcement at airports when attempting to travel through airports with their Iranian passports even though both had legal visas to live and work in the United States. When they could, both opted to travel with an American driver's license instead, which drastically reduced these kinds of interactions.

With the two Iranian cases in this study, we see further evidence of Islamophobia embedded not only in a religious context, but in a nationalistic, geographic one, as well. Indeed, Iran holds a distinct place in the minds of many Americans, perhaps left over from the enormous effect that the 1980s hostage crisis had on American society (Mostofi

2003), or maybe from the lack of diplomatic relations that has ensued since that time, or some other reason. Regardless, the Iranian respondents in this study experienced by far the highest levels of discrimination from law enforcement or security officials, for reasons not directly related to religion, but nationality.

I was able to interview two Middle Eastern Christians for this study to more intricately see how religion is embedded in Islamophobic sentiment, and how it affects daily life in America for Middle Eastern immigrants. Selah is a 23 year old female from Lebanon. She arrived to the United States about a year before 9/11 at the age of 12. Her parents are middle class entrepreneurs, and she is the youngest of four children, and all of her siblings graduated from college. Although she thinks very fondly of her former village in Lebanon, she imagines herself living in the United States for at least the extended future.

Talitha is a 35 year old female from Egypt, who came migrated with her husband and young child. All are now U.S. citizens and she definitely sees them living here for at least the foreseeable future. Both Selah and Talitha emigrated from social environments where they were religious minorities and where religious identity has very strong historical, family, community, and ethnic implications (Halliday 2000).

Thus, it is not surprising that the biggest distinction with these respondents, compared to those who identified as Muslim, was how they felt their religion "fit" in the American social landscape. When asked about this, Talitha replied, "I think it fits very well here. I can yell as loud as I want, 'I am a Christian!' This is a 100 percent change from Egypt, where I almost have to hide my religion." In this way, Middle Eastern Christian immigrants have the ability to be as exclamative about their religion in the

United States without risking being subjected to the hostility to which Muslims are subjected.

Saleh migrated at a much younger age than Talitha, and says that relations between Muslims and Christians are relatively stable in Lebanon currently, so she does not speak about this freedom of religious expression as Talitha does. Being Greek Orthodox has not affected how she is treated in society, she says, because she does not close herself off to being friends with only Greek Orthodox or Lebanese individuals.

However, simply by choosing to not be closed off to only those who share her religion is an option not available to many of the Muslim Middle Eastern immigrants in this sample. Through being Christian, they are permitted the agency to exert as strong of a religious identity as they see appropriate, without suffering the risks that come with exerting a Muslim identity. This is very similar to some of the themes brought up by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo in her book, *God's Heart Has No Borders: How Religious Activists are Working for Immigrant Rights*. She finds that in the United States., Christians are able to use religious resources in their activism in ways that are not possible for Muslims. In order to gain acceptance in American society, Muslims have to downplay their religion, while Christians can be very public about theirs. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo, because Islam remains a minority religion in the United States, and also because the 9/11 attacks fueled terrorism, Muslim activists have been reticent to use or incorporate the religious resources of Islam into their activism.

However, when asked about things that made life difficult for them in the United States, both Christian women mentioned the most challenging thing to overcome was having a strong accent. "The biggest thing for sure is my accent," Selah responds. "When

I talk to people, right off they ask me 'Where are you from?' because they know I am not

from here…I'm always reminded by others that I'm not from here, by my accent."

Talitha also explains how people respond to her accent and physical features:

People here love my skin color and hair, especially the women.
They tell me they pay a lot of money at the tanning place to look
like me. But when someone makes fun of my accent, they make
me feel like I should not talk or be involved with them. It hurts my
feelings. But now I tell myself, 'You know what, that doesn't
matter, as long as they can understand me, it doesn't bother me.'
Nothing much like that bothers me anymore.

In this case accents are mechanisms of racialization as they paint Saleh and Talitha as

different and *foreign,* in spite of the fact that both speak English fluently. This is also the

case of millions of first-generation immigrants who arrive in the United States every year.

In this way, the discrimination experienced by Saleh and Talitha has little to do with their

being Middle Eastern, and more to do with their accents. This is similar to Shamil's story,

who was experiencing hardships related to the more general secondary labor market,

rather than Islamophobic discrimination itself.

Christians who migrate to the United States from the Middle East undoubtedly

experience less discrimination and hostility compared to Muslims from the Middle East.

The data here corroborate this. However, as Middle Eastern Christians are still

immigrants, there are obstacles that they must face to gain full access in society. As with

Talitha and Selah, language barriers can drastically impede prospects for future

employment or succeeding in school. Talitha even experienced this while trying to find

work in a job for which she had a Bachelor's degree.

Muslim men by and large expressed that the threat of experiencing discrimination

or hostility in society was *not* an issue of concern in their lives. They were able to interact

freely with whomever they wished, go to work or school, and generally travel through

public spaces safely. The one male Muslim interviewee, Essam from Syria, who did in

fact experience direct discrimination for being Muslim was at the time going across a

national border via car, and also keeps a medium-sized beard. In other words, he was also

the one male Muslim interviewee who displayed attributes that are associated with being

Muslim. In his case, being visibly perceived as Muslim meant that he was wearing a full

beard, something which has been associated in the media with Osama bin Laden and

other Muslim terrorists. This is also an important distinction in my findings—those who

were visibly Muslim had very unique experiences.

Muslim women, on the other hand, described a much higher incidence of hostile

and discriminatory experiences. But within this group, women who were *visibly*

Muslim—women who wore the *hijab*, were targets of hostility and humiliation. These

actions occurred not only while interacting with other non-Muslims, but even while they

were going about their daily routines, either with other Muslims or alone. These findings

concerning Muslim men and women line up considerably with Cainkar's (2009) findings

on discrimination—specifically, that women who wear the hijab encounter much higher

levels of it in society.

In the next chapter, we will see how the Muslims in this study navigate the

Islamophobic social environment when constructing and molding their identities. While it

is difficult to argue some kind of casual relationship between experiences of

discrimination and identity construction, we see how identities are constantly molded and

negotiated, and how this process plays out in other areas of life.

Chapter 5

Negotiating Post-9/11 America: Patterns of Identity Construction and Religious

Individualism among Muslims

The social process of migration often involves the decoupling of social identity from known and familiar social contexts of culture, language, religion, etc, in which identity is constructed. Immigrants often must negotiate new social contexts in molding and reconstructing their identities. For Middle Eastern immigrants in America, this means mediating the post-9/11 Islamophobic environment and the potential for discrimination, stereotyping, and racialization of culture, religion, and even language, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

In this chapter, I examine several overarching themes pertaining to identity construction that emerged from the data: (1) the emphasizing of a "Muslim First" identity; (2) a potential trend of religious individualism among Muslims, and (3) boundary negotiation of Iranians in America. Researchers of social identity have noted that identities are fluid and contextual, and that identity construction is a process that occurs at the intersection of the macro-structural and micro-interaction levels (Nagel 1994; Waters 1990). Systems of structural, social boundaries are imposed upon the individual; the individual then has the agency to negotiate these boundaries to a certain extent.

Zolberg and Woon (1999) formulated three types of social action that they saw as fundamental to this process: boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting. It must be stated that these social actions are ideal types, and thus, difficult to define in a precise way.

Boundary crossing occurs when individuals from either side of the social boundary crosses to the other side, without any real shift in group differences. This can be seen as the classic individual-level phenomenon of cultural assimilation—when an immigrant fully assimilates to a host culture, largely leaving the distinctions between social groups intact.

Boundary blurring occurs where the social boundary becomes less clear, and when the distinguishing traits become less distinguishable. This appears, for example, when levels of interracial marriage rise, as has been occurring in the United States (Lee and Bean 2010). In turn, bi- or multi-race identities have also been increasing, as interracial couples have children.

Boundary shifting occurs when the social boundary moves to become either more or less inclusive, or it disappears altogether. In America, the process of a boundary shifting to become less inclusive played out, for example, with the adoption of "separate but equal" Jim Crow legislation in southern states after the American Civil War and with Japanese Americans after the Pearl Harbor bombing. Boundary shifting to becoming more inclusive occurred in the mid-twentieth century, as Jewish, Italian, and Irish immigrants came to be seen as part "white America" (Barkan 1996).

The data in this study show aspects of all three of these processes at times, and more. I use this framework to analyze the patters of identity negotiation that emerged from the data.

Muslim First

Scholars have been writing about the growing worldwide salience of a Muslim identity since at least the beginnings of Islamic Revival Movement of the mid-1990s (Cainkar 2004; Naber 2005), when even second generation Arab-Muslims in the United States became more actively engaged in their Muslim faith (Cainkar 2006). Since 9/11, the Muslim First identity has been mobilized as a form of reactive identity, reacting against the conflation of the 9/11 terrorists with Islam as a general faith, and with Muslims as a religious group (Cesari 2004; Nagra 2011).

Five of thirteen participants included in this study emphasized such a Muslim identity over other modes. Three of these individuals were international students who had no intention of staying in America, nor had any notions of being "American" in any way. With these interviewees, I asked if they identified more with their country of origin or their religion. For these individuals, they answered relatively easy, with responses such as:

> I think I am more Muslim. I am very proud of being Muslim. You know, my country, Qatar, we are a small country with a very small population. (Abida)

> I identify more with being Muslim because Islam has a very good set of core values, and I live my life by these values. (Taja)

> I am more Muslim. *[Why do you think?]* Because this is my religion, and it means very much to me. (Mahir)

Interestingly, Abida, Taja, and Mahir are the only Arab international students in my sample, and all identified as "Muslim First." This lines up with survey results from the fourth wave of the World Values Survey which was administered between 1999 and 2003 (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007). Respondents in Arab countries were almost twice as likely those from non-Arab countries, such as Iran and Turkey, to report that being a Muslim was more meaningful than any kind of national identity.

The other two interviewees who identified as "Muslim First" appeared to have more carefully negotiated this process. Essam, the Syrian-born man in his twenties, attempts to blur boundaries in order to claim a Muslim identity that was primal on the one hand, but also inclusive and "American" on the other:

> I identify as Muslim *first*, and I think a lot of Muslims today, as you may already be finding, are identifying this way. The point, though, is that I don't think this somehow makes me a worse American. In fact, the opposite is true. I think identifying myself as a Muslim makes me a better American, because Islam teaches me, I believe, to be good to my neighbors, to be supportive of my country, to stand up for freedom and justice, and all these things.

Essam states that his religious identity of being Muslim is his most meaningful source of identity, and goes on to explain that he is proud of being both Muslim and American, and that these two identities are not at all opposed to one another but complement and reinforce each other. Essam considers himself an activist who is pursuing a collective cultural shift in how Muslims are viewed in American society by removing the social boundaries that many believe exist between Americans and Muslims. This is perhaps to better confront the threat of Islamophobia in society, and the perception that American culture and Islam are somehow opposing forces, or incompatible. It is worth noting that Essam is extremely active both inside and outside of the Muslim community, in a very

public fashion. He sees himself as an example for other Muslims of how to "integrate" to American society without "assimilating," or losing his sense of being an authentic and active Muslim. In this way, he blurs the boundaries of being American and being Muslim and attempts to consolidate them.

Bahaar, the 26 year old female from Pakistan who immigrated to the United States after she married her American-born husband in 2008, plans to live in the United States for the foreseeable future. She, like Essam notices a change in social boundaries but in the opposite direction. When Bahaar first arrived, she did not typically cover with the hijab, but soon began to do so. In the earlier chapter, she spoke of how this made her feel racialized in society to a certain extent, and described receiving the "Muslim stare" on several occasions. She explains how this has affected her identity:

> You know, this is a very interesting issue, because I feel much more *Muslim* today than I did back in Pakistan. When I first moved here, I would always identify myself as Pakistani first, then Muslim. But now, it's the other way around. I just feel that I "stick out" much more here for being Muslim. Some people say "Arab" or "Middle Eastern," but I don't consider myself either of those. We're actually much closer to Indian culture than anything else. I'm South Asian, but "Muslim" covers all those other countries, and I definitely feel more Muslim now.

It is interesting that Bahaar identified as Pakistani before Muslim when she arrived in the United States. However, after some time, the social boundaries between Muslims and American society became far brighter (Alba 2005) and salient. This manifested itself in her beginning to cover with the hijab and shifting her identity *away* from being Pakistani or part of the multicultural, American society, and *towards* being Muslim and racialized. When she speaks of feeling racialized, she is referring to the

social boundaries that now exist between her and mainstream society, which are more strongly perceived with the covering of the hijab.

In this way, we see again how gender might be embedded in this process of identity negotiation. The "Muslim First" identity from Essam emerges from seeing the commonalities between Islam and American values. It is a call for unity and blurring boundaries by consolidating identities that are perceived to be in opposition to each other, but in fact, overlap considerably. For Bahaar, however, those social boundaries have become brighter and are very much a part of everyday life. Wearing the hijab has served to elucidate these experiences.

The "Muslim First" identity then can occur in America in several ways. First, it can occur as a call for inclusiveness, or as a plea to destigmatize Islam and break down the social boundaries that have been developing since at least the last couple of decades between Muslims and Americans, and even longer in Europe (Zolberg and Woon 1999) through a process of boundary consolidation. It can also occur as a call for exclusiveness and unity among Muslims, very similar to reactive ethnicity (Portes and Stepick 1993) which overlaps with Nagra's (2011) findings. This serves to insulate oneself against perceived discrimination in society. It can also occur among new immigrants from the Middle East, where research has shown that religious identity and affiliation have more drastic social consequences than ethnic, cultural, or national identity (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007).

On an Individualized, Progressive Islam

In this section, I analyze the experiences of four Muslim interviewees who expressed varying levels of an individualized or modified Islamic faith. That is, these

participants viewed themselves as breaking away from at least part of orthodox Islamic doctrine. At times, this process of individualization symbolized a move towards assimilation, which was demonstrated through individualized or modified religious value systems and social networks.

If I consider only Muslims, four of nine in this study identified with Islam on at least somewhat individualized terms. That is, they identified as Muslim, but at the same time demonstrated that a Muslim identity did not "define" them, nor did it serve as an especially salient source of identity. All of these participants were from non-Arab countries: Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. This would seem to once again align with data collected during the fourth wave of the World Values Survey (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007) that found higher levels of religious identity existing in Arab Muslim countries compared to non-Arab Muslim countries.

There were two overarching areas in which these Muslim participants were unique in this study. First, all modified in some way what Islam means to them, altering what is commonly thought of as Islamic religious custom. This was commonly portrayed as a reflective process reconstructing what it means to be Muslim—a more *individualized* interpretation of religious rituals. Second, they tended to value having very diverse social networks, sometimes consisting of very few if any Muslims. I expand on these notions below.

When asked to describe his religious faith, Siraj, the 28 year old Pakistani who was interviewed in his mosque, replied:

> To me, religion is more of a personal thing. I don't go and advertise it to people, and I don't agree that as Muslims we have to do that kind of thing, whether by dress or whatever… it's something you carry within yourself. It kind of dictates your personal outlook and daily conduct,

but you don't need to advertise it. Many Muslims…probably don't agree with me on that by the way [laughs], but I see it like that.

Siraj, whose interview took place in his home mosque, is careful to add a disclaimer when describing his own personal faith that many Muslims would not agree with his particular definition of religiosity, perhaps for being seen as breaking with the mainstream rituals of Islam such as conservative dress, among other things. Relating to his faith as "a personal thing" as well as advising against "advertising" his Muslim identity to others are perhaps methods he has come up with for avoiding personal discrimination. As we learned earlier, in Siraj's work, it is important to him that he not be seen as "foreign" or "strange," as he says other South Asians are seen. Downplaying his Muslim faith possibly allows him this ability. However, it is also important to note that although Siraj sees himself as taking unorthodox or non-mainstream views, he actively attends his mosque, and also regularly associates with other Muslims.

Sabah, the 20 year old college student from Pakistan, explains a similar negotiation pattern and speculates how this process might be related to her experiences of discrimination:

Well, I am Muslim…Shiite. I'm very religious, but I don't practice everything that's in the scripture. Some people… they like to follow it exactly by the book, like, you have to wear "this" or "that", you can't do "this" or "that", and "don't associate with these people." Things that don't have any meaning behind them, I don't do. So maybe that's part of the reason why [I don't feel so much discrimination for being Muslim]. So, I've kind of…made my own, modern version of Islam.

Statements such as this illustrate a desire to construct an image of being a "modern Muslim"—one that Sabah perceives as less restrictive on certain behaviors that she sees as lacking any meaning or merit. And by not adhering to those rules which "don't have

any meaning behind them," she reasons that she might be somewhat insulated from Islamophobic discrimination in the larger society.

Indeed, with reports of hate crimes and other discriminatory acts against Muslims at much higher levels today than before 9/11 (Disha et al. 2011), including several recent and particularly gruesome and violent acts (Cookler 2011), it is plausible that there exists considerable motivation to disjoin one's image and actions from those that may be commonly associated with being Muslim. As she frames this process in terms of "modernization" of religion, rather than altering one's behaviors to better fit in the host society, she avoids constructing an assimilated identity. This could possibly be due to pressure to maintain a culturally authentic identity. But interestingly, she describes herself as more "American" than "Pakistani."

This is similar to the forms of "mediated assimilation" that David and Ayouby (2002) found in their examination of Arab-American organizations in Dearborn, Michigan. They describe mediated assimilation as an effort to combine the best of Arab and American cultures to create a new hybrid culture, constructing the blueprint for a new hybrid Arab-American group identity. These are also the main tenets behind Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and theory of selective acculturation, where immigrants learn "American" way while also continuing to hold strong bonds with the ethnic community and culture.

Similarly, Walidah stresses that to her, Islam is a modern religion, and raises the possibility that more orthodox Shiite Muslims are misinterpreting the Koran:

> The way I see it…the Koran said that you should go with 'time.' So that's what it is. So 'time' is right now. You're not covering your hair because of a government mandate. You're doing it because you want to. You know? If I want to go swimming and wear a bikini, I'll do that,

because everyone is doing it. You know? … It's not a taboo. You go
with the time.

From the above quote, we see that Walidah does not hold sacred the wearing of the veil

or other practices that could be considered as following conservative Islamic doctrine,

although she still considers herself a devout Muslim. This is similar to Sabah's

experiences which were detailed earlier. Neither Sabah nor Walidah reported

experiencing much discrimination from strangers in public. Perhaps by avoiding the

visible practices and customs that often differentiate Muslims in U.S. society, such as

veiling or otherwise covering one's body with clothing, Sabah and Walidah are able to

deflect some of the racism and stigmatization that would otherwise occur.

A second characteristic that differentiated this group of Muslims was the value of

diverse social networks that include many who are not members of one's own social

group—in this case, Muslims or compatriots. Several participants in fact stated that they

were friends with very few Muslims at all. This often took the appearance of appealing to

the idea of a multicultural America, as Siraj does:

As far as my friends, I'm drawn to people who are from different
backgrounds and cultures. And not only that, but also to those who
invite others into their culture, you know? My closest friend is from
Ecuador. Another is from Puerto Rico. I have friends from all over.
America is America because people can come here and feel as though
they belong, because no group defines what it is to be American.

Siraj seems to be employing what Kasinitz et al. (2008) argue occurs among second

generation immigrants in New York who increasingly consolidate seemingly diverse

identities into being a "New Yorker." In Siraj's case, he uses the rhetoric of "a nation of

immigrants" to consolidate identities into being an American. As such, he is actively

engaging with the boundaries between being Muslim and being American, although he

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maintains several close friendships with those at his mosque and also expects to one day

marry another Muslim.

Others, particularly the females, were more exclusionary when defining their

social networks. In this study, they claimed to rarely have significant relationships with

those who share their ethnicity or religion. For instance, Sabah, the 20 year old Pakistani

female college student explains why she does not feel much in common with other

Pakistanis, and constructs an image of them as being "unassimilated":

> I feel a lot of resistance [from other Pakistanis], either for the way I
> talk, or what I wear, or who I hang out with. I'm just like, 'Who
> cares?! We live in America now. Go by where you live, not where
> you're from.' I actually don't hang out with much Pakistanis. I don't
> have a, sort of like, connection, or a bond with them. So I tend to not
> be friends with them.

Sabah, like Siraj, revealed that her social network is very diverse; however, it also

includes very few Muslims or Pakistanis. The reason for this is the "resistance" she feels

from them, and implies that it is because she is too assimilated in her choice of clothing,

her way of speaking, and her friends. This is a real source of potential conflict in crossing

a social boundary—resentment from the original social group for being perceived by

them as culturally inauthentic.

Sabah has also chosen to date non-Muslims, and as well does not consider other

Muslims as future romantic partners. This is contrary to the Muslim men in this section,

Siraj and Shamil. During the interview, Sabah revealed that she was in fact in a long-term

relationship with a non-Muslim American, and that they plan to marry one day. However,

in the over two years that they have been dating, she has not yet revealed the relationship

to her parents, for fear of their disapproval. Sabah has broken across the Muslim-

American social boundaries by constructing a relatively diverse social network that does

not include many other Muslims or Pakistanis, information which she has at least partially chosen to withhold from her parents and possibly other family members.

Walidah, the 45 year old Iranian female immigrant, also speaks to the difficulty of being Muslim while dating non-Muslims. Specifically, her potential partners wish for her to drop the Muslim status altogether, which she views as extremely frustrating:

> For me, I have a value regarding the guys that I date. They don't have to be Muslim, but he has to believe in God. You know, it's very important to me. But meeting a guy and you tell him you're Muslim, and they don't believe the same thing. They don't understand and say, "No, you have to convert to Christianity." And I'm like "Well, I believe in Jesus Christ, you know? Why would I want to convert again?! You know? I believe in Christianity, I believe in Judaism, you know? So it's very hard to connect with people. In the middle, it's hard. People want to be with only their own kind, and people don't get me.

It is telling that Walidah describes herself as "in the middle." Although this statement was not followed up with a question, I assume that she means in the middle of being Muslim and American, or even Christian. Indeed, she considers herself more of a religious "universalist" in that she sees relevancy in many religions, including Christianity.

Nonetheless, a satisfying dating life eludes her as her Muslim status marginalizes her in this way while she is otherwise generally accepted. Like Sabah, she does not consider other Muslims or Iranians as suitable romantic partners. She explains that this is because she can no longer relate to other Muslims or Iranians, and that they are "stuck in a different mindset." I suspect that like Sabah, Walidah is also dissuaded from such interaction for fear of being perceived as culturally inauthentic. Regardless, crossing social boundaries represents a "cutting off" from former relationships with Muslim or Iranians.

The above portrayed actions are reminiscent of what Duderija (2007b) and others (Safi 2003) have called Progressive Islam. The Progressive Muslim movement can be best described as a self-critical engagement with Islam, and a commitment to finding its place in religiously and ethnically pluralist societies, such as the United States (Safi 2003). Duderija argues that Progressive Islam "emphasizes the role of the interpreter in the process of meaning derivation" and that "the qur'anic text can withstand or accommodate various interpretative strategies eliciting different readings of the same (piece of) text by different communities of interpretation (Duderija 2007b:425)". And indeed, several of the Muslims in this study, as shown above, assumed a role of "interpreter" in navigating levels of religiosity, and Walidah specifically alludes to this process.

However, contrary to the Progressive Muslim movement which Duderija writes of, the female Muslims alluded to in this section did not see themselves involved in a "particular interpretation" (Duderija 2007b:425) of the Koran, or any other institutionalized religious dogma. On the contrary, in many ways they chose to cross social boundaries and assimilate.

However, I argue that the Muslims presented in this section are *individualizing* their religious belief systems, which often took the form of breaking from at least some aspects of more traditional Islamic dogma. This trend of individualization in American religion has been documented by sociologists for several decades (Bellah 1996), which has its roots in Puritan New England. In this way, religious assimilation for Muslims could mean taking the cultural turn towards individualization, or the relegation of religion to the private sphere.

We also see how this process might play out across gender, as the women who spoke of individualizing their Muslim faith did not associate with large Muslim communities, nor did they date Muslim men. Perhaps the women felt this way because marrying another Muslim might cause them to, in effect, become "more Muslim." Perhaps a Muslim husband would have expectations that she wear a hijab, or shrink her social network of non-Muslim friends. This was not so for the men. Siraj expressed that it would simply be easier for him to marry another Muslim if he were to marry. And although he spoke of having a large non-Muslim social network, he also had a large Muslim social network and regularly attended the mosque.

This process of individualization is very similar to the literature that documents what some Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual (LGBT) Christians experience. Wilcox (2002) writes that as many Christian communities and churches turn away LGBT parishioners, or attempt to "heal" them, LGBTs are often forced to reconstruct what it means to be Christian. This often involves the downplaying or ignoring of aspects of religious doctrine that are not helpful in their pursuit of a fulfilling life. In my study, I find that some Muslims, particularly women, are reconstructing what it means to be Muslim in much the same way.

Iranian vs. Persian

The Iranians in this study presented perhaps the most interesting case of identity negotiation even though there were only two Iranian participants in this group. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been an Islamic theocracy since the late 1970s, after the Shah was overthrown during the Iranian Revolution, and replaced with a Supreme Ruler. American hostages were taken and held for over one year, which caused extreme political

turmoil in the United States, and a diplomatic backlash against Iranians.[3] The United

States and Iran to this day still have no official diplomatic relationship. There is much

evidence in the literature, as well, that Iranians and Iranian-Americans continue to be

stigmatized in America by these events and the ensuing backlash (Daha 2011; Mobasher

2006; Mostofi 2003).

Stereotypes of Iranians largely align with those for Muslims in general, conflated

with extreme violence and anti-Americanism—stereotypes which are reinforced by a

dramatic political dispute and coinciding media messages which have their roots in the

Iranian Hostage Crisis (Mostofi 2003).

These intricacies played out with both Iranian interviewees, Walidah and Shadee.

Walidah and Shadee were asked how they respond when people ask them (as they often

do) "What are you?" This is important because, like the question pertaining to writing

one's autobiography, it leaves open the possibility to respond with any desirable, context-

based answer. Note how Walidah and Shadee, both Iranian women, differed in their

responses to this question:

> I'm Shiite Muslim. But not the way that *they* see it, or that
> everybody else sees it…. That's why I always, you know, say
> [that] I'm Persian. Because "Persian" is where you were born, you
> were raised—the culture. Religion is what you believe in. You
> know? People don't look at your face, and say, "Oh! Jewish!" So
> it's a belief. It's like, oh, I'm vegetarian, or I'm vegan. So when we
> [my family] gets together, we don't talk about religion, and there is
> no arguing, because religion is just a belief, it's just an idea.
> (Walidah)

> I always say that I'm Iranian…Many of my friends, when they
> introduce themselves, they say they are Persian. This is the
> historical, cultural name of Iran, and it doesn't sound as bad to
> Americans as Iranian. But I refuse to do this. But we don't like

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[3] For an excellent discussion of these events from a reporter who visited Iran many times, both leading up
to and after the Revolution, please see The Last Great Revolution, by Robin Wright (2010).

people to ask us where we are from; because we know what's
going to happen…the air will be sucked out of the room [anxiously
laughs]. (Shadee)

Walidah answers that she is Shiite Muslim, but does not introduce herself this

way to others because she does not identify as "they see it, or that everybody else sees it."

Walidah suggests that she is distancing herself from a negatively stereotyped image of a

Shiite Muslim. Because of the negative images associated with Shiite Islam and Iran in

general, or perhaps due to the lack of salience of a religious identity to her, Walidah

prefers to introduce herself as "Persian" instead. Persia is the historical and cultural name

for the country that we now call Iran.

She goes on later in the interview to explain that her lacking a specifically

"Iranian" identity is a result of her being politically opposed to the 1979 Iranian

Revolution and the overthrowing of the Shah, as well as the current theocratic

government regime. This aligns considerably with previous research on Iranian

immigrants in America in the aftermath of the hostage crisis that followed the revolution

(Mobasher 2006; Mostofi 2003).

Shadee, who is nonreligious herself but grew up a Muslim household, claims an

Iranian identity, despite Americans' generally negative reaction towards Iranians.

Interestingly, even though she arrived to the United States very recently, she refers to the

trend of Iranians identifying as "Persian" to escape these experiences, such as what

Walidah does, suggesting that this trend is at least somewhat common and known among

Iranians in America. This points to the likelihood of Iranians maintaining a contentious

position in American society—targets of hostility left over from an event that was said to

shake "this country with thunderclap force, becoming a crisis of an overwhelming and

all-absorbing nature" (Oberdorfer 1981). This is astonishing, considering that most young adult Iranians were not alive at the time of the Iranian revolution.

The situation Iranians face in America begins to sound similar to the "golden exiles" (Portes 1969) from Cuba who fled following Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution and subsequent alignment with the Communist Party, although the "golden exiles" never really gave up their Cuban identities. One could deduce from this that Walidah and other Iranians who identify as "Persian" are perhaps "hiding" their nationalities. And indeed, Shadee's account suggests that her friends might be doing the same, which she herself refuses to partake in. However, the situation with Cuba's golden exiles was very different from Iranians. The hostility from Americans towards Iranians extended to *all* Iranians, regardless of religion, class, or political ideology; and even extended to Iranian immigrants who were already in the United States at the time. Cuban exiles, contrarily, were generally welcomed as examples of the supposed supremacy of democracy and capitalism as opposed to communism.

The primacy of an ethnic identity over a more stigmatized identity option is not something that is unique to certain groups of Middle Easterners. Greenbaum (2002) and Waters (1994) found similar identity patterns among both English and Spanish speaking black Caribbean immigrants in America. Greenbaum details how the Afro-Cuban community of Ybor City, Florida, differentiated themselves upon arrival to Tampa in the late-nineteenth century from the African American community due to the highly racialized and discriminatory environment of the Jim Crow South. This was accomplished partly through the emphasis on cultural and ethnic rituals among the Afro-Cubans and their identity as "Cuban" to override the sharing of skin-tones with African

Americans. Waters found that black Caribbean children of immigrants vary in their patterns of identifying ethnically, some identifying as "black Americans" and others as "ethnic West Indians." Those who stressed their ethnic roots as West Indian did so, she found, by differentiating themselves, sometimes very subtlety, from black Americans. These examples illustrate a larger pattern of identity negotiation in relation to a host society's ascribed meanings regarding race, religion, and in this case *nationality*, which may not line up with meanings carried from the society of origin.

In this study, we see a parallel to Waters' and Greenbaum's findings in that many Iranians opt to utilize the ethnic identity label of "Persian" over the more stigmatized national identity of "Iranian." However, we also see that the younger generation of Iranians may be stepping away from these tendencies, as the memories of the hostage situation fade evermore to the background. Whatever the case, this is surely a rich avenue for future research on Iranian and Middle Eastern identities.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to gain insight into the lives of Middle Eastern immigrants in America by analyzing: (1) their daily experiences and perceptions of Islamophobia in U.S. society, and (2) patterns of identity construction and negotiation. I accomplished this by utilizing qualitative interviews to ask first-generation Middle Eastern immigrants, regardless of religious identity, about experiences of discrimination and perceptions of cultural or religious hostility in America.

This study is unique in that the sample consists of Middle Eastern (and South Asian) immigrants. Much of the literature analyzing experiences of Islamophobic discrimination focuses exclusively on American Muslims (Peek 2010) or Arabs (Jamal and Naber 2008). This is specifically true of the literature pre-dating 9/11 (Suleiman 1988).

Since 9/11, most of the literature that examines Islamophobia in America does so in the context of the subsequent backlash. This research includes data revealing a substantial increase in hate crimes, reported cases of discrimination, and scapegoating of Muslims in the media (Disha, Cavendish, and King 2011; Nagra 2011; Peek 2003). This thesis differentiates itself in that it analyzes experiences that have largely occurred well after 9/11. Eight of 13 interviewees arrived in the United States after 9/11, and only one participant had spent substantial time in the United States both before and after 9/11.

In my study, I found that gender played an overwhelming role in the experiences, perceptions, and outlooks of Middle Eastern immigrants. Muslim men perceive little Islamophobic discrimination in everyday life, except in cases where they display racial markers that identify them as Muslim, such as wearing a beard. This was not necessarily associated with length of time spent in the United States, as the one male participant who reported experiencing an incidence of Islamophobic discrimination had been in the country for the longest amount of time. However, he was also the only male who wore a beard.

Women as a group perceived much higher levels of discrimination, particularly from strangers. This was especially true of women who were *visibly* perceived as Muslim, either by wearing Muslim dress, praying in public, or some other way. A couple of Muslim women recalled receiving "hate stares" in public, which were sometimes countered with smiling, in order to de-racialize or de-stigmatize themselves. The one Muslim woman, Abida, who wore full Muslim dress on a daily basis, reported the highest levels of daily interactional discrimination, often leaving her feeling insulted and offended.

It would be an interesting line of inquiry for future scholars to study this further, specifically, whether the wearing of more Muslim garments (full Muslim dress as compared to just the hijab, for example) might lead to a greater incidence of discrimination in public. I would suspect this to be the case, and hypothesize that the less "Western" a Muslim woman is perceived as, the more of a cultural "threat" she embodies. This was shown in the aftermath of 9/11, when some Muslim women living in

the United States tried to persuade their daughters to wear the hijab in a "less Muslim way" or stop wearing it altogether in order to avoid hostility (Peek 2003).

Non-Muslim Middle Eastern immigrants, especially Christians, felt little Islamophobic discrimination. This is due to the ability they have to cross social boundaries without changing any part of their religious identity given their common Christian faith. This may be true even for nonreligious individuals from the Middle East, particularly if they are *not* from a country that is highly stigmatized by the U.S. media for their political systems, such as Iran. This was alluded to during one interview with a nonreligious woman from Turkey, who reported that her Muslim friend, also from Turkey, often felt discriminated against.

The Iranians in this study experienced racialization not by religion, but by nationality. This was evident in the treatment of Walidah by customs agents and in what appeared to be negative reactions towards Shadee upon revealing to people where she is from. Previous literature concerning Iranian immigrants in America draws similar conclusions (Mobasher 2006; Mostofi 2003). It has been theorized that the Iranian Revolution and the ensuing hostage crisis were such powerful events in the minds of Americans that the images and stereotypes of Iranians as anti-American, violent, and extremist have endured. This has been exacerbated by the violent and hostile rhetoric from the current Iranian government's alleged desire to secure nuclear weapons.

Data suggests that in the Iranian case, it is not the hijab, or even the Islamic faith, that cause public scorn and suspicion from border agents, but Iranian citizenship itself. Iranians represent a different kind of threat—one of a diplomatic and political character. Iranians represent a threat to American democracy.

This conclusion goes hand-in-hand with the finding that Iranians attempt to avoid public scorn or humiliation by maintaining a Persian identity when questioned by Americans, rather than an Iranian one. This is true even 30 years after the hostage crisis. The Iranian who proudly claimed an Iranian identity was very much aware of the potential repercussions of such action. Past research regarding Iranians in America confirms these results (Daha 2011).

As such, data suggest that as long as the United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iran, our main source of information remains the U.S. media, which tends to cast Iran as extremist, violent, and hostile to America. The protest movement of 2008 has the potential to change this perception, but data suggest that this has not happened on a large scale. Thus, I see little reason why these stereotypes and prejudices would change in the near future. But just as stereotypes of Jews, Irish, Japanese, and Germans have changed drastically in the last century, the long-term trajectory of these trends is much more in question.

A second area that we see gender highly embedded in is in the process of identity negotiation, particularly in the Muslim First identity and the individualization of Muslim identities. The Muslim First identity, which has been highlighted by past researchers (Cesari 2004; Naber 2005; Nagra 2011), emerges as Muslims feel they are unjustifiably being discriminated against in society, and it is a way of organizing and standing in opposition to this discrimination. Indeed, this process resembles that of reactive identity formation (Portes and Stepick 1993). Moreover, most recent studies focus on reactive identity formation in the context of boundaries becoming brighter, or more salient, which is a pattern confirmed in this study. However, reactive identity formation also occurred in

the context of boundary consolidation, where multiple identities are consolidated in *hopes* of breaking down social boundaries. Future research is needed to uncover the nuances of these processes. Discrimination may play a key role here, as individuals who feel less discriminated against in society may be more inclined to consolidate boundaries. Among international students, those exclusively from Arab-Muslim countries claimed a Muslim First Identity. This reaffirms the diversity in ethnic and religious identity patterns among Middle Eastern immigrants, which future researchers would be unwise to ignore.

Lastly, I find the potential that some Muslims are going through a process of individualization, where the individual plays the role of interpreting religious meaning. A similar process has been documented among U.S. Christians for several decades (Bellah 1996), suggesting a possible cultural trend of privatization that spans religions.

Once again, however, this process played out differently across gender. Data suggests that women who break from orthodox Islam by not covering or attending a mosque separate themselves somewhat from the larger Muslim community. This fact makes these individuals a rather difficult group for researchers to recruit, as they are typically not present at religious services or organization meetings for Muslims. As well, both women who identified this way dated non-Muslims exclusively, leaving in question how this process would play out across generations. This was less true for the Muslim men in this study, who showed less pressure to follow orthodox styles of dress or the like.

Future studies should further analyze gender distinctions that emerge from the identity negotiation process, especially for Muslim women. Both qualitative and quantitative researchers should actively seek participants in non-religiously affiliated bodies, such as through craigslist, or ethnically-based organizations, as some Muslims

may be hesitant to join religious organizations if they are perceived to be too conservative. This especially holds true for women, as both women who had drastically individualized their religious faith in this study were recruited through a public posting on craigslist, and neither regularly attended or belonged to a formal religious organization.

This study is limited by its sample, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Access to the target population was a prime issue, as I was only able to interview those who contacted me and were comfortable enough to sit down for an interview. It is very likely that those Middle Eastern immigrants who feel the highest levels of discrimination in society might be more hesitant to speak with me about personal and sensitive issues such as discrimination and religious identity. For this reason, it would be beneficial for non-Middle Easterners or non-Muslims who wish to study these issues to build long-term relationships with Muslim organizations for participant recruitment purposes.

Lastly, my own positionality as a white, non-Muslim male should be regarded as a limitation to these findings and interpretations. Past work has shown that individuals shape their behavior to some extent according to the situation (Goffman 1959), and it is possible that the responses I received from the interviewees were somewhat "filtered." Nonetheless, the findings presented here offer a valuable contribution to the study of identity negotiation, particularly among immigrants, which is a complex social process encompassing both internal and contextual factors.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to Group Leader for Email Listserv

To (members of organization):

My name is Gregory Mills, and I am a Sociology graduate student at the University of South Florida. This Fall (2011) I am conducting interviews with for part of a social research study inquiring the immigrant experience and notions of belonging among people of Middle Eastern decent here in the US and the Tampa area, specifically. I would like to extend to you an invitation to participate in the study by giving your voice to a piece of academic literature which will be published in the USF library and possibly in scholarly journals. Also, there is a compensation of a $10 gift card to either Publix or Wal-Mart (or other department store of your choice) for your time and participation.

Specifically, I am seeking first-generation immigrants of Middle Eastern decent, between the ages of 18 and 35. A specific religious affiliation is not necessary to take part in the study, any are welcome. The interview will take about 45-90 minutes, and will be somewhat of a free-flowing conversation.
Like I mentioned above, there will be a compensation of a $10 gift card to either Publix or Wal-Mart (or other comparable store) for participating in the study. If you would like to participate or find out more about the study or interview, please contact me ASAP at: (email address) or by phone at (phone number).
Thank you for your time and good luck in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Gregory Mills

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Bio/Demographic Questions:
Tell me about yourself.
Family
       Who do you live with?
       Who do you stay connected with in your country of origin?
How do you stay connected with your country of origin (facebook, skype, email, etc)?
       Citizenship status
       Immigration story
Where did you grow up?
Where did you go to school?
Where do you live/work/go to school now?
How long have you lived there?
How long have you worked there?
Where do you see yourself, personally, geographically, and professionally, in 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?
How do you define success?**
If you had to name three to five general "life goals" (job, education, family, etc.), what would you say they are?
Do you feel you will have/have had fair access to resources to achieve these goals? How or how not?
Do you feel that you have adequate access to future job or education opportunities compared to other Americans? In what ways?
How satisfied are you with your life here? What has been satisfying? Dissatisfying?

Religious/Cultural Identity:
When people ask what you are (origins), how do you respond? (Hyphenated identities, etc.) Why?
How has this process changed over the years?
How do you identify religiously?
How do other members of your immediate family identify religiously?
How often do you participate in religious activities? What kinds of activities?
How do you define your ethnicity?
With what do you identity with more closely, your ethnicity or religion? Why do you think that is so?

Describe to me your closest networks of friends? Of what nationality/religion are they? Who do you spend the most time with?

**ask about romantic relationships, expectations and past tendencies

How do you and/or your family maintain a distinct cultural identity in America (rituals, foods, language, etc)?

What specifically from your culture and/or religion to you want instill in your children? Do you have certain expectations from your future children in this way?

This is a very general question, but are there certain values that you carry with you from your ethnic background/culture that you feel distinct and unique in the US?

Describe to me some of the differences in how people act here in America compared to …(whatever country)….?*****

Notions of "belonging" in America:

Does your religious affiliation affect how you think you fit in here in America? How?

How would you describe racial or cultural tolerance in American society? How does that compare to tolerance in Tampa, in general (compared to other places you've lived)?

Prejudice/Discrimination:

How are your day-to-day interactions affected by your origin or religion (with strangers, at work/school, with government/police/officials)?

To what extent do you feel that you are discriminated against in your day-to-day interactions?

> At work or school?
> Through the media?
> By law enforcement?
> At the airport?

How did you handle these situations with strangers?

Can you talk about certain times when you may have felt very socially awkward or anxious because of comments, looks, or other subtle social interactions?

Have you ever been in a situation that you felt uncomfortable because of others? Tell me about it.

Are there certain topics that you do not readily openly discuss with certain individuals or places you do not go because of your ethnicity or religion? Why or why not?

Can you talk about any recent, specific instances where you felt discriminated against? How did they make you feel?

Is the threat of "possible discriminatory acts" an often discussed topic among close friends/family?

In what ways or to what extent do you (or friends or family) actively try to avoid or diminish situations where you might be victim to discrimination?

How do you feel the Middle Eastern/Muslim community is portrayed in American media?

How do these representations compare to reality in your opinion?

You could talk about the Arab Spring if you haven't already….

Is there anything I could have asked, but didn't, that you think would be helpful for me in future interviews?