UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Sources of Authority and Authenticity in American Shar'ia Law

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in Islamic Studies

by

Kristina Elizabeth Benson

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Islamic Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Sondra Hale, Chair

In this project, I use anthropological, sociological, and ethnographic methodologies to interrogate the production of religious knowledge and concepts surrounding authority and authenticity for U.S. Muslims in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. First, I ask who exercises interpretive authority over religious texts to produce religious knowledge for the community. Second, I ask how Muslim Americans determine that religious knowledge is authoritative. Finally, I examine the extent to which there are tensions between American and Islamic values (however understood), and ask how these tensions are resolved .

My research, drawn from internet-based ethnography and open-ended interviews, reveals *inter alia* that U.S. Muslims identify Islamic law as crucial to larger processes of decision-making as well as to the rhythm of their daily lives. While authority for U.S. Muslims primarily resides in self-authorized, individual interpretations of religious texts, certain members of the community are viewed as valuable resources for guiding the framework of interpretive efforts.

The purpose of these interpretive efforts is oriented towards developing a personal relationship with God, experiencing a connection to the broader Muslim community, and living in harmony with key Islamic values like modesty and charity. Religious ideology, therefore, factors heavily into expressions of Muslim identity, particularly for U.S. Muslim women, who often strive to embody Islamicate values through a mix of sartorial and behavioral choices.

At present, while there has been scholarly research on Muslims in the U.S., there is little scholarly work on the development of Islam itself in the U.S. The substance and content of U.S. Shar'ia law, as well as its sources of authority and drivers of authenticity, are largely unknown. Therefore, in a time when there is widespread anxiety about Shari'a law in the United States among non-Muslims, my project has applied significance to bodies of knowledge related to sociology, Islamic jurisprudence, and American studies; it also makes important contributions to anthropological and sociological theoretical frameworks regarding how the production of authoritative knowledge is influenced by the ubiquity of social media and on-line religious knowledge production.

The dissertation of Kristina Elizabeth Benson is approved.

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2015

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Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help and support of my parents, my fiancé, and my committee.

I would additionally like to thank the Graduate Division for awarding me the Dissertation Year Fellowship to help support me during the writing phase of the dissertation.

Biographical Sketch

Kristina Benson's research primarily focuses on Islam in contemporary Western contexts. She is particularly interested in themes relating to legal pluralism, Shar'ia law, and the War on Terror. Her work interrogates the effects of the securitization of Islam on articulations of Islam and the trajectory of Muslim religio-cultural norms. Because of her interdisciplinary background, she approaches these issues using a mix of sociological, anthropological, and critical theoretical frameworks. In so doing, her work destabilizes theoretical frameworks implying that "Muslim" and "Western" behavioral matrices are mutually exclusive and teases out the relationships between group and individual expressions of identity, solidarity, and piety.

She received Bachelor's degrees in Music and in Environmental Analysis and Design from the University of California, Irvine, and a Master's degree in Islamic Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles. She has presented papers at selective scholarly conferences in a number of disciplines, given invited lectures on topics such as public health, Islam, and gender. received training in interview techniques from the UCLA Research Library's Department of Oral History, achieved advanced language competency in Persian and Arabic, and published papers in scholarly sources such as the *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law*, the *Buffalo Journal of Human Rights Law* (a top ten law review in the field of human rights law), *Voices of Claremont University Student Research Journal,* and the *Pacific McGeorge Journal of International Law.*

I. Introduction and Purpose

In this project, I use anthropological, sociological, and ethnographic methodologies to interrogate the production of religious knowledge, and concepts surrounding authority and authenticity for U.S. Muslims in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. Several research questions flow from this broad statement of purpose: first, I ask who exercises interpretive authority over religious texts to produce religious knowledge on behalf of the community. Second, I ask how Muslim Americans determine which religious knowledge is authoritative, and which is not credible. Finally, I examine the extent to which there are tensions between American and Islamic values (however understood), and ask how these tensions are resolved or otherwise dealt with.

My research, based on both written and interview sources, reveals *inter alia* that Muslim Americans identify Islamic law as crucial to larger processes of decision-making as well as to the rhythm of their daily lives, and that they make enormous effort to instill in their children the importance of Islam and Islamicate values. While authority for U.S. Muslims primarily resides in self-authorized, individual interpretations of religious texts, certain key Media Muftis and local Imams—terms I will define more precisely in relevant chapters-- are viewed as valuable resources for guiding the framework of interpretive efforts. The purpose of these interpretive efforts is oriented towards developing a personal relationship with God, experiencing a connection to the broader Muslim community, and living a lifestyle in harmony with key Islamic values like modesty and charity. Religious ideology, therefore, factors heavily into expressions of

Muslim identity, particularly for U.S. Muslim women, who often strive to embody Islamicate values through a mix of sartorial and behavioral choices.

As anthropologist Karen Leonard recognized, religion and religious identity can be enormous factors in shaping concepts of group and individual identity. However, it has only been in the past few decades that anthropologists and sociologists have begun interrogating this process. While there is research on Muslims in the U.S., there is little scholarly work on the development of Islam itself in the U.S. and the substance and content of U.S. Shar'ia law, as well as its sources of authority and drivers of authenticity, are largely unknown. Although I provide a nuanced and textured portrait of American Shari'a law for the Muslim community in Southern California, more work is needed to fill in this critical scholarly gap.

Additionally, in a time when there is widespread anxiety about Shari'a law in the United States among non-Muslims, my project has applied significance to bodies of knowledge related to sociology, Islamic jurisprudence, and American studies; it also makes important contributions to anthropological and sociological theoretical frameworks regarding how the production of authoritative knowledge is influenced by the ubiquity of social media and on-line religious knowledge production.

Setting and Field Site

It is difficult to say with any certainty how many Muslims, exactly, reside in Southern California. At present, the U.S. Census is barred from asking people for their religious identity or

affiliation, and as a result, there is no verified data on the size or location of the Muslim population in the U.S. (Krikorian et al). As a result, the estimates that do exist range widely: for example, in 2011, Cal State University Northridge's Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program estimated the number at 600,000. The Association of Statistics of American Religious Bodies concluded in 2010 that somewhere between .5 - .99 percent of Southern Californians identify as Muslim, and furthermore, that one of the largest concentrations of Muslims in the U.S. live in the Southern California area. The USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture, meanwhile, claims that a majority of the U.S. Muslim population resides in California, and that 1% of Californians are Muslim.[1]

That said, given that some studies focus on race and ethnicity, and others focus on religion, no study gives a complete picture of *what kind* of Muslims live in the Southland in particular, nor the United States, in general. In other words, there is no source wherein in a researcher can find the populations of Persian, Arab, Black, Hispanic, White or North African Muslims in Southern California, nor the numbers of Sunnis, Shi'as, or members of various other sects, and triangulating between sources is challenging given that they all use different survey methods, present their data in different ways, and were taken at different times during the past decade.

That said, Orange County and Los Angeles Counties are home to dozens of cultural, educational, political, and religious institutions devoted to serving Muslims and promoting Islamic values, including at least two dozen mosques, the Los Angeles office of the Council of

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[1] There is no date given for this statistic. See, however, The University of California Center for Religion and Civic Culture, *Resources: California Mosque List*, http://crcc.usc.edu/resources/maps/masjid-list.html (accessed November 26 , 2014).

American Islamic Relations (CAIR), and the University of California Irvine and University of California Los Angeles Muslim Student Unions. It is therefore an ideal field site for observing the *in situ* interpretations, dissemination, and application of Shar'ia law.

In the following section I discuss the methodological approach to my research questions, which can be broken into three components: participant-observation at local mosques and places of worship; open-ended interviews with self-identified U.S. Muslims; and "netnographic research"—a term that will be defined and discussed below. This section will then be followed by an overview of the plan of the work. Subsequent chapters will contextualize these approaches within the relevant literature, as well as within the overall history of Islam and Muslims in the U.S.

Methodological Approach

My approach to interrogating my research questions involves a mixture of classical and emerging methodologies, including participant observation, interviews, and netnographic observation and analysis. These processes were mutually reinforcing and took place concurrently between the period of June 2013 and June 2014.

Participant Observation

I conducted several visits to local mosques and Islamic cultural centers, youth group meetings, and Islamic schools, where I observed Friday prayers when possible, spoke to scholars in residence, and attended or listened to lectures. I also analyzed educational materials and toured the facilities. These visits served several purposes. First, they allowed me to infer the role (or roles) that the institution plays within the context of the local community. One Islamic school, for example, not only has classrooms, a prayer hall, and a cafeteria, but also an on-site funeral home, a banquet hall for weddings or parties, a food pantry, a gift shop, a soccer field, and a community meeting room. The availability of such amenities suggests that this is not only a school, but also a center of social, political, and spiritual support available to the community from cradle to grave.

Second, these visits allowed me to observe how Imams and scholars, as well as the organizations themselves, project authority and Muslim identity in addition to providing a forum for me to observe the socio-cultural norms guiding interaction. Visits allowed me not only to observe the degree of overlap between members of ethno-cultural, generational, socio-economic, and sectarian groups, but also to uncover some of the values informing religious practice and religious belief in U.S. Muslim communities.

Interviews

I conducted well over a hundred hours of interviews with more than 75 U.S. Muslims

using snowball sampling. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. They were most often conducted in person, and occasionally were conducted over Skype when an in-person meeting was not possible due to complications with child-care arrangements, work schedules, or other logistical challenges. The interviews served several functions, and in many ways, were the centerpiece of this project. The format, which was semi-structured but still fairly conversational, allowed self-identified American Muslims to name and explain aspects of their faith in their own words, and to elaborate in detail on topics of particular interest.

These interview questions include demographic questions about ethnic identity, marital status, age, college education, and place of birth, in addition to questions about how the interview subject learned about Islam, the importance of Islam in his or her life, and sources of information about Islam. I also asked interview participants if they thought music and dogs were harām, and why or why not. The verbalized answers to these questions allowed me not only to trace respondents' thought processes as they reasoned through the question, but facilitated my ability to tease out the way respondents drew from and applied various sources of authority, and furthermore, revealed the epistemological framework of their Islamic knowledge.

Sometimes the interviews took on a conversational tone, and the topics respondents chose to address, of course, were just as telling as the topics they chose not to address. The same was true of the sources of authority that they identified, and the way they characterized their relationship to American identity, practices, and culture. To recruit participants, I had a colleague send my contact information along with a short paragraph about my study to the UCLA Muslim Student Union (MSU) listerv. Eventually, through a process of referrals, my call for participants worked its way through the listservs of Muslim Student Unions from the University of

California, Irvine (UCI), the University of California, Riverside (UCR) and Claremont College, attracting participants from all over the Southland. As a result, my sample is biased towards current college students and recent graduates. It is evenly divided between men and women, but a plurality of respondents who identify as South Asian, are between the ages of 21 and 27, and hold or are pursuing degrees from UCI, UCLA, UCR, or the Claremont Colleges

To be sure, me reliance on snowball sampling of course has certain advantages as well as drawbacks. First, African Americans were highly under-represented in my sample: only one person I interviewed identified as African American even though roughly 40% of the U.S. Muslim population identifies as African American. I was therefore very concerned about the under-representation of African Americans in my sample, and began asking interview subjects if they knew anyone who was identified as Black so they could refer me to a listerv popular among Black identified Muslims. None of my respondents knew of a listserv popular among Black-identified Muslims, and in fact, many respondents lamented the fact that "the Muslim community" needed to do a better job of reaching out to the "African American community" and resolved to bring up the issue for discussion at community meetings and at their local mosques.

The absence of African Americans in my sample, therefore, can most likely be traced to the demographics of college students on major U.S. campuses: in 2010, African Americans earned only 10.3% of Bachelor's degrees (*Condition of Education)*. At UCLA, only 3.8% of undergraduates who enrolled for the 2013-2014 academic year identified as African American (UCLA "Quick Facts"). At UCI, one of the most selective universities in the country, only 3.2% of undergraduates are African American (UCI *Campus Data*). UCR is slightly better, with African Americans constituting 6.3% of the 2014 undergraduate student body (The University of

California, Riverside). I can find no research investigating the racial composition of American Muslim Student Unions or Muslim Student Associations, nor theorizing on why (or if) African Americans could be under-represented in Muslim Student Unions or Muslim Student Associations. However, recent alumni of the UCLA and UCI MSUs told me that there were only "a few" African Americans at the MSU, and that they came to meetings irregularly.

It therefore makes sense that recruiting participants based on college or MSA list-servs would yield a sample wherein South Asians, Arab Americans, and upper-middle class or wealthy people are over-represented, and people of color, as well as poor or working class people, are under represented.

I should also note that UCLA's Internal Review Board, which charged with supervising the ethical practices of research, classifies interviewing and participant observation as research involving "human subjects." When conducting research, organizing research results, and storing research data, I had to follow strict guidelines for protecting the privacy of my interview participants. For this reason, I only refer to interview subjects using pseudonyms. Additionally, I give little information about interview participants, referring only to the date, time, and city where the interview took place, and to general characteristics such as marital status, ethnic identity, and age.

Netnographic Observation

In my preliminary research, a majority of self-identified Muslims stated that they regard the Internet as an important source of information on Islam, and reported that they regularly used on-line lectures, courses, and articles to supplement their interactions with local Imāms. Many of my interview participants told me that they were also active commenters on sites that catered specifically to U.S. Muslims,[2] discussing social, political, and religious issues in comment threads and message boards on a regular basis.

As I became more involved in later stages of research, however, I began to conclude that participants saw the Internet as a supplement to (rather than a replacement for) real-world interactions with members of Muslim community and ritual within brick-and-mortar places of worship, and a supplement to (rather than a replacement for) face-to-face interactions with scholars, community leaders, and Imāms. As such, my on-line research supplements (rather than replaces) "real world" participant observation and interviews.

That said, drawing from netnographic methods allows me to interrogate how so-called "Media Muftīs"—self-identified scholars, Imāms, or Muftīs with a substantial on-line reach and a large audience of followers on social media—project authority, as well as how on-line sources of authority shape real-world rituals, symbolic orders, and practices. For this aspect of the

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[2] The nature of the deterritorialized computer-mediated milieu will be interrogated at length in the relevant chapter. However, for now suffice it to say that the physical organization of Internet infrastructure as well as the multi-national character of corporate organization makes it difficult to say with any certainty that these websites are hosted on U.S. servers or by U.S. companies. For example: a website built with Google Blog may be hosted on a server physically located in the United States; even so, it is not entirely accurate to refer to a Google Blog website as an an accurate to refer to a Google be hosted iGoogle is actually an Irish company for tax purposes. For the sake of simplicity, therefore, I refer to these sites as "American" or "U.S.-based" websites given that first that the majority of their audience consists of Muslims in the U.S., second that bloggers for these websites are overwhelmingly American Muslims studying abroad, or Muslims living in the U.S. for extended periods of time.

project, I relied heavily on the work of Robert Kozinets, a foundational figure in the field of internet-based ethnographies.

Data Analysis

My analysis of on-line data, as aforementioned, drew from Kozinet's suggested ethical practices and I limited myself to publicly accessible websites, publicly accessible comment threads and discussion boards, and publicly accessible social media profiles of Imāms popular with Muslims living in the U.S. More specifically, my ethical guidelines for engaging in on-line field work was as follows:

1. *Message boards or comments used as a source of data must be "public."* In other words, I only engaged in netnographic analysis on sites that have no requirement for a log-in or invitation to view the comment threads. When quoting from these threads, however, I change casual commenters' "handles" or online identities as a gesture of respect for privacy.

2. *The website must be popular with Muslims living in the U.S.* This is because the topic under consideration is American Islam. Additionally, as American Muslims operate without the explicit threat of government monitoring and browse the web under the auspices of First Amendment protection, I operate under the assumption that that

conversations and comments on "American" sites catering to American users are less likely to be "chilled" due to fear of government censure or intervention.

3. *Site administrators and servers must be located in a country with limited government interference in on-line speech.* The sites under consideration here, for example, were registered in Canada, the U.S., or the U.K. This, again, is to prevent the chilling effect of direct government intervention or the possibility that site content had to be approved by a board of government-appointed religious scholars.

The public nature of my online "field-site" thus allowed me to balance research activity with respect for user privacy. I performed these observations while I was doing interviews and engaging in participant observation. Approaching these phases of research as mutually re-enforcing and overlapping allowed me to observe the connections—or lack thereof—between online discourses of authority, and real-world approaches to religious practice.

Throughout the interview process, I used an IRB-compliant transcription service to have my interviews transcribed word for word, as suggested by Mergenthaler and Stinson. Interviews, social interactions in the field, and netnographic data were analyzed using Norman Fairclough's system of discourse analysis, which assists researchers in locating manifestations of power, authority, and hegemony in text, talk, video, and social practice. Interviews and interactions are therefore coded according to how interview subjects define, construct, understand, and relate to religious hierarchies, religious texts, and religious ideology.

Plan of the Work

The work is divided into eight sections, including the present section, which serves as an introduction to the research question and relevant methodological approach. In the following chapter, I engage in a thorough discussion of anthropological, sociological, and netnographic literatures as related to the topic at hand. In Chapter III, I give a brief overview of Islam and its central tenets, as well as its historical concerns with authority, and the development of Islam in the United States. In Chapter IV, I turn to a discussion on the highly individualized nature of Islam and its attendant ideology as it occurs in the U.S., and then to an exploration of authority as manifested in on-line environments. This is followed by a chapter delving into U.S. Muslims' preoccupation with identity and the relationship between identification with Islam and the relationship between "identity" and "authenticity" as experienced by U.S. Muslims. This is followed by an exploration of the gendered nature of "authentic" Islam that situates contemporary instantiations of "authentic" Muslim identity within the context of the colonial legacy. I then discuss computer-mediated environments and their impacts on religious authority, before moving to my conclusion.

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Chapter II: The Origins and Evolutions of Islam and Muslim Communities in the U.S.: Core Beliefs, Authority, and Authenticity in History

Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of many of the widely accepted core beliefs of Islam, as well as its foundational texts and figures. I then move on to providing a background portrait of the emergence and growth of Islam in the U.S. The final section discusses the current state of Muslim and Islamic institutions in the U.S., as well as prevalent political discourses surrounding Islam and U.S. Muslims.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is threefold. First, I give a background and summary of beliefs, doctrines, and texts that are central to Sunni and Shi'a Islam, thus defining and giving a context for terms and vocabulary that occur throughout the dissertation. Second, I provide the historical context for subsequent chapters, particularly those discussing Muslim identity as related to the colonial legacy and the development of post-9/11 Muslim identity, in general. Finally, I place this project within the context of current literature regarding Islam and Muslims in the U.S.

Islam in Context: History, Core Beliefs, and Practices

From the beginning, authority and authenticity have been central concerns underlying the origins and evolution of Islamic law and Islamicate culture. Muslims believe that Islam was first

revealed to the Prophet Mohammad while he meditated in a cave in what is now Saudi Arabia (Esposito *What Everyone Needs to Know* 8), proclaimed through him and through his followers to the polytheistic Arabs of Mecca, and, in the decades that followed, documented in a collection of oral histories and testimonies what would eventually be called the Qur'ān . The Qur'ān , in other words, is not just an oral history of the establishment of Islam and the substance of its core doctrines; rather, it is regarded by Muslims as the eternal word of God as it as directly transmitted through Mohammad (Esposito *What Everyone Needs to Know* 9).

At the time of the revelations, Mecca was a commercial hub and important center of polytheistic pilgrimage and worship, connecting the then-Persianate Yemen in the South with the Byzantine Syria in the North, and offering carefully calibrated political and religious neutrality to maximize the possibility of expanded trade flow and its attendant material enrichment.[3] Islam, and its emphasis on social justice and its focus on uncompromising monotheism, was a significant disruption to the established social, political, and religious orders, as well as to pre-existing social and political hierarchies, thus constituting an enormous threat to entrenched economic interests (Donner "Muhammad" 8).

The earliest followers of Islam, and Mohammad himself, therefore, relied heavily on the protection of Mohammad's uncle, Abu Talib, a key figure in the locally powerful Banu Hashim clan (Donner "Muhammad" 8), as well as on the significant financial resources of Mohammad's wife Khadija, the first convert to Islam and a wealthy merchant (Ahmed 47).

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[3] For a discussion on the role of trade in structuring pre-Islamic society and culture in Mecca, see: Fred M. Donner, "Muhammad and the Caliphate," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, 1-62 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

The deaths of Abu Talib and Khadija in 619 C.E. of natural causes, and in fairly rapid succession, was devastating to Mohammad on a personal as well as a political level as well as to the early Muslim community. He and his followers were suddenly vulnerable to persecution by his extended kinship network and various members of the Mecca establishment. Warned of a plot to assassinate him, Mohammad escaped Mecca with one of his closest companions, Abu Baker, to the city of Yathrib (renamed Medina in his honor) in 622 CE. This flight to Yathrib (*hijra*) would mark the beginning of the Islamic lunar calendar and a second phase of revelation.

The Charter of Medina, drafted by the Prophet Mohammad in 622, set forth the rights and responsibilities of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Pagan tribes living in and around Medina, as well as the basis of Mohammed's political authority over Medinans. This charter set an important precedent regarding the nature of political and spiritual authority as well as the various rights, responsibilities, and privileges of non-Muslims living under Muslim rule, acting as the basis for future Muslim religio-political governing institutions. It regarded Christians and Jews as protected subjects (*dhimmis*) who were permitted not only to live in Medina alongside Muslims as part of a coherent political unit, but also to practice their own religions and carry out their own religious traditions. Mohammad, in the multifaceted role of prophet, judge, arbiter, and lawmaker, was the head of an intertribal community-state where Qur'ānic mandates could take substance and find articulation within social services and the structures of governance. The Muslim community, with Mohammad as its guide, was thus able to set precedents regarding the relationships between the individual, family, society, government, and spiritual leaders.

This social experiment was conducted alongside a series of decisive battles, which not only allowed Islam to thrive in Medina, but also enabled Muslims to expand their authority considerably throughout Arabia. By the year of Mohammad's death in 632 C.E., the Arabian tribes had been united under the banner of Islam, and Mecca had been anointed Islam's spiritual center (Lapidus 42).

Mohammad died, however, without explicitly naming a successor; the successor was thus identified not by his blood or kinship ties to the Prophet, but rather though appointment by a council of qualified men (Lane and Redissi 76). This solution, however, posed several problems, given that it attempted to transfer Mohammad's charismatic authority from the Prophet to the combination of legal and rational authority associated with an institutional position of leadership (Lane and Redissi 77).

For a short period of time, this solution worked, and Abū Bakr and Umar al-Khattab became the first and second leaders, or Caliphs, of the Muslim community in 632 and 634 respectively, supervising the affairs of the rapidly expanding Caliphate from Medina. The Muslim community, more or less, accepted the authority of the first two Caliphs, Abū Bakr and his designated successor, Umar (Lane and Redissi 77). However, a series of disagreements arose with the appointment of the third Caliph, Uthmān, in 644, whom Umar had chosen on the basis of his closeness to the prophet and the fact that he was among the earliest converts to Islam (Lane and Redissi 77). Uthmān was subsequently murdered in 656 amongst charges of nepotism, injustice, and disregard of tradition (Lapidus 46-47), and his place taken by ʻAli, a cousin of the prophet and the first male convert to Islam.

Ali's authority was in turn almost immediately challenged by 'Aisha, the Prophet's wife and the daughter of the first Caliph, Abū Bakr (Lapidus 56). Ali was able to defeat 'Aisha and negotiate a truce, however, these and other divisions would eventually to the fracturing of the Muslim community into the broad sects of "Sunni" and "Shi'a." The Sunni view, represented by 'Aisha and her followers, is that lineage is unrelated to one's qualifications for leadership or claim to authority. In other words, to Sunnis, an individual's spiritual authority over the Muslim community is related to the individual's fitness for leadership and the approval of the Muslim community. A person's ancestral origins or familial ties to the prophet are irrelevant to his or her fitness as a spiritual leader.

The position of the Shi'a community, on the other hand, is that spiritual authority lies only in the descendents of Ali, and that this spiritual authority is not subject to human approval, or to negotiation. That said, being a descendent of 'Ali is a necessary, but insufficient, condition for spiritual authority in the Shi'a community. In addition to having the correct lineage, the person must be spiritually fit and mentally capable.

The Muslim community would be fractured further after the Umayyad clan demanded revenge on behalf of their murdered kinsman, Caliph Uthmān. Ali entered into arbitration with the Umayyad clan, which angered a puritannical group known as the Kharijites, or "seceders." To the Kharijites, compromising one's principles for the Umayyad or anyone else, for that matter, was unacceptable. A large group of them, therefore, seceded from Ali's forces (Glassé 247). When a Kharijite eventually murdered 'Ali, Muawiya, the governor of Syria and the leader of the Umayyad clan, took the title of Caliph and ruled from Damascus, instead of Medina.

In spite of these internal divisions and disputes over succession, the four Caliphs, often called the Rashidūn, or Rightly-Guided Caliphs, used a combination of diplomatic skill and military might to defeat the Persian and Roman armies and expand the reach of the Caliphate. At the inception of the Umayyad Dynasty in 661 EC, the Caliphate controlled parts of North Africa as well as Palestine and Eastern Iran (Lapidus 58).

The ascension of Muwaiya, formerly a governor of Syria and a member of the Umayyad clan, marked the beginning of the Umayyad Caliphate, and the inception of the first of the great Muslim dynasties, which reigned from 661 to 750. The Umayyads managed to expand considerably during this relatively short period, quickly gaining control of major trading ports and sites of commerce as they dealt major defeats to Byzantine and Persian forces. At its peak, the Ummayad Caliphate would eventually stretch from Central Asia in the East to North Africa and Spain in the West (Lapidus 50).

At first, Caliphs retained and maintained the bureaucratic structures they inherited, however ‘Abd al-Malik (685-705) introduced an extensive program of Arabization, making Arabic the official state language and replacing local officials with Arabs (Benison 159, 177, 178). Spiritual authority and bureaucratic authority were therefore one and the same, projected by the physical presence of government structures throughout the Caliphate. Islamic theology and jurisprudence, meanwhile, developed largely outside the reach of direct government interference as various schools of jurisprudence emerged through a dialectical process involving independent scholars and members of the local community. [4]

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[4] See: Wael B Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic law* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Umayyad reign came to an end from a combination of factors. Expansion to western Europe was halted first by the French in 732 (Lapidus 54) and Umayyad forces were dealt another in Anatolia in the 740s (Lapidus 54). Inter-tribal feuds, meanwhile, plagued Iraq and Syria. Non-Arabs (*mawali*), tired of political and social marginalization, found common ground with the hashimiyya, group of pious Muslims who questioned the legitimacy of Umayyad rule and their right to exert spiritual as well as political authority over their subjects (Lapidus 54). Eventually the hashimiyya proclaimed that Abū al-Abbas al-Saffah, a descendent of the prophet's uncle Abbas, was rightfully Caliph, and overthrew the Umayyad dynasty with the aid of the *mawali*, establishing the Abassid Caliphate in Baghdad in 750. Members of the Umayyad clan fled to Spain, establishing a new Caliphate in Andalusia which endured until 1031.

The Umayyad dynasty had been characterized by an aggressive program of Arabization and Westward expansion, however, the Abbassid Caliphate borrowed from Persian models of administration and culture and turned its attention to the East. Key supporters of the Abbassids were Central Asians or Persian converts, which lead to process of Persianization as manifested in its cultural traditions and administrative structures. The flexibility of Islam and the willingness to allow local people their own instantiations of Islamic worship and belief enabled expansion, and eventually, the Abbasid Caliphate would extend through India and the Central Asian steppes in the East and parts of North Africa in the West.

During Abbasid Caliphate, diverse ethnic and religio-cultural groups throughout the empire contributed to some of the finest Islamicate art and poetry in world history, and explored new expressions of mystic piety through the development of Sufi practices and rituals. During periods of Abbasid stability and wealth, Baghdad became one of the grandest cities in the world,

and the Abbasid court patronized translations of Greek, Persianate and Sanskrit texts into Arabic and Persian.[5]

It was also in the Abbasid period that the Hanbali, Maliki, Shafi'I, and Hanafi were established as the four main schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, or madhāb*,* and authoritative collections of Hadith—detailed records of what the prophet did and said while he was alive--were compiled. The concept of a madhāb (also referred to in the literature as a "guild"), as well as conceptions of authenticity in Ḥadīth compilations will be explored in detail later; for now, however, it is just important to note that this was a foundational time for many core aspects of Islamic jurisprudence. Methods and epistemological assumptions founded at this time remain in place today, and these guilds or schools of law are still very much relevant to the articulation and practice of Islamic law.

But by the ninth century, North Africa had slipped from the Empire's control, and in 1055, the Abbassids were effectively overthrown by a group of Seljuks who proclaimed the existence of a Seljuk Sultanate, legitimating their rule through retaining the Abbasid Caliph as a figure with religious authority, and robbing him of all of his political and temporal power. The Abbassids were thus reduced to little more than a symbol of spiritual legitimation, and the dynasty finally fell in 1258 with the Mongol invasion of Baghdad.

The collapse of the Abbasid Empire was followed by the growth and proliferation of local Muslim states throughout Central Asia, North Africa, and Western Europe. In India, descendents of Genghis Khan overthrew the Delhi Sultanate, which had ruled northern India since the 14th

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[5] For an extensive discussion of this process see Wael B Hallaq, *The origins and evolution of Islamic law* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

century. Controlling much of present day Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, the Mughal court patronized the arts, horticulture, architecture, and poetry until their eradication in 1857 by the British Empire. Meanwhile, in Spain, the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate would be followed by a series of smaller Emirates until the 1492 *reconquista*, and in North Africa, the Fatimid Dynasty would found Al-Azhar University and sponsor the development of Ismaili jurisprudence until its collapse in the twelfth century.

The largest and most enduring of the states to emerge after the Abbasid collapse was the Ottoman Empire, which was founded in the fourteenth century by Turkic tribes in Anatolia. Lasting over 600 years, it was one of the most powerful empires in the world, and at its largest, included the Arabian peninsula, parts of North Africa, and most of southeastern Europe to the gates of Vienna. Officially, the Hanafi School was the basis of Ottoman law and custom, but local *qadis* (judges) applied Shafi law and custom in parts of North Africa and the *hijaz*, and some religious groups were permitted to retain their own religious laws, traditions, and languages so long as they recognized the suzerainty of the sultan.[6]

Territorial expansion was halted in the 16th century as the Ottoman military was defeated by the Persians and the Austrians in the sixteenth century, and Russia in the 18th century. Sultans were therefore forced to focus on exerting power through means other than territorial expansion, and in the 19th century, a series of bureaucratic and administrative reforms--many of which were explicitly aimed at "Westernization"-- ensued to meet the challenges posed by the modern era of

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[6] For an exploration of this practice, see Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2003) and for an extensive discussion of gender and authority in the Ottoman Empire, see Leslie P. Peirce, *The imperial harem: women and sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the nation state.[7] The Ottoman Empire finally collapsed in the wake of World War I, and present-day Syria, Jordan, Israel/Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon was parceled out to the French and British for administration and occupation.

By the onset of the colonial period, Islam had spread from its birthplace in the Middle East throughout much of Africa, and Central and South Asia. It had even set down roots in various parts of Europe, and, as aforementioned, had journeyed all the way to the Americas via the slave trade. Devotion to Islam was characterized by myriad of local variations in expression, and Islamic jurisprudence had developed into a sophisticated system of common law that made various uses of text, custom, precedent, and epistemological methodology.

These systems were changed or destroyed, however, with the arrival of European colonists. Local administrators replaced or transformed local systems of law, education, trade, and communication and social practices, religious customs, and even entire languages were wiped out completely.[8] By the late eighteenth century, nearly one fifth of the globe was under British control, and by the early twentieth century, another tenth of it was claimed by the French. When the colonial age finally drew to a close in the mid-twentieth century, few Muslim states had managed to remain even nominally independent of European control.

Upon achieving independence, Muslims had to grapple with the vacuum in authority that had resulted from the decimation of pre-colonial juristic endowments, as well as the erosion of the scholarly class itself. Colonial regimes often created a bifurcated system of law: one that

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[7] For a discussion of these reforms, see Kemal H. Karpat, *Ifta and Kaza: The Ilmiye State and Modernism in Turkey*, Vol. 1, in *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies* (London: I.B. Taurus) 25

[8] For a thorough discussion of this process and its effect on Islamic jurisprudence see: Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharia: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 371 - 442

applied Shar'ia law in matters relating to family law, and one that applied a form of the code civil to everything else, and post-colonial regimes often kept these systems in place. In the precolonial period, a muftī (jurist) would have had to study for up to twenty years before he or she was considered qualified to issue fatawā (non-binding responses to religious questions); now, however, political and community leaders took advantage of the vacuum in authority to issue *fatawā* after little training, if any.[9] Additionally, a drive to codify the Shar'ia frequently ensued, initiated by Western-educated post-colonial officials interested in "judicial reform." In the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of South Asia, Shari'a law was therefore rendered inflexible, often with disastrous consequences for women.[10]

The widespread perception that Islam was being increasingly marginalized, acting in concert with frustrations about post-colonial governments, contributed to an Islamic Revival, which swept through much of the Middle East and North Africa in the 1970s. The movement emphasized textual literalism and called for a fusion between Islam and the state. Further ruptures to the social fabric, as well as to traditional frameworks of spiritual leadership, occurred in the aftermath of September 11, with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and drone strikes in Yemen, Pakistan, and Somalia. Muslims in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, therefore, find themselves re-negotiating the terms of their post-colonial self-governance, as well as the relationship between Islam, the state, and the individual, in the post-9/11 context.

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[9] For a discussion on this process see: Khaled Abou el Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2007)

[10] For a discussion of the impact of these processes on women, see Khaled Abou el Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications Limited, 2001).

At present, there are over one billion Muslims living all over the world, a number that is set to double by the year 2030. Most Muslims are Sunni, and contrary to popular belief, a majority of the world's Muslims are Asian, rather than Arab. Muslims in Europe and the United States have continued to develop Islamic jurisprudence in order to meet the simultaneous challenges of practicing a minority faith, and reconciling Islam to the realities of the twenty-first century.

While Islam and Islamic jurisprudence originated in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, it would be a mistake to think of Islam as a belief system confined solely to the Old World. Muslims arrived in the Americas as early as the 16th century, establishing thriving communities and traditions that exist in some form to this day.

Islam and Muslims in the U.S.: Migration-- Forced and Voluntary

Muslims arrived on U.S. shores as early as the 16th century. They included European converts to Islam and members of the Spanish merchant class (Ghanea Bassiri 9) as well as victims of the slave trade who were forcibly brought by the Spanish, and later the American colonists, from West Africa. It therefore bears repeating that Islam has been practiced on American shores for approximately as long as Christianity, problematizing depictions of it as "new" or "foreign."

But reliably estimating the number of Muslim slaves that survived the journey to American shores, much less the number that would have identified as Muslim (if anyone had bothered to ask them) is difficult, if not impossible. There are some reports of runaway slaves

and Muslim war captives from the Ottoman Empire being brought to the Americas by Dutch and Spanish settlers. Some may have run away and resettled in Appalachia with African slaves and Native Americans to form a "triracial" community called the Melungians (GhaneaBassiri 14). A few Muslim African slaves, such as Job Ben Solomon and Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima, were fluent in Arabic as well as in West African languages, and were able not only to practice Islam in the United States, but also to record and document their experiences as slaves, and transmit Muslim traditions, rituals, and practices to their children (GhaneaBassiri 14).

The experiences of these extraordinary men were the exception, however, rather than the rule. The religion of slaves--be it Muslim, Christian, or chthonic --was almost always clandestine, practiced in secret with found materials during stolen moments. Much of our knowledge of slave religion and culture comes from the labor of field workers in the 1930s, hired by the Works Projects Administration (WPA) to interview surviving slaves and their descendants (Curtis *Muslims in America* 14). These interviews allow us to infer a great deal about African American Muslim religious practices along the Georgia coast and provide substantial evidence of Islamic practice and worship, such as thrice-daily prayer facing Eastward, the use of prayer beads, and the celebration of West African occasions and rituals (Curtis 17). Even so, it is difficult to reconstruct precisely how many slaves were Muslim, nor precisely what *kind* of Islam they practiced. But a number of letters in both Arabic and English, in addition to an expansive number of oral histories do confirm without a doubt that Islam has been in what is now the United States since the 1730s, and possibly before.

It should also be stressed that in spite of the oppressive and brutal conditions of slavery, Islam was actually *practiced.* Muslim slaves managed to worship, and occasionally even

preserved their traditions and values in the face of extreme pressure, coercion, or violence from their Christian owners (Diouf 2). There are reports of slaves creating head-coverings and veils out of homespun cloth (Diouf 77), forging jewelry associated with African articulations of Islamic spiritual practice (Diouf 80), and using their real names within their community of fellow slaves and in the Underground Railroad (Diouf 82).

Until the first half of the 19th century, indigenous American Muslims (that is, Muslims who weren't migrants or the children of migrants) were almost exclusively, if not entirely, African-Americans. This slowly changed starting in the late half of the 19th century as immigrants from the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Europe brought "traditional" forms of Islam to the U.S., establishing their own mosques and community centers to serve their fellow new Americans. Beginning in 1875, Ottoman, Albanian, and South Asian migrants trickled into the U.S., settling in the Midwest and East Coast in great enough numbers to build create but vibrant spiritual and cultural communities, and build mosques where they could gather and worship (Smith). Approximately one-third of all Syrian and Lebanese North Dakotans at this time were Muslim and there were over 100 Muslims in the small town of Ross (Curtis 49). A large community of Arab Muslims also settled in Dearborn, Michigan, after Henry Ford moved his automobile manufacturing plant to Dearborn in the late 1920s. Regional political instability during the interwar period led to an additional wave of migrants from Syria-Lebanon, the Balkans, south Russia, Caucasia, and Turkey, as well as from former British colonies in South Asia (Al-Faruqi 260).

Many of these Muslim migrants traveled West, and Indian Muslims from the region of Punjab began arriving to California, Washington, and Oregon in the late nineteenth century

(Smith 60). Eventually, California became a destination for other South Asian Muslims, and significant numbers fled Partition for the West Coast (Smith 60). But as their fellow Americans often simply referred to them as "Hindu," and as census documents did not yet have a racial category for Indians or South Asians (a category, incidentally, that was not created until the 1970s) it is impossible to know exactly how many of these migrants were Muslim.

The increased numbers of self-identified Muslims, however, does not mean that Islam was a "mainstream" religion in any sense of the word. African American communities, living under the oppressive system of *de facto* and *de jure* social segregation, were developing new, indigenous forms of Islam (as I explore in the next section) and most Arab Muslim migrants did not speak English. Thus they usually formed bonds almost exclusively with other Arabs of similar socio-economic status and lived in tightly-knit, religio-ethnic communities in industrial centers. (Haddad and Lummis 14). Islam was also associated primarily with the lavish and exotic practices of the Ottoman Empire, which at the time was a formidable regional superpower, challenging European and American global expansion. The possibility of conversion therefore held little popular appeal amongst white, American Christians, and even light-skinned Arab, Turkish, or North African Muslim Americans were seen as exotic, foreign, and "Other."

Caps on immigration from the global south also meant that Muslims remained a small minority until 1965, when the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act allowed increased numbers of migrants--Muslim and otherwise--legally to immigrate to the U.S. from predominantly Muslim areas of South Asia and the Middle East. The 1979 revolution in Iran once again increased the population of U.S. Muslims as Iranians—many of whom were Muslim--fled the new regime for the United States, with the largest Persian ethnic enclave

concentrated in Los Angeles (Fata and Rafii 5) .

Today, Asian Indians are the third largest Asian ethnic group in the U.S. (after Chinese and Filipinos, and a large percentage of South Asian Americans come from urban and educated backgrounds (Leonard "State, Culture, and Religion" 22). These new (post-1960s) South Asian immigrants are particularly privileged in the United States, with Indians in particular having the highest median household income, family income, and per capita income of any foreign-born group in the US (Leonard "State, Culture, and Religion" 22).

It was therefore not until the 1960s and 1970s, when Muslim migration to this country increased to a significant degree, that Muslim Americans began to establish organizations and associations dedicated to preserving Islam, countering negative stereotypes about Muslims, and catering to the needs of the growing number of Muslim American immigrants and their children. Some organizations, such as the Muslim Student Association (founded 1963), the Islamic Society of North America, and the Islamic Circle of North America (founded in 1968) focused on the transmission and maintenance of Islam and were— and to a large degree still are-- generally led by Muslims of South Asian or Arab descent (Leonard *Muslims in the United States* 23). The largest of the organizations established at this time was the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), which evolved out of the Muslim Students Association (MSAs) and currently focuses on serving the growing number of American mosques and Islamic cultural centers.

Muslim migrants and their children, therefore, exert considerable influence over the development of normative Islam in the United States, as well as on public perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

Conversion and Innovation

The first known Anglo-American to convert to Islam faced a formidable challenge when he attempted to spread the religion to his fellow white American Christians. Alexander Russell Webb, a writer, publisher, newspaper owner, and the U.S. consul to the Philippines in the late nineteenth century (Curtis *Muslims in America* 27), believed that Islam and Mohammad had been "grossly represented and misunderstood" by Christians, and considered the embrace of Islam entirely consistent with rational inquiry and intellectual curiosity (GhaneaBassiri 122). Sponsored by upper class Indian Muslims wishing to spark a global Islamic revival, Webb attempted to establish reading circles and salons to discuss Islamic thought and debate Islamic theology (GhaneaBassiri 122). He published books, and set up a periodical in a Manhattan office, hoping to inspire converts (GhaneaBassiri 122). Persistent though he was, his efforts were ultimately not fruitful and few converted, or took him seriously.

Other missionaries, most of whom were South Asian, encountered similar resistance as they tried to convert white, middle- and upper-class American Christians: Sufi musician and religious leader Inayat Khan came to the United States from India in 1910, and spent the next two years evangelizing primarily to white Christian communities. To combat Western prejudice against Islam and transcend its Oriental and exotic associations, Khan resorted to the discourse of "universal religion," and carefully avoided any discussion of politics, Indian nationalism, or the "non-cooperation" movement that was awakening under the inspiration of Mahatma Ghandi (GhaneaBassiri 130). Khan founded the Sufi Order of the West (now called Sufi Order International), and although many came to hear him lecture, few converted (Curtis *Muslims in*

America 30). He ultimately concluded that Americans were not yet ready for Islam (Curtis *Muslims in America* 30.

Indian missionary Muhammad Sadiq, another evangelist associated with the Muslim Indian reformer Ghulam Ahmad, reached a different conclusion. Sadiq quickly realized that African Americans on the South Side of Chicago were more likely to be receptive to his message and adjusted his goals and approach accordingly, distributing English translations of the Qur'ān , which most other Muslim missionaries had not done, and preaching an open-minded, tolerant version of Islam that lent itself to the advocacy of social justice and racial equality--ideas that appealed to African Americans at a time when the Klu Klux Klan was rising to political and social prominence (Smith 102). Followers of Sadiq's brand of Islam called themselves Ahmadiyyas, founding a newspaper called the *Moslem Sunrise*, and supporting the Universal Negro Improvement Association, an organization founded by Marcus Garvey to advocate for pan-global, transnational black unity (Smith 103).

As the message of Islam spread, more and more African American communities founded their own mosques and practiced their own variations and interpretations of Islam. The Moorish Science Temple, established by Noble Drew Ali in Chicago in 1925, linked Moorish identity to authentic expressions of African heritage, and mixed elements of mysticism and folk medicine with Qur'ān ic teachings. While some of Ali's teachings considered heretical by many Sunni Muslims-- such as the fact that Ali positioned himself as a Prophet--the establishment of the Moorish Science Temple is significant because it was the first time that African American missionaries devoted themselves to the spread of Islam, however defined (Curtis *Muslims in America* 41). It is also one of the first examples of an indigenous, American form of Islam.

The most famous of these indigenous African-American Muslim groups is, of course, the Nation of Islam, established by Farad Muhammad (né Wallace D. Fard), in 1930. Muhammad mysteriously disappeared in 1934, and Elijah Muhammad (né Elijah Poole), a key figure in the movement, took over. Like Farad Muhammad and Noble Drew Ali, Elijah Muhammad's teachings were controversial, if not heretical to Sunni Muslims, given that he claimed to be the Prophet of God and advanced a narrative of pre-Islamic history that contradicted that of the Qur'ān .

African Americans in later decades would continue developing and applying their own forms of Islam under the guidance of Elijah Muhammad, and the Nation of Islam would become the largest Muslim organization in America by the middle of the 20th century. By 1943, there were enough African American Muslim groups to merit the creation of an organizational umbrella called the Uniting Islamic Societies of America. Although these African American Muslim movements and organizations were never formally united, they had much in common: many stressed that African Americans' true heritage was both Arab and African and most saw Islam as the best expression of African Americans' true identity, as well as the ideal vehicle for peaceful political activism, social cohesiveness, intellectual development, and economic independence (Curtis *Muslims in America* 43).

Elijah Mohammad died in 1975 and his son, Warith Deen Mohammad, took over, changing the name of the organization several times and shifting the focus of the group from black nationalist causes to Sunni Muslim doctrine. Louis Farrakhan, meanwhile, attempted in the late 70s to take over and rehabilitate the Nation of Islam, returning to the religious teachings of Elijah Mohammad and emphasizing social justice issues of particular concern to African

Americans. As early as the 1940s Nation of Islam began focusing on prison recruitment; for this reason, the Nation of Islam is particularly strong amongst prison populations (Webb "Nation of Islam" 619).

Islam-inspired Religious Traditions and Cultures: Shriners and Sufi Mystics

Around the same time that Alexander Webb was focusing on white, American Christians and trying to persuade them to convert to and practice Islam, a small group of white, American Christians from New York were founding an organization that borrowed heavily from Islamicate traditions, discourse, and culture while explicitly eschewing the actual practice of Islam. The Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (or "Shriners") was founded in 1870 by a comedian named William Florence. Florence, a stage actor, visited the Ottoman Empire and became impressed with its ceremonies and visual aesthetic, founding the Order upon his return to the U.S.

The organization's 1903 self-published handbook, titled "The Ancient Arabic Order of the Mystic Shrine for North America" opens with the following passage:

> Instituted by the Mohammedan Kalif Alee (whose name be praised!), the cousin-german and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad (God favor and preserve him!), in the year of the Hegira 25 (A.D. 644) at Mecca, in Arabia, as an Inquisition, or Vigilance Committee, to dispense justice and execute punishment upon criminals who escaped their just deserts through the tardiness of the courts, and also to promote religious toleration among cultured men of all nations (Root 11).

In spite of these references to Islamic law, culture, and history, the Shriners should not be confused with other indigenous Muslim organizations, nor with American instantiations of

sincerely held belief in Islam or Islamic religious development. Although members of the organization adopted Oriental forms of dress, published materials in both Arabic and English, and referred throughout their various rituals, greetings, and mission statements to Islam and Islamic historical figures, Shriners self-identify as a "secret society" (Root 11) that is an offshoot of the Freemasons. The current site of the Shriner's 1887 Temple in Los Angeles is now a music and arts venue known as the Shrine auditorium, and while present-day Shriners still self-adorn with fez's, use Arabic greetings, and refer to Islamic places and persons in their promotional materials, there is nothing "Muslim" about the organization. In fact, the only requirements of membership is to 1) be male, 2) profess a belief in some sort of deity or Supreme Being, and 3) be a Mason.

The Shriners, however, were (and are) not alone in their active borrowing of Islamic traditional rituals which are absent any spiritual basis specifically linking their group to the broader Muslim community or global Muslim institutions. Other Islam-inspired groups include certain Sufi communities, many of which appear on the margins of scholarship devoted to Islam in America and American Muslims. There will be more on Sufism in the following chapter, but for now, Sufism generally refers to a form of Islamic mysticism concerned with seeking truth, wisdom, and love through direct, personal experience with the divine. Sufis historically have evangelized their particular interpretation of Islam primarily throughout Central Asia, Africa, India, and Malaysia, and their roots can be traced as far back as eighth century C.E. Even so, Sufis are frequently framed within "traditional" Islamic history and scholarship as a sort of alternative discourse that exists alongside, and occasionally in tension with, more "conservative" or "legalistic" expressions of the faith (Webb "Third-Wave Sufism" 86).

Contemporary American Sufis can be placed within a broad spectrum of interests and practices: some borrow from Central Asian and Arab Sufi rituals and traditions for the explicit purpose of connecting to Allah, while others are more like Shriners in that they engage Islamicate rituals absent any specific or explicit link to the broader Muslim community or to Islamic law, practice, or theology in general. Occasionally, U.S.-based Sufi orders operate without explicitly expressed desires to get closer to—or even recognize—Muslim theological conceptions of Allah. Instead, these communities, which are primarily white and upper- or middle- class, draw from Sufi practices in pursuit of "spirituality" or a "spiritual connection"[11] which may or may not even involve a professed belief in God. Scholarship of American Islam, therefore, generally regards American Sufism as existing in the margins of Islam, or alternatively, labels it as a New Age or cultish phenomenon completely disengaged from Islamic history or tradition (Hermanson 158).

Religious studies scholar Gisella Webb has claimed that Sufism came to the U.S. in three waves: the first, initiated by the aforementioned Inayat Khan, was in the 1920s. The second, in 1960s and 1970s, was associated with the youth counter-cultural movement and its attendant interest in learning de-historicized versions of "Eastern" spiritual practices and forms of cultural expression. The third, which began in the late twentieth century, has been characterized by a proliferation of transnational ties, global Islamic revivalism, interfaith workshops and fora, and

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[11] For an example, visit http://www.theabode.org/, the web site of a "retreat center and community" in New York State that identifies as Sufi and, according to its http://www.theabode.org/community/ page, "holds the concentration of Love, Harmony, and Beauty." As of the summer 2013, the Abode is offering classes and workshops that include (but are not limited to): Yoga Hoedown 2013, Healing Retreats with Devi Tide and Gayatri Hull, and a Ziraat retreat with Sharifa Felicia that will 'bring us towards a clear and healing relationship with our own nature' using 'the profound teachings of Sufism.'

the increased self-awareness of religio-cultural identity and belonging (Hermanson 158).

This is not to say that there are no "cultish" or "New Wave" groups currently practicing a sort of a decontextualized, universalist kind of Sufism, stripped of its "Islamic" history and origins, but rather that just as there are "Islams" in America, there are "Sufisms," each deploying unique sets of spiritual challenges and employing different strategies to solve them.

Muslim Americans and Islam Today: Sectarian Affiliation and Ethnic Background

Today, U.S. Muslims are one of the largest minorities in the country. Even so, very little is known about who they are, where they live, or the kind of Islam they practice. For example, the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) puts the total Muslim population in the U.S. at around 7 million (Bagby "American Mosque Report 1" 5), but the Pew Center puts the estimate at around 2.75 million (Bagby "American Mosque Report 1" 5). The Pew Center also breaks this number down further, claiming that approximately 41% of all foreign-born U.S. Muslims, or 26% of all Muslim Americans total, are from Arab countries in the Middle East or North Africa, and 26% of all first generation immigrants are from South Asia. The rest are primarily either African Americans, or white converts to Islam (Pew "Muslim Americans" 15).

Although many Muslims Americans are relatively new to the United States, a large portion of them have roots in this country that go back generations. Over three quarters of the Muslims living in the U.S. are American citizens, and nearly one quarter possess a college degree, including 10% who have completed some graduate studies (Pew "Muslim Americans" 18).American Muslims are not only diverse in terms of ethnic background and educational level,

but also in terms of generation, with more than three quarters of American Muslims are first generation immigrants (63%) or second generation Americans (15%), and about one fifth (22%) belonging to a third, fourth, or a later generation of Americans (Pew "Muslim Americans").

A 2011 study co-sponsored by the Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religious Research, and the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, and conducted in partnership with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), counted a total of 2106 mosques, up 74% from a decade before, and confirmed that a plurality of Muslims are either South Asian, Arab, or African American, with significant numbers of Somalis, West Africans, and Iraqis arriving in the past decade (Bagby "American Mosque" 2). Approximately a third of all mosques in the U.S. are located in suburban areas, up from 16% in the year 2000, and about half of mosques remain located in urban areas (Bagby "American Mosque" 4). The study also argued that the real number of Muslim Americans is around 7 million, given that 2.6 million Muslims attended Eid Prayer (the high holiday prayers after Ramadan and Hajj) in 2011 (Bagby "Ameican Mosques" 4).

Muslim Americans are also diverse in terms of their professed sectarian affiliations:[12] a 2007 Pew Research Study found that half of American Muslims self-identify as "Sunni," 16% as Shi'a, and 22% claim just to be Muslim without any particular sectarian affiliation (Pew "Muslim Americans" 21).American Muslims also express devotion to the teachings of Islam,

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[12] In later chapters I discuss Islamic belief, history, and practice in more detail but for now, suffice to say that all Muslims are united by a belief in uncompromising monotheism, and all (with the exception of the Nation of Islam) believe Mohammad to be the last prophet of God and the Qur'ān the literal word of God as revealed to Mohammad. Sunnis and Shi'is differ in terms of their appreciation of religious and temporal authority, and these groups may be broken down further into guilds, or mathhabs, which use differing methodological and epistemological methods for understanding and applying Islamic law.

with 86% believing that the Quran is the word of God , 50% believing that the Quran is to be read literally, 30% claiming that there is "one true way" to interpret the teaching of Islam and 58% thinking that it is "very important" to read or listen to the Quran daily (58%) (Pew "American Muslims" 21).

There is also evidence that American Muslims, even those who are second or third generation Americans, make the effort not only to practice Islam itself, but apply and interpret Shar'ia law: currently there are approximately one million Muslim pre-nuptial agreements in circulation in the United States (Quraishi *Islamic Family Law Survey*). That said, there is very little available information—in Pew surveys or in other sources—on *why* they might feel strongly about Muslim marriage contracts, or what the terms and conditions of these contracts are. Nor is there information about how Muslims from different sectarian or ethnic backgrounds might negotiate the terms of these contracts, or to whom they would turn for help if they had questions about the process.

The larger point here, however, is that Muslims are an enormous minority about which we know incredibly little. Although we have some information on *who* U.S. Muslims are, *where* they are, and how they identify, there is little information about what American Muslims' professed affiliations *mean* in the American context, or how their respective differences are articulated in practice. Scholarly sources on Islam in America generally focus primarily on *Muslims* in America and spend little time exploring sources of authority within the Muslim community, or how Islam articulates with the lived experience of American Muslims.

In spite of the paucity of information on Shar'ia law (or perhaps because of it), a number of legislatures and politicians have devoted a considerable amount of energy towards limiting the

ability of Muslims to live according to Shar'ia law. For example, in 2008, Congressman Tom Tancredo (R-CO) introduced HR 6975, also known as the "*Jihad* Prevention Act," which *inter alia* would have banned Shar'ia law from courtrooms in the U.S., and prevented Shar'ia law-advocates from entering the United States. By 2011, over a dozen states were considering measures that would ban Shar'ia law (Michel), and by late 2014, the number of states that had considered such a ban within the past five years alone had risen to 34 (Farmer).

These bills were introduced while the U.S. grappled with several fairly serious challenges that would not by any stretch of the imagination be addressed through banning Shar'ia law (including, but not limited to, a prolonged economic slowdown, military engagements around the world, a number of natural disasters wrought by climate change, and record levels of unemployment). It therefore may be tempting to explain this ongoing preoccupation with Shar'ia law as a far-right concern held by a small handful of fringe agitators.

Fears about Shar'ia law in the United States, however, can only be described as mainstream: 50% of self-identified Republicans and 22% of self-identified Democrats believed in 2011 that Muslims want to establish Shar'ia law as the land of the United States (Public Religion Policy Institute "Fact Sheet.")_Anti-Shar'ia legislation has been praised or introduced by such politicians and political commentators as former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, Kansas governor Sam Brownback, Congresswoman Michele Bachman (R-MN) and the current chair of the Committee on Homeland Security Peter King (R-NY). Anti-Shar'ia language even found its way into the GOP party platform in time for the 2012 Republican convention in Tampa.

In spite of this widespread fear of and fascination with Shar'ia law, there are few (if any) scholarly studies devoted to studying Shar'ia law or Islamic jurisprudence as it has developed

and has been applied in the U.S. As a result, the substance and content of U.S. Shar'ia law, as well as its sources of authority and drivers of authenticity, are not known. There is little (if any) information available on what Shar'ia law *means* to U.S. Muslims, what it *is,* how much influence it has on U.S. Muslims' daily lives, how it has changed in diaspora, or who in the community is charged with interpreting and applying it.

In the next chapter Idiscuss U.S. Muslims' attitudes towards authority, framing their approach to Islamicate ideology as highly influenced by "American" discourses such as liberalism and individualism. While informed by the core beliefs discussed above, and anchored in religious texts, Islam in the U.S. is highly diverse in terms of the spectrum of beliefs and attitudes held by Muslims themselves.

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Chapter III: Review of the Literature: Theoretical Frameworks and Methodological Approach

In the previous chapter, I discussed the core tenets and beliefs of Islam, gave an overview on the development of Islam in North America and Europe, and touched on the various ways in which Muslim communities and leaders have grappled with the concepts of authority authenticity throughout history. But how have scholars understood these basic concerns, and how have they approached research pertaining to the category of "Islam" in general?

To discuss this question, I draw from several bodies of literature, including the emerging field of netnographic fieldwork, to interrogate contemporary issues related to the study of Islam, identity, and gender in the U.S. context. These methodological frameworks combine the classic with the contemporary, deploying Geertzian and Weberian notions of authority, culture, and ritual while being mindful of researchers' tendency to objectify Muslims, essentialize Islam, and altogether disregard the experiences of female-bodied people.

The literature review that follows is therefore a summary of bodies of research related to this dissertation and thus situates the current project within the context of previous research efforts devoted to Islam and the U.S. Additionally, the review will illuminate the theoretical frameworks underpinning data collection and analysis efforts as well as their reasons for inclusion. I have organized the literature into fairly gross categories, but have refined the readings within each sub-section.

Anthropology and the Study of Islam or Muslims: Approaches to the Study of Religion and

"Problems" in Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Islam

European scholars first became interested in the study of other religions (and Other religions) in the 19th century, relying on a variety of methods and theoretical frameworks to separate religion from magic, and philosophize on the greater social and individual purposes served by each. Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) is generally recognized as a founder, if not the founder, of British anthropology as a disciplinary subject, credited with writing the first general anthropology textbook (*Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization,* published 1881) as well as with paving the way for a generation of anthropologists and thinkers, including James Frazer, Emile Durkheim, and even Sigmund Freud.[13] Like other scholar-thinkers of his day, his work is informed by an orientation towards evolution, presenting spiritual belief as a continuum with the primitive "animism" on one end of the spectrum and the sophisticated "religion" on the other.

Later modes of thinking about religion tended to separate the cognitive from the behavioral and interrogate the connections (or lack thereof between the two), and eventually, to focus on symbolic aspects of religious practice and the social field in which these semiotics were embedded; Tylor's definition of religion, however, was fairly simple, regarding it merely as "belief in spiritual beings" and arguing that all societies, from the most primitive to the most advanced, shared this belief, although they expressed and articulated it in different ways.

This notion—that "magic" or "animism" was associated with so-called "primitive" or

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[13] Of course, Ibn Khaldoun, the 14th century Muslim philosopher, is often credited with laying the foundation for the contemporary fields of anthropology and sociology.

"savage" cultures, and "religion" with the "civilized" people (read: Europeans)--was a widely held view at the time. So, too, was the notion that magic or animism acted as the foundation for religious beliefs, and that spirituality developed in a linear fashion, progressing neatly through the different stages of belief that purportedly existed between "magic" on one pole and "religion" on the other.

This began to change in the early 20th century, however, when researchers began conducting fieldwork and living for extended periods amongst their research subjects. Using participant-observation, interviews, or other ethnographic methodologies, the Polish-born British anthropologist / ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942)]achieved notoriety for his 1925 essay "Magic, Science, and Religion," first published in *Science, Religion, and Reality.* Malinowski, unlike earlier anthropologists like Tylor, Frazer, or Lévy-Bruhl, set forth insights based on his own firsthand, extensive experience living in the Trobriand Islands.

Furthermore, Malinowski would also question many of the Darwinist assumptions informing the work of 19th century European anthropologists. Malinowski was a functionalist; as such, he viewed society as made up of parts that functioned primarily to meet the individual's biological and emotional needs. He thus disagreed with Durkheim's assessment of religion as essentially private and solitary, arguing that myths, legends, and folktales all served important social functions, even for communities that use orally transmitted stories to strengthen and give authority to various traditions and belief systems important to the local culture.

Unlike Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim, and others, Malinowski (75) also argued that so-called "primitive" people were not lacking in practical or empirical knowledge about their circumstances, suggesting that magic arises when

> man *[sic]* [comes to an] unbridgeable gap, a hiatus in his knowledge or in his powers of practical control, and yet has to continue in his pursuit." Religion, likewise, is "not borne out of speculation or reflection…but out of the real tragedies of human life, out of the conflict between human plans and realities (Malinowski 76).

He even argued that magic could be found in "modern" (i.e "European") societies, pointing out that Catholic saints, in popular practice, become "accomplices" of magic when placed in a field to beckon rain, for example, or carried in a procession (Malinowski 76-80).

Approaches to religion would change again when ethnographer and anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926 – 2006) introduced an entirely new set of methods and theoretical assumptions. Influenced by the work of German sociologist and philosopher Max Weber, Geertz saw anthropology as a semiotic endeavor wherein cultural analysis should proceed as interpretive practice aimed at deducing ascribed meaning. In other words, behavior is embedded in a web of meanings and culture is a "semiotic" system (Geertz "Religion as a Cultural System" 88).

His definition of religion, which he advanced in a foundational 1966 article called "Religion as a Cultural System" is indebted to Max Weber as well as to James Frazer, displaying an interest in emotion over behavior, and meaning over act:

> [Religion is] (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz "Religion as a Cultural System" 89).

This, of course, necessitates the definition of a "symbol," which Geertz provides: "[a symbol] is any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception is the symbol's 'meaning'" (Geertz "Religion as a Cultural System" 91). Geertz, like Durkheim, leaves out any mention of God, deities, spirits, or Supreme Being. This does not,

however, mean that playing golf can be a religious activity unless the person playing it sees it as "symbolic of some transcendent truths" (Geertz "Religion as a Cultural System" 91). The importance and social relevance of these beliefs, to Geertz, are reinforced by ritual, which is a way of acting out a symbol, and engaging in the imagined world and material world at the same time.

It bears mentioning at this point that the anthropologists discussed so far performed fieldwork under different circumstances, and often with different goals, than scholars who came mere decades after them: while Geertz, Malinowski, and others were neither explicitly nor implicitly handmaidens of empire, European anthropological and ethnographical inquiry arose and developed against a backdrop of European colonial and imperialistic pursuits. In a paper that J.H. Driberg that wrote and presented before the Anthropological Society at the London School of Economics on December 9, 1926, he described the relationship between anthropology and colonial bureaucracy in this way:

> [Anthropology's] value cannot be overestimated and has been expressed in better words than mine by the present Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, who writes: 'If we are to succeed in our duties towards these peoples as rulers, as missionaries, or as instruments for the advancement of civilization we must study them objectively and base our policy real understanding acquired not from personal contact but from scientific study of their mental and moral characteristics, of native law and custom, of native history, language and traditions. Native methods of agriculture, native arts and crafts, should be examined scientifically before any attempt is made to supersede what we find existing. Herein lies the importance of anthropological work, an importance which it is difficult to overestimate.'…Anthropology is the consulting physician to colonial governments, and properly utilized, can be of greatest service in every branch of governmental activity, whether it be in the sphere of political organization, economics, labor, law, or religion (Driberg 156).

The men—and it was overwhelmingly men—who developed the field of anthropology may

have done so solely in the spirit of intellectual curiosity and the advancement of the social sciences. However, in practice, the fruits of anthropological inquiry were disproportionately meted out to colonial authorities at the expense of colonized bodies. The anthropology of Islam in the post-colonial era was therefore informed by debates about the nature of Islam, its appropriateness as an object of study, and the "purity" of the ethnographic encounter in a rapidly globalizing world.

Until approximately the 1980s, then, a vast majority of Islam-focused anthropological studies took place in the "Muslim world," with scholars like Pieree Bourdieu, Clifford Geertz, Vincent Crapanzano, and Dale Eickelman traveling to Algeria, Morocco, Indonesia, or North Africa to observe Islam or engage in fieldwork in these various "exotic" locations. These and other anthropologists also engaged in sustained examinations about methodology and theory, writing "reflexive" accounts of their time in the field and expressing concern about the ethical framework guiding anthropologists interested in working with and among "the Other."

Crapanzano and Dwyer, for example, discussed their reservations about the possibility of projecting their own assumptions on an objective reality as experienced by research subjects, and in his *Reflections on Fieldwork*, Rabinow confessed *inter alia* to creating composites of individual "informants" that he had encountered in the field. Subsequent researchers, inspired by these and other reflexive accounts, and influenced by the works of Edward Said, Foucault, and other post-structural, post-colonial theorists therefore engaged in sustained debates about the ethics of fieldwork and the very notion of an "anthropology of Islam." These debates centered *inter alia* around methodological challenges surrounding the study of religion, the ethics of fieldwork, and the degree to which it was possible to uncover "real Islam" in the process of

scholarly inquiry.

In response, many researchers began developing theoretical frameworks devoted to solving the "problem" of the anthropology of Islam, with Abdul Hamid el-Zein advocating for a Geertzian approach wherein the researcher "started from the 'native's' model of 'Islam' and analyzed the relations which produce its meaning. Beginning from this assumption, he argued, "the system can be entered and explored in depth…[While] the 'content' might differ from one culture to another, the logic embedded in these various contents are the same (el-Zein 234) ." In other words, Islam in Morocco and Islam in Indonesia were certainly different, but some elements were the same, and that "sameness," he asserted, captured an essence of Islam.

In the mid-1980s, anthropologist Talal Asad gave a foundational paper that unfurled several criticisms about the very notion of an anthropology of Islam. First, he argued, "1)…in the final analysis there is no such theoretical object as Islam; (2) [Islam] is the anthropologist's label for a heterogeneous collection of items, each of which has been designated Islamic by informants; (3) [Islam] is a distinctive historical totality which organizes various aspects of social life (Asad 2)."

Instead of focusing on semiotics or the social function of ritual, Asad encouraged researchers to trace sources of authority, which, he argued, were less bound in cultural landscapes than in politics and textual interpretation. Additionally, he claimed that the diversity of Islamic practice and the increasing importance of transnational ties invalidated the notion of discovering any ideology or practice that could be characterized as completely "pure," thus destabilizing the Middle East, for example, as the "true" locus of Islam and Europe as the "true" locus of Christianity (Asad 9).

This is not to say that scholars in all disciplines uniformly agreed that the multivalent nature of Islamic identity or practice should inform theoretical or methodological approaches to work in the field. Nor was there unanimous agreement about the problems posed by reifying dichotomies such as "self/Other," "primitive/modern," "masculine/feminine,"—dichotomies that --as Edward Said pointed out in *Orientalism* --had often informed the study of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians.

As recently as 1994, Ernest Gellner was convinced that "Muslim society" and its constituent members advocated for an "ideological monopoly," thus precluding them for participation in a shared culture of nationalism and its attendant discourses of modernity (Gellner 211).[14] Two years after Gellner made this declaration, political scientist and public intellectual Samuel Huntington published "Clash of the Civilizations," where he argued *inter alia* that "Islam" and "Western Civilization," with their profound differences in culture and political organization, would inevitably be destined for conflict.

Anthropology in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries: Islam in the West, Islam and the West, and a Post-9/11 Reality

A decade later, social, cultural, and technological changes, some related to 9/11, others coincidental to it, quite drastically altered the study of Islam and Muslim communities in the post 9/11 era. First, the global popularity of social media and other computer mediated environments

[14] A thorough critique of Gellner's work is offered in Dale F. Eickelman "Islam and the Languages of Modernity," *Daedalus,* Vol 129 No 1 Multiple Modernities (Winter, 200) pp 119 – 135 p 119

and the availability of new methods for gathering data allowed for new possibilities in the field of anthropology and related disciplines. There are many methodological treatises and individual case studies on Islam in cyberspace, which will be discussed in a later section. Second, the post-colonial and post-9/11 influx of Muslims to the global north, acting in combination with the increasingly globalized field of information and culture problematized research frameworks developed under the assumption that there could be a "pure" Islam.

Third, the events of 9/11 led researchers to focus with more regularity on Muslim communities living in North America or Europe, often paying particular attention to themes related to individual identity, as well as to the relationship between ethnicity and religious practice. Many of these researchers used interdisciplinary methods, producing scholarship informed by methodologies generally associated with anthropology—including participant observation and open-ended interviews—but not explicitly identified as such. In the past two decades, some of the most prominent studies of Muslims in the U.S. have been produced by sociologists, religious studies scholars, or gender studies scholars who deploy classical Geertzian or Malinowskian approaches, along with analytical frames from their respective fields, to reach their conclusions.

For example, Yvonne Haddad, a professor of religious studies at Georgetown, is a prolific scholar writing on the topic of Muslims and Arabs in the U.S. Her 1987 monograph *Islamic Values in the United States: A Comparative Study* is one of the only scholarly works on this topic. She uses a mix of interviews, surveys, and ethnographic methodologies to explore the stated values of the Muslim community at that time. The book surveys communities in the Midwest, upstate New York, and the East Coast, and provides a wealth of information on the role

of and services provided by mosques in Muslim communities, degrees of integration, and attitudes concerning the role of women in the family and society. Haddad's other works include 2004's *Not Quite American? The Forging of Arab and Muslim Identity in Pluralism America* which –as the title indicates—focuses on Arab identity in the U.S. South Asian communities, African American communities, and white or Hispanic convert communities, all of which are significant in number, are thus not addressed in detail.

Jane I. Smith's *Islam in America* is a textured, nuanced portrait of the American Muslim community, including African American Islam, and the histories of South Asian migration to the U.S. The book includes chapters discussing how America's diverse Muslim community came to either come to the U.S. or convert to Islam, how Islam is practiced publicly, why Muslim American institutions and foundations provide services to the community, and how Muslim women function within the family and the community. She spends little, if any, time, however, exploring how Muslim families transmit these values to their children, what types of values they stress when doing so, or how the children continue (or decline to continue) enacting these values when they have families of their own.

Edward Curtis IV, professor of religious studies at Purdue, has written several important books and monographs about the history of Islam as practiced in the African American community: *Islam in Black America* analyzes the works and lives of African American Muslim Malcolm X, Edward W. Blyden, Noble Drew Ali, Elijah Muhammad, and Wallace D. Muhammad to trace the origin and development of African American Islamic thought. The African American experience is often neglected or marginalized in studies of American Islam, and the works of Edward Curtis, in addition to the scholarship of African Diaspora historian

Sylviane Diouf and religious studies professor Sherman Jackson are highly respected scholars of African American Islam and the African American Muslim community. That said, a relatively small portion of their work is devoted to the jurisprudential methodologies of Sunni Islam as practiced by African Americans (or, as Sherman Jackson prefers, "Blackamericans"), focusing instead on the history of the African Diaspora, or on the reasons for Islam's popularity amongst African Americans.[15]

Other influential figures in the field of Islam in America include Kathleen Moore, chair of religious studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Moore has edited collections on Muslims in America with Yvonne Haddad and co-authored a book on American Muslim identity with Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith; in addition, she recently published *The Unfamiliar Abode: Islamic Law in United States and Britain,* which examines *inter alia* local expressions of religious life and identity, and the emergence of 'religion' as a descriptive identity. The importance of Moore's work, like that of Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Haddad, cannot be overstated.

This study builds on the literature discussed herein, using a Geertzian approach to conduct an anthropological investigation on Islam in North America. I chose Geertz for several reasons. First, unlike many of the other researchers discussed herein, Geertz not only laid out a unique and specific theoretical framework for not only studying religion in the field, but also for interrogating and recognizing the symbolic system that constitutes the fabric of religion and religious experiences. This means that his theoretical framework that accounts not only for the

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[15] Additionally, as discussed in the Introduction, the limits of snowball sampling led to the under-representation of African Americans in my interview subjects; the work of scholars who focus on African American instantiations of Islam is therefore not terribly relevant to my project.

internal, personal experiences but also for shared, social rituals, thus lending itself to social scientific study.

Second, Geertz' theoretical framework has an element of rigorousness and specificity that lends itself to application; in my review of relevant literature, I could not find a similarly clear or detailed theoretical framework that dealt with religion. Of course, Geertz is not the only anthropologist who discussed methodology and suggested possible theoretical frameworks for the study of religion and religious activity. But he is nearly alone in the clarity with which he discussed and defined the process of research in the field. Furthermore, while some scholars gave very specific criteria for defining, recognizing, and studying religion, they did so using outdated tropes regarding, for example, the differences between religion and magic. Unlike many of his peers, therefore, Geertz not only *defines* religion in a way that is still up-to-date, but also the symbols that constitute religion and the religious experience, and furthermore, gives examples of these symbols and suggestions about how to recognize them in the field.

Finally, as discussed above, many anthropologists of Geertz' stature admitted to practicing research methodologies that were difficult to replicate at best and ethically problematic at worst, creating "composites" in the field, for example (Rabinow *Reflections*), or claiming interpretive authority on behalf of "natives" (Gellner *Post-Traditional Forms*; Rabinow *Reflections*). Alternatively, scholars responded to these problematic approaches by arguing for a different approach to the study of religion (El Zein; Gellner *Post-Traditional Forms*), or highlighting problems with previously developed categories of analysis (Ahmed; Asad; Abaza and Sauth; Stoller); none of these scholars, however, suggested a new theoretical framework as specific, clear, or rigorous as that proposed by Geertz.

This does not mean, however, that the critiques leveled by the scholars discussed are irrelevant to my approach, or that Geertz himself did not engage in problematic practices or assumptions. Therefore, while I draw from and build on Geertz' understanding of religion as a cultural system, using social exchanges, rituals, symbolic orders, and normative practices as lenses to reveal underlying subjectivities, anxieties, and embodied modes of collective consciousness, I do so with a sensitivity to the ways in which Muslims and women have been objectified and essentialized in the anthropological literature. I am further mindful of the historical relationship between anthropology and the systematic oppression of people from the global south, and approach my research participants, the literature, and the subject matter with this in mind. Interactions in the field and in interviews, therefore, build on Geertz' system while remaining mindful of concerns posed by anthropologists concerned with Orientalist, gendered, and essentialist approaches to Islam and its attendant culture(s).

Sociology

Religion emerged as a primary concern for the founders of sociology, who often drew from the work of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber to theorize about the role of religion in social interaction, and the role of social interaction in religious life. While nineteenth century sociologists and scholars in related disciplines included theories of religion as central, or at least important elements of their work, twentieth century scholars from the 1900s until around the late 1950s showed comparatively little interest in religion as its own category of analysis.

This is not to say that sociologists never considered religion; however, when they did, it

was often in a tangential fashion: in the 1950s, for example, Erving Goffman, a sociologist, cultural theorist, and philosopher, drew from Weberian and Durkheimian concepts regarding ritual to theorize on the purpose of ritual interaction. Like other members of the Chicago School of Sociology, Goffman believed that ritual served the important social process of affirming relationships, delineating communities, and creating shared meaningful experiences. Additionally, rituals, with their rules and norms, structure the terms of social interaction, give it order as well as meaning.

Goffman's theories of ritual, as well as his theories about framing and the "on-stage, off-stage" nature of society, informed later theories on religion and its role in American life. Throughout this work, I draw on aspects of his work that treat performance and social roles, particularly in discussions of gender. I do so, however, with the understanding that his work on these concepts was not devoted specifically to framing the nature of religion or its role in driving any of these phenomena. Like other sociologists of his time, Goffman was most likely working under the assumption that Americans' religiosity would wane in favor of secular modernity, and for a while, it seemed that this assumption might come to pass.

A few decades later, however, the role of religion in American society could no longer be ignored. The leaders of the Civil Rights Movement included a minister, and used religious discourse in presenting their case for equality. Catholic priests and nuns were among the many groups publicly agitating for the Vietnam war to end. Jimmy Carter admitted that he identified as a devout evangelical Christian. Religion was not going away, and sociologists began to consider why.

Talcott Parsons, professor of sociology at Harvard, deployed Durkheimian theory in his

analysis of religion and its relationship to modernity. A functionalist heavily influenced by the work of Durkheim, he viewed American society as a product of ascetic, individualist Protestantism, and argued against the Weberian notion of modernity as inherently rational and non-religious. American culture, which was simultaneously "secular" and "religious," provided an alternative example of modernity wherein liberalized religion could thrive within the context of a rationalist society.[16]

Parsons' student Robert N. Bellah argued in an influential 1964 essay that religious change did not take place along a vector from one stage to another. He did, however, divide the religious history of humanity into five ideal types (primitive, archaic, historic, early modern, modern) with each stage more sophisticated than the one before it. Early modern religion, for example, was not unlike the Protestant Reformation. Modern religion, he argued, envisions a liberal landscape wherein man *[sic]* can not only choose the symbolic and religious field in which he wishes to participate, but also enjoy self-authorized, interpretive authority over text and other forms of religious orthodoxy. This freedom, however, could come with the price of rupturing social and communal bonds that had previously been created through shared, communal rituals.

Other sociologists, however, remained convinced that religion would recede from mainstream American life. Peter Berger, for example, theorized that religion would only continue amongst socially or geographically disenfranchised groups, "typically whose social location (in 'backwards' regions, say, or in the lower classes) gives them little interest or stake in the world of

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[16] For a thorough discussion of Parsons' work and his contribution to the fields of sociology, American studies, and religious studies, see Uta Gerhardt, *The Social Thought of Talcott Parsons: Methodology and American Ethos* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

modernity" (Berger *Rumor of Angels* 72). Berger further explored the function of religion within these marginalized groups, regarding it as one of many structures that facilitated shared meaning. These views, succinctly summarized, are as follows: "society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product" (Berger *Rumor of Angels* 61).

In other words, while society is not necessarily an objective reality, externalizations of that society (infrastructure, for example, or a Twinkie) are objective, and human beings become affected by their interaction with these objectified products through a process called "internalization." Reality is not "real," however human beings can function as though it is real by creating a shared perception of its characteristics. These shared perceptions are facilitated *inter alia* through religion and religious groups, which act as mediators between individuals and society. Berger, of course, acknowledged in 1986 (Berger *Capitalist Revolution* 226-227)_his early work was incorrect, and that modernity in the United States did not necessarily need to eradicate communal, religious life; even so, his early work is influential.

Even with the rise of the Christian Right, a group of sociologists continued defending the notion of religion's demise. The most prominent of these include Frank L. Lechner, an Emory University sociologist, argued in a 1989 article that "fundamentalism shows signs of waning" (61). The present rise of Christian culture and religious institutions, therefore, provided an opportunity to take stock of the events of the last decade "before fundamentalism disappears from the public scene again" (65).

To Lechner, "fundamentalism"--which he defined *inter alia* as the belief that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, and that this Word provides solutions for most contemporary problems- is modern, although it appears to be antimodern in orientation. Furthermore, the

Religious Right, like other American "Awakening" or "revitalization" had unintended modernizing consequences. These include support for liberal, individualist principles; constraints on government authority; and definitions of community dependent on shared, secular rules of a modern, culturally pluralistic society.

Lechner, of course, was not alone in conceiving of "modernity" as fundamentally incompatible with "religion," even in the face of significant revivalist movements and the pervasiveness of Christian discourse in mainstream American politics. Gellner, as aforementioned, contened that Islam precluded Muslims from enjoying full participation in the modern condition, and Samuel Huntington argued in his widely-cited, 1994 "Clash of Civilizations" essay that the schism between "modern" and "religious" were so profound that confrontation would be inevitable.

In response to Lechner and other scholars insisting on the modern/religious dichotomy, R. Steven Warner (1048) argued for a brand new paradigm, explicitly rejecting the use of secularist, Weberian apparati to account for the resurgence of fundamentalism, the persistence of evangelism, and liberal instantiations of Protestantism. Explaining the Religious Right in terms of social organization or alternative paths to modernity, he contended, were equally unsatisfactory; so too were claims that American forms of religion were on one hand an articulation of the free market system, or that religion persisted on the other simply because it consoled those who were unable to participate effectively in the American free enterprise system. Instead, he claimed, religion is and always has been rooted as a "fundamental category of identity and association...capable of grounding both identities and solidarities" (Warner 1058). Religion, furthermore, has promoted community relations amongst mobile people, served as a

"refuge of free association and autonomous identity" (Warner 1059) acting as a social centrifuge to reshuffle people smoothly from one organization into another.

Other scholars, grappling with the relationship between modernity, religion, and community, proposed a reframing of "modernity" all together: Yves Lambert, for example, drew from Berger's work to propose an alternative understanding of modernity, arguing among other things that that religions had adapted to the condition of modernity, resulting in new religious forms.

It should be noted, of course, that most of these theoretical frameworks were developed to explain variations in American expressions of Christianity, with a few considering Jewishness and its relationship to assimilation or acculturation. The few existing studies of minority religious groups often focused on Jewish immigrants and their children. In the 1950s and 1960s, Judith R. Kramer and Seymour Leventman studied the process of assimilation and attendant shifts in minority identity within the context of Orthodox communities in New York. In 1961's *Children of the Gilded Ghetto* Kramer and Leventman described the ghetto as a "complete, albeit narrow social world organized around traditional religious values that permeated even the smallest detail of existence...[contributing] to communal solidarity that supported conformity to the demands of piety" (192). Jews leaving the ghetto, therefore, often "left behind the religious orthodoxy that may have slowed their flight. Few, however, rejected their Jewish identity" (Kramer and Leventmen 194). Although they conformed to suburban values in a way that rendered them "indistinguishable" from non-Jewish neighbors, they also nonetheless refrained from disavowing their identities as Jews (Seymour and Leventman 194). To Kramer and Leventman, then, identity for Jewish Americans was less associated with religious ritual than

with historical ties to one's given community of origin.

Eventually, however, "assimilation" lost its appeal and sociologists instead turned to studies of "ethnic groups," generally focusing on immigrants from Europe and attempting to explain why ethnic affiliation persisted for some and waned for others. Herberg argued in a 1955 monograph that Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism were constitutive of a "triple melting pot." The fact that there was a "religious revival," he argued, furthermore indicated a lack of identity among second or third generation Americans who on one hand lacked the social and linguistic skills to return to their grandparents' homes, but on the other, did not feel at "home" in the American mainstream. Members of these groups, therefore, selected elements of their grandparents' identities as their own to contextualize their own identities as individuals and as members of larger subgroups in the United States.

By the 1980s, then, a subfield of sociology had emerged which was concerned primarily with the sociological processes of religion.[17] It was widely recognized in sociology as well as in other disciplines that religion and ethnicity were closely related phenomena in the North American context, and that patterns of immigration and the establishment of ethnic communities can shape patterns of religious identification. Generally speaking, sociologists adhered to a Durkheimian functionalist theory of religion, which emphasized the role of religion in maintaining ethnic customs and group solidary, or alternatively, saw ethic religious institutions as adapting organizations that ease and facilitate the process of assimilation for their constituent members (Mullins 324).

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[17] For a discussion of this tendency, see, for example, James A. Beckford, "The Insulation and Isolation of the Sociology of Religion," *Sociology of Religion* 46, no. 4 (1985): 347-354.

After 9/11, an increased number of anthropologists and sociologists became interested in the relationship between Islam and identity, analyzing the development and enactment of identity and its relationship to religiosity for Muslim communities in the global north. Often, researchers concluded that Muslims in North America were living "on the hyphen" (Sirin and Fine) and had a "hybrid" identity (Skapoulli) or that "Muslim" identity was in conflict with "American identity (Haddad *Muslims in America*). Gabriele Marranci, however, has suggested that applying terms like "hybrid" or "fluid" to the process of self-identification positions Muslims as confused and lacking in self-determination, calling for researchers to assume that Muslims in the West, like the rest of us, have coherent autobiographical selves.

My own research reveals that Bellah's earlier work on the highly individualized nature of religious belief is applicable to contemporary U.S. Muslims, whose interpretive efforts are generally self-authorized interactions with primary sources such as the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. However, even though U.S. Muslims may experience their relationships with God as highly individualized and personalized, they think of Muslim American identity as coherent (but not monolithic) and regard identification with Islam as one of many layers of self-identification that in no way conflicts with identification with American culture, society, or values. As Marranci has suggested, "American Muslim" identity is conceived as a coherent, singular identity that draws from Islamic discourses surrounding modesty and charity on one hand, and American discourses surrounding tolerance and civic participation on the other.

That said, work on Muslim communities is still scant, and is preoccupied almost exclusively with the effect of 9/11 on Muslim American identity. A 2008 "Special Section" in *Social Forces* laments the lack of work on Islam and the role of religious institutions in Muslim

communities (Smith 1568). This project answers this call, and although I draw from Geertz' definition of identity as "collectively ratified" and "publicly expressed" (309) in demarcated and systematic ways (Geertz *Interpretation of Cultures* 268, 309), my approach creates space for interview participants to define themselves, Islam, and the social/semiotic field in which it is embedded on their own terms and in their own voices. In so doing, I destabilize assumptions placing Muslim identity on one pole and American identity on the other.

Of course, in the year 2014, much of Geertz' "semiotic field" takes place in computer-mediated environments, with self-identified Muslims regularly receiving and contributing religious knowledge to a constellation of websites, message boards, and listservs spanning the Anglophone globe. The following section thus discusses the emerging field of "netnography," its theoretical underpinnings, and its applicability to this project.

Netnographic Methods

Early technological theorists like Arturo Escobar wrote on regimes of "technosociality" (*Anthropology* 217) a process of sociocultural construction that along with Rabinow's "biosociality" formed the basis of "cyberculture." The characteristics of cyberculture, Escobar admitted, were not yet fully understood, however it was clear that cyberculture could be defined as the "overarching field of forces and meanings in which the complex production of life, labor, and language takes place" (Esobar 217).

Technosociality has since come to refer to the inhabitation of an online network as a social environment, wherein no fissures exist between the individual, technology, and "society,"

however defined. Computers, smart phones, and other technological instruments in this framework are reconceptualized as "contexts which bring about new ways of being, new chains of values, and new sensibilities about time, space, and the events of culture" (Holmes 73). Individuals can therefore remain connected in an online-world unmediated by offline constraints of time and place, using emoticons, elipses, choices in spelling, and nuances of capitalization to creates substitutes for body language, facial expression, or tone of voice.

Most early work on online communities, however, located anonymity as a defining feature of online interaction, which was presumed to result not only in negative interactions but also an utter lack of social bonds, online or otherwise. Asynchronous, anonymous interaction via the written word and the occasional animated gif, was thought to present an environment devoid of social cues or possibilities for meaningful social interaction. In other words, an ethnographer or anthropologist would find no *data* in the cold, detached milieu of cyberspace.

More recent work, however, has acknowledged that a) members of online communities can and do form social bonds, b) that their online activities can translate into offline shifts in action, ideology, and identity, d) close, personal ties can and are maintained online and c) that users have a variety of methods for communicating social cues absent body language, shifts in tone of voice, hand gestures, etc (Haythornwaite and Kendall 5). If the nation-state itself is an "imagined community" comprised of people who will certainly never meet,[18] and whose constitution relies on semiotics, discourse, and imagination so too, then, can a virtual society be a "community," even if its constituent members only ever meet in cyberspace.

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[18] For a discussion of the notion of the nation as an "Imagined Community" see: Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (New York: Verso, 1983).

Many researchers have additionally agreed that "culture" can occur online, even in the Geertzian sense of possessing "historically transmitted patterns of meanings embedded in symbols" (Geertz qtd. in Kozinets *Doing Ethnographic Research Online* p 10-11) to a "web" of constituent members who have formed "personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold 5).Members of an online community, in this sense, are simultaneously existing in, creating, and developing of a subculture by virtue of a shared fluency in signs and symbols such as emoticons, ellipses, choices in spelling, and choices of capitalization. Such textual cues can act as a substitute for in-person social cues assuming, of course, that participants are fluent in their meaning. The asynchronous nature of online communication also presents opportunities that do not exist in in-person, real-life, real-time interactions.

Pierre Levy, for example, has proposed that:

> cyberculture reinstates the copresence of messages and their context, which had been current in oral societies, but on a different scale and on a different plane. The new universality no longer depends on self-sufficient texts, on the fixity and independence of signification. It is constructed and extended by interconnecting messages with one another, by their continuous ramification through virtual communities, which instills in them varied meanings that are constantly renewed (Levy xiv).

Online communities, furthermore, interact with each other and with material under discussion in a manner that blurs the consumption and the production of knowledge. As Nancy Baym observed in her 2000 study of an online group of soap opera fans, online communities devoted to appreciating a certain text, craft, skill, or ideology are "communities of practice" in every sense of the term, given that they are organized and defined according to common interests and are generally devoted to the sharing and trading of information (Baym 4). She adds, "grappling with the nature of these communities requires understanding them not just as online

communities (organized through a network) or as audience communities (organized around a text) but as communities of practice, organized, like all communities, through habitual ways of acting..." (Baym 3).

Robert Kozinets, a pioneer in the arena of Internet-based ethnography, argues that the study of these communities and attendant practices can take place using a form of ethnography called netnography, "a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications" (Kozinets "The Field Behind the Screen" 62). Kozinets has additionally described netnographic research as a process and a product, informed by the methods of cultural anthropology" and developed to investigate communities bound by a common interest in certain lifestyles, hobbies, products, or brands (Kozinets "I Want to Believe" 470). He furthermore argues that netnography should follow similar same steps as off-line ethnography: entree (wherein the researcher formulates a research question and identifies an appropriate community for study), data collection (wherein the computer-mediated communication of an online community is copied or downloaded), and analysis and interpretation (classifying, contextualizing, and interpreting one's observations and data).

Kozinets recommends that researchers conducting netnographies engage in some level of participation in a given online community, but allows that participation can range from communicating with members of the community to simply reading messages:

> Not every netnographic researcher needs to be involved in every type of community activity. But every netnographic researcher needs to be involved in some type of community. A netnographer probably doesn't want to be leading the community, but she should not be invisible either (Kozinets *Doing Ethnographic Research Online* 96).

To be sure, netnography has obvious limits: the researcher cannot pick up on body language or tone of voice, for example, since the digital self has no body and no voice. The researcher is generally unable to make verifiable conclusions surrounding how ethnicity, race, socio-economic background, or gender impacts the conditions of participation on an online community since our digital identities are often devoid of these markers of identity.

That said, netnography can have many advantages over traditional forms of ethnography. First, netnography is "far less time consuming and elaborate" (Kozinets "The Field Behind the Screen" 62) than traditional forms of ethnographic investigation, wherein researchers must become immersed in the field for weeks, months, or even years at a time. Furthermore, the very presence of a researcher can disturb or influence the rhythms of day-to-day life and interpersonal communication. Netnography, on the other hand, can be conducted entirely unobtrusively, while still capturing the practices of a given community as it exists in its natural setting.

Second, the very conditions of netnographic research render it much less expensive than conducting research in the "real" world. Researchers need not spend money on travel, food, or lodging, and require only a computer and an Internet connection to engage in sustained periods of participant observation. Research is therefore not only cheaper than ethnography in the off-line world, it is also open to researchers who have health challenges, family responsibilities, or financial situations that prevent sustained periods of participant observation in far-flung or rural contexts.

Sociologist Ekant Veer argues in a 2013 paper that on-line communities enable participants to freely discuss subjects and views—such as racism, for example—-that may be taboo in their off-line worlds. These communities additionally allow participants to self-present

in ways that completely diverge from off-line identities and modes of self-presentation. Online lives, therefore, can diverge considerably from off-line lives and online communities may not necessarily be visible in off-line contexts. Furthermore, "computer related social fields," as David Hakken (4) referred to them, have "delocalized" social interaction and social networks, destabilizing conventional notions of the ethnographic "field" (Hakken 4). Research performed in internet forums and message boards thus allows researcher access to spaces and groups that literally may not exist anywhere else.

The destabilization of the private and public domain as well as the de-territorialization of social bonds has ramifications for online actors, including ethnographers conducting research online. Christina Allen has suggested that while "research ethics for cyberspace are like research ethics for any other site…Researchers can, however, develop ethical wisdom that comes from experience with many configurations of research in cyberspace, and report on the conditions that grounded their ethical choices, and the results that emerged from their work in the site (Allen 176)."

When engaging in netnographic work, the researcher not only collects the written communications occurring between and among participants in the online setting, but also makes field notes wherein she descries and analyzes observations made during the research process (Kozinets "The Field Behind the Screen"). Both types of data can, however, yield an avalanche of information, given that a single post or article can have as many as 2,000 comments; for particularly popular sites like YouTube, Buzzfeed, or Fox News, there can be as many or more than 20,000 comments in addition to the thousands of "interactions" stemming from "liking," "upvoting," or "favoriting" the comments of other users.

Investigators can deploy several strategies to manage this volume of information. Kozinets has recommended that analysis of messages should be coded along two frameworks: the commenter's social ties to the group, and the content of the communication. To categorize the commenter's social ties to the group, researchers should assess whether not the poster is a "newbie," a "mingler," a "devotee," or an "insider."[19]

These categorizations are at the researcher's own discretion, emphasizing the organic nature of these divisions (Kozinets *Doing Ethnographic Research Online*). Newbies (also called n00bs in internet parlance) are commenters who lack strong social ties to the group, as evidenced by passing or very occasional participation in community discussions or interactions. A mingler might comment frequently or evidence strong social ties to the group, but evidence only perfunctory interest in participating. Devotees, on the other hand, evidence strong interest in the activity at hand, but have few social ties to the group. Finally, the insider might be an unpaid moderator (or "mod") or a staff writer; alternatively, he or she may comment faithfully and at length on material posted to a website or discussion board, engage with other commenters, have strong social ties to other commenters or posters, and/or share personal information about his or her own experiences.

To analyze the content of messages posted by participants, Dholakis and Zhang have suggested that researchers categorize messages as to whether they are primarily a) social, b)

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[19] Discussed thoroughly throughout Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (New York, NY: SAGE Publications, 2010).

informational, or c) on or off topic.[20] Upon identifying the messages directly related to the research question at hand, they continue, the investigator can engage in the same methods of analysis used for traditional ethnographic studies based on off-line data and interactions. This approach is one that has guided me throughout the course of this project, with on-line literature subjected to the same theoretical frameworks and analyses as in-person, real-work interaction.

It also bears discussing that current debates about the benefits and disadvantages of online communities generally share the basic assumption that "cyberspace" contributes to an idealized concept of the authentic community (Mascheroni 126). The internet, therefore, may be a valid "field" and suffice for viable study absent the presence of supplementary, IRL (in real life) participant observation. For example, Baym, Bunt, Barker, Cowan, and Campbell drew solely from netnographic research to interrogate how the Internet affirms and threatens traditional sources of religious authority.

To be sure, most recent studies have accepted or reinforced earlier predictions regarding the Internet's potential to de-stabilize and de-centralize authority. Howard Rheingold (1993), for example, referred repeatedly to cyber-communities' ability to form networks of power which were essentially based solely on reciprocal sharing of information, but were nonetheless capable of disrupting the monopoly of power held by existing political hierarchies.

I do not, however, consider the internet in and of itself to be a sufficient field for the purpose of this project. This is because, as aforementioned (and as will be discussed in detail in the relevant chapter) my research reveals there is little evidence that monopolies on information

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[20] Discussed in detail throughout Nikhilesh Dholakia & Dong Zhang, "Online Qualitative Research in the Age of E-Commerce: Data Sources and Approaches," Qualitative Social Research 5.2 (2004): 1-27.

and power have experienced the widespread disruption that Rheingold predicted. I say this not only because of the data gleaned from interviews, but also because it is an undeniable fact that regardless the topic or subject matter, participants in virtual salons who are engaged in the stimulating and exciting process of sharing information and trading knowledge on line are more likely than not to be English-speaking people from the global north.

The conversations that take place on line, just like the conversations that take place in "real life," therefore, are generally dominated by a small group of people who are disproportionately empowered to affect change. An individual's political or geographic location, class, race, gender, and age all influence the possibility of online access. In this way, off-line hierarchies related to gender and race are frequently re-enacted and re-created in online spaces.[21]

Therefore, we are still in the nascent phases of computer mediated environments and what they have to offer; thus far, however, my research has not found substantial evidence surrounding the "democratizing" effect of on-line interaction, given that the ability to participate in on-line discussions is generally limited by many of the same constraints that apply to off-line interactions. Like any technological innovation and instance of large-scale social change, certain social bonds have been weakened and replaced, certain expressions of personal identity have been transformed, certain actors benefit at the expense or exploitation the exploitation of others, and small groups of people wield an enormous amount of control over what information is available online.

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[21] See, for example, Ann Bartow. "Internet Defamation as Profit Center: The Monetization of Online Harassment" Harvard Journal of Law and Gender 32.2 (2009): 101-147 and Janet Morahan-Martin. CyberPsychology & Behavior. October 2000, 3(5): 683-691

For example, while there is near total penetration of the Internet in large swaths of North America, Japan, Taiwan, and Western Europe, online access in rural communities in the global south, particularly in Africa and portions of South America, is hard to come by (Miniwatts Marketing Group). American Muslims, moreover, as well as Muslims in the UK, Australia, and parts of South Asia enjoy disproportionate online representation and access to a disproportionate number of online spaces, given that 20% of regular internet users primarily speak English, and 42% of English speakers reported having regular access to the internet (Miniwatts Marketing Group).

Nonetheless, the Internet should not be dismissed as irrelevant to the study of Islam in the U.S., particularly for researchers interested in using gender as a lens. This is because Muslim women in the U.S., unlike women in the Middle East or South Asia, are uniquely positioned to participate in on-line communities, given that women and girls in the U.S. enjoy high rates of literacy[22] and given that American women are only slightly less likely to use the internet than American men (Fallows). Scholars have argued that monopoly of English on the internet is particularly significant for Muslim users because it "de-emphasizes and Arab/Middle Eastern Arabic speaking monopoly on Arabic discourse, opening up debate and discussion between Muslims worldwide" (Kort 364).

Theoretical frameworks for studying religion in computer-mediated environments, furthermore, are still underdeveloped. In the past fifteen years, technological and social theorists

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[22] According to the CIA Factbook, the Human Development Report estimated that in 2005, 40% Arab women and girls were illiterate. Over 90% of women and girls living in the U.S., on the other hand, are literate https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html.

have explored the ways in which authority is performed, challenged, or altered in computer-mediated environments.[23] Early work on religion and cyberspace suggested that the digital milieu transforms religious practice in offline environments, and scholars theorized that performative acts of religion in computer mediated environments could one day replace brick-and-mortar spaces for worship (O'Leary 1996). Others argued that the Internet would fragment or fundamentally transform pre-existing, off-line sources of religious authority (Eickleman & Anderson; Barker; Barzali-Nahon; Cowan; Bunt).

In most cases, however, studies of on-line sources of authority do not explicitly interrogate *how* on-line disruptions of hierarchy, tradition, or authority impact real-world institutions and norms in anything but the most general terms. Additionally, as Heidi Campbell (2005), a scholar of religious studies and digital humanities, has pointed out, few researchers engage at length with or define the concept of authority, simply employing it as a general synonym for power, credibility, and/or legitimacy. Eickleman & Anderson, Barzali-Nahon, and Cowan, for example, use the term "authority" when referring to the changing dynamics of religious practices, interpretive approaches, and modes of worship in on-line environments; "authority" is therefore a catch-all term that captures changes in power dynamics as well as the transformation of belief systems in computer mediated environments. Kruger, Turner, and Bunt, meanwhile, position authority as stemming from a monopoly on religious knowledge consumption and production.

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[23] An excellent discussion on the development of research practices of in computer mediated environments can be found in Heidi Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society," *Journal of the Academy of Religion* (Oxford) 8-, no. 1 (2012): 64-93.

The tendency for researchers to use the term "authority" in overarching, overly broad, and overly general ways has led Campbell to argue that:

> It is not enough to say that the Internet transforms or challenges traditional authority; rather, researchers must identify what specific form or type of authority is being affected. Is it the power position of traditional religious leaders? Is it the established systems by which policy decisions are made and information is passed on to community members? Is it the corporate ideology of the community? Or is it the role and interpretation of official religious rhetoric and teaching? Studying authority online involves identifying these multiple layers in order to discover whether it is religious roles, systems, beliefs, or sources that are being affected. This multi-layered approach to authority seeks to offer a new and more subtle way for researchers to study questions related to authority online (Campbell "Who's Got the Power?" 1044).

Campbell's point is a valid one, and her deployment of Weberian notions of authority to interrogate religion and authority in cyberspace pointed researchers in new directions in their search for sound methodology. This project, like Campbell's, deploys Weberian frameworks to interrogate systems of power.,

In *The Three Types of Legitimate Rule*, published in 1958, Weber lays out his theories on authority, framing authority as a legitimate type of power wherein followers willingly accept or obey the conditions of their domination. To Weber, authority therefore rests less on the coercive effect of domination, nor on the moral justifications for domination, than on the willingness of followers to believe in and support the legitimacy claims of those in authority. To that end, Weber further outlines three major ideal types of "pure legitimate authority" (Weber *Three Types* 362)-- legal, traditional, and charismatic—to show how some exercise power over others.

Legal authority, or legal-rational authority, is based on belief in the "legality" of patterns and normative rule and belief in the substance of the law. This type of authority is based on a belief in the legality of rules and the right of authority figures to deploy these rules. Instances of

this might include legally established bureaucracies and other forms of impersonal order--such as, for example, pro-gun activists' discursive and rhetorical reliance on the Constitution to legitimate their goals, regardless of the applicability of the Second Amendment to contemporary settings and circumstances.

Traditional authority, on the other hand, stems from a belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions. Here, loyalty is given to the person or persons occupying positions of authority by virtue of their occupation or membership in a privileged group.[24] Examples of this type of authority include familial, monarchical, clan, tribe-like, feudal, matrilineal, patrilineal, matriarchal, or patrimonial structures, as well as the normative patterns of culture. The perpetuation and continuation of this type of authority can also rest on rhythm of day-to-day rules, customs, routines, and/or schedules which maintain and preserve inequality in ways that may seem bizarre or irrational to outsiders (Ritzer 132). Examples might include the exclusion of qualified women or minorities from jobs typically held by white men, disparities in pay between white men and women or non-white men performing the same job, or the gendered division of labor in household where both spouses work outside the home on a full time basis.

Finally, charismatic authority rests on the perceived characteristics of an individual whose mission, vision, personal attributes, exceptional character, and/or heroism inspires others. In this type of authority, the perceived virtues of a charismatic leader may reveal or ordain personality characteristics that while exemplary, are not necessarily possible for the ordinary person to obtain. As such, this type authority rests almost entirely on a single leader or group of

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[24] My discussion of Weber is informed by the analysis conducted by Ritzer, "Structures of Authority," pages 128-136 of *Sociological Theory*, 3rd edition.

leaders who may have exceptional character, or alternatively, special access supernatural powers or sacred knowledge. Examples of this type of authority might include the Pope, given that he is seen as having exclusive access to certain forms of religious knowledge; it may also apply to businesspeople like Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, Richard Branson, or Sheryl Sandburg.

Several points are worth noting here. First, these are ideal types and are not mutually exclusive: it is therefore possible to deploy, say, charismatic authority and legal authority simultaneously, and it is also possible within this model for authority figures to use coercion to enforce the privileges associated with the conditions of their empowerment.

That said, "power" is not synonymous with "authority," even though the terms are often used interchangeably. Weber defined "power" as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless on the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber *Social and Economic Organization* 52). Power, in other words, largely relates to the ability to impose one's will on others despite their resistance (Blau 305). Authority, on the other hand, rests to a certain degree on the voluntary submission of others, rather than on pure coercion (Blau 305.)

For example, an army commander can use coercion over the enemy but he cannot, say, hold them responsible for insubordination or compel them to obey his commands absent the use of force (Blau 305). Using coercion or bribery, therefore, is a tacit admission that there is an absence of authority. Voluntary obedience, on the other hand, is not necessarily evidence of authority given that positive incentives or persuasiveness can also lead to compliance absent the use or threat of coercion or force (Blau 305.) When authority, rather than power, is in play, subordinates "a priori suspend their own judgment and accept that of an acknowledged superior

without having to be convinced that his [or hers] is correct" (Blau 306). The commands of an actor in authority, furthermore, are treated as binding by others absent the use of coercive force (Spencer 124).

Authority is therefore linked with legitimacy, although there is not a complete overlap between the two. It is possible, for example, for a leader to retain his or her authority even though a minority of people consider his or her exercise thereof to be illegitimate (Uphoff 300). Of course, Weber's system does not capture all manifestations or examples of authority, particularly new forms of authority that have emerged in the conditions of post-modern fragmentation, wherein the individual is endowed with interpretive capacity based on his or her own experiences and self-authorized research. This dissertation will therefore be building on, in addition to mobilizing, Weber's concepts of authority in order to capture the realities of life in a post-modern, diasporic setting.

That said, it bears mentioning once again that Campbell's work, like most work devoted to interrogating religion and the Internet, focuses almost solely on on-line interactions. This project, on the other hand, regards the Internet as *part* of—rather than the sum total of—the research fieldsite for reasons that have already been discussed. Weberian concepts of authority, therefore, is applicable to the total of the semiotic field, rather than merely to research taking place in computer-mediated contexts.

Conclusion

In tracing the development of what I have observed as a uniquely American Islam and its

underlying sources of authority, I have deployed a mix of online ethnography, participant observation, and open-ended interviews. I therefore hope to contribute to anthropological theoretical frameworks that are considering the extension of the semiotic field into cyberspace at the same time I am drawing from classic and foundational "real-world" ethnographic and sociological approaches.

I hope,therefore, not only to contribute to theoretical debates, but to open up possibilities for applied significance: I use a Geertzian approach in that I start from the "native's" model of Islam, as defined by the community itself, and analyze the symbolic, cultural, and social relations which produce its shared meaning. In beginning from this assumption, the system can be entered and explored in depth, allowing me to identify what knowledge and values American Muslims identify as authoritative and authentic. Furthermore, I assume that the semiotic field extends from the "real" world into computer-mediated environments, thus allowing me to capture elements of religious knowledge production, social interaction, and the behavioral matrix that are often conspicuously absent in contemporary treatments of religion.

Finally, much of the data on American Islam (rather than American Muslims) has been collected from the perspective of preventing "extremism" and "terrorism," however defined. This has led to flawed methodological approaches and widespread inter-cultural misunderstandings, contributing to the alienation of the Muslim American community. My research will provide a nuanced and textured portrait of American Shari'a law, complicating existing narratives that Other and Orientalize American Muslims and American Islam. I hope the research will be useful to policy makers, interfaith organizations, public health agencies, and women's rights organizations.

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Chapter IV: Individualism, Authority, and Legitimacy for U.S. Muslims

Introduction

Over a century ago, the American psychologist and philosopher William James gave a series of lectures wherein he attempted to define the essence of religion, and to suggest appropriate theoretical frameworks for researchers interested in the study of religiosity and religious experience. Unlike earlier anthropologists like Tylor and Frazier (discussed in the previous chapter), James did not make hard and fast distinctions between religious belief, religious ritual, and religious authority. Instead, James positioned dogma as distinct from experience, and argued that "the various observances of the average religious believer [was] essentially imitative in nature" (James192)

The religion of the average believer, James additionally claimed, had been "made for him by others, communicated to him by tradition, determined to fixed forms of imitation, and retained by habit;" researchers would therefore benefit little from studying rites, observances, and rituals, which James characterized as "second-hand religious life" (James 188). To include primarily the ceremonial aspects of religious observance in a study of religion would have the effect of limiting our view of religion to the "institutional," and to the "external art, the art of winning the favor of the gods" (James 192). James thus advocated for a focus on what he defined as "personal religion, pure and simple," which was consisted of "personal," rather than "ritual" acts, wherein the individual "transacts business by himself alone, and the ecclesiastical

organization, with its priests and sacraments and other go-betweens, sinks to an altogether secondary place" (James 192).

James' emphasis on a personal relationship with God, and his separation of religious rites from religious belief, reflected his position as an American living during the Second Great Awakening, a movement that sought to democratize opportunities for laypeople to claim religious authority and develop a personal relationship with God (Porterfeld 4). James' philosophies, like those of the Second Great Awakening, were radical breaks from tradition. They implied not only a rejection of the church and its monopoly over religious authority, but also a premium placement on the individual search for authenticity.

Approximately a century after William James delivered his lectures on the importance of personal faith, the sociologist Robert Neelly Bellah supervised a groundbreaking study on civil society and religion, arguing that the discourse of the individual provided a overarching frame for American conceptions of the self in relation to God, religion, and society at large (Bellah 222). Religious symbols and traditions were primarily mobilized to legitimate individual actors' various beliefs and actions, and the individual emerged as the primary mediator between the self and God (Bellah 235). Religiosity, he argued, is manifested along two different poles: on one side, God is simply "the self, magnified," and on the other, an external God acts through the individual to provide order and control (Bellah 235). In both cases, however, individual experience is the basis of belief, and individuals shift with regularity between one pole and the other.

My research suggests that contemporary Muslim Americans, like the Christians and Jews in Bellah's study, frame their religious experiences and conceptions of religion the same way,

with the individual acting both as consumer and producer of religious knowledge, and serving as the primary mediator between material concerns and spiritual ones.

In the following sections I explore the individualism and individualist discourses that inform American Islam and American Muslim understandings of their faith. I argue that American Muslims, like Americans of other faiths, are comfortable engaging in a sort of "forum-shopping," wherein they select from competing instantiations of Islam and Islamic values. Imāms, scholars, and even entire schools of jurisprudence compete in a global arena where the individual, empowered by one's own experiences and concepts of "correctness," chooses the "right" interpretation of religious texts and religious doctrine. The result of all this picking and choosing is not fragmentation, but rather, a universalist expression of Islam open to all regardless of sectarian affiliation or cultural background.

Islam in the American Religious Marketplace

My first Arabic teacher was an Egyptian Muslim graduate student who had come to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to study with Professor Khaled Abou el Fadl, chair of the Islamic Studies program at UCLA and a renowned scholar of Islamic jurisprudence. As he stood in front of the class explaining various aspects of Egyptian society and culture, he showed us his Egyptian ID card, which had (among other things) his name, the names of members of his family, and his religion. Someone had a question: "what if you want to change your religion, what do you do about your ID card?"

The teacher looked very surprised. "You cannot change your religion," he said, perplexed. We (and we were all American) were equally perplexed. "Of course you can change your religion," we said. "No..." he responded. "Yes, you can change your religion," we insisted. Some of us related personal experiences, and some of us gave examples of high-profile converts to Islam: Yusuf Islam (perhaps better known as the folk singer Cat Stevens), Peter Murphy (lead singer of Bauhaus), Dave Chapelle (an actor and stand-up comedian), and Yusuf Def (a.k.a Mos Def, the rapper and actor). This seemed to be a basic truth to all of us: you can change your religion. The teacher, surprised at our confidence that religion-changing was not only possible, but acceptable, looked at first as though he was going to try to explain why we were incorrect, realized quickly that this would be fruitless, and finally just said, "We do not have this."

The class, for the most part, accepted this answer: in Egypt, they do not have this and, except in rare circumstances, people do not change religions or sectarian affiliation on a regular basis, if at all.[25] But in the United States, we do, of course "have this." In fact, "this"--the practice of changing one's religion-- is a feature, rather than a glitch, in American religious practice. Americans' pursuit of spiritual meaning often manifests through experimentation with other spiritual traditions and a willingness to move between and among various religious associations and institutions.

A 2007 Pew Religious Survey, for example, found that more than one quarter of adults had left the faith in which they were raised in favor of joining or adhering to another religion, or

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[25] In fact, in North Africa and the Middle East, over half of those polled favor "strict criminal penalties" for people who renounce their faith, and in South Asia, over 3/4ths support the death penalty for Muslims who leave Islam. See: Pew Research, *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*, Polling and Analysis, Religion and Public Life, Pew Research Center (Washington, DC: Pew Forum, 2013).

alternatively, to belonging to no religion at all (Pew ”U.S. Religious Landscape” 5). If switch in affiliation from one type of Protestantism to another is counted as a change in religious faith, than the number of Americans changing religions grows significantly, and roughly 44% of adults have “either switched religious affiliation, moved from being unaffiliated with any religion to being affiliated with a particular faith, or dropped any connection to a specific religious tradition altogether” within their lifetimes (Pew ”U.S. Religious Landscape” 8). Among Americans who are married, nearly four in ten (37%) are married to a spouse with a different religious affiliation; this figure, it should be noted, includes Protestants who are married to another Protestant from a different denominational family, such as a Baptist who is married to a Methodist (Pew ”U.S. Religious Landscape” 5).

Religious organizations in the U.S., therefore, offer their wares within an active and liquid spiritual marketplace, competing for congregants and devotees as they present their various interpretations of God’s (or Gods’) message. The rational actors participating in this spiritual marketplace are permitted, if not encouraged, to move between different sectarian and religious groups in an effort to find one that is the best fit for them. Within this marketplace, the boundaries separating one sectarian tradition from another are blurred and religious life in the U.S. is dynamic, fluid, and infinitely adaptable (Roof 4).

Put in this context, it is perhaps easy to understand why half or more Muslims in all but a few South Asian and Middle Eastern countries claim there is only one true understanding of Islam (Pew ”The World’s Muslims” 195) while Muslims in the U.S., on the other hand, fluent in the language of the market and raised to place a premium on the freedom to choose, feel empowered to select from a wide variety of interpretations that are all “correct” in their own

way. The individual seeker and chooser is now empowered to select from an increasingly crowded spiritual space filled with all variety of sectarian and spiritual lifestyles.

To be sure, Muslims' willingness to choose between and among fatawā[26] and muftī[27] from different ethnic and jurisprudential traditions is not solely due to American influences. Classical Muslim jurists allowed laypeople to choose from among different fatwā within the context of takhayyur, which refers to the right of individuals to follow the teachings of a madhāb[28] different from their own (Yilmaz 81). While it would be inaccurate to claim that classical Islamic scholars conceived of a spiritual "marketplace" wherein the faithful could "bargain-shop" for *fatwā,* they did, recognize a need for flexibility and variation. Classical jurists therefore interpreted the Qur'ān and the Hadith using methods that include, but are not limited to, independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), reference to local custom (*'urf*), analogy (*qiyas*), and pure reasoning (*ra'y*).[29]

However, the use of these tools "became concepts fettered and limited by the juristic method. They occupied roles carefully defined by the overall structure of the law…In most circumstances, they were regarded as aids to textual interpretation, not as actual sources of the

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[26] A *fatwā* (*fatawā* plural) is a non-binding religious *responsa* to a legal question.

[27] A *muftī.* or jurist, is a person considered qualified to issue a *fatwā.*

[28] A *madhāb*, as discussed in the previous chapter, is a school or guild of Islamic law.

[29] As an example: Islamic jurisprudence expert H.M. Kamali refers to the fact that Qur'ānic commenters have deferred to *'urf*, or custom, in determining the precise amount of maintenance that a husband must provide for his wife. Verse 65:7 in the Qur'ān states (according to Kamali's translation of the Arabic) `Let those who possess means pay according to their means.' As the verse does not specify the exact amount of maintenance, it can be decided by referring to custom, or in other words, by turning to local norms and practices that may even pre-exist a community's widespread conversion to Islam. Use of *'urf* is generally permitted so long as it is not in contravention of the Shar'ia.

law" (Abou el Fadl *Great Theft* 36). Furthermore, the lack of centralized authority did not mean that there were no institutions for creating or disseminating religious knowledge, nor for demarcating symbolic lines of authority and authenticity. In the pre-colonial era, Muslim jurists developed a system of legal guilds, certifications, and insignia to symbolize that a person had attained the requisite amount of knowledge to be able to speak as a jurist (Abou el Fadl *Great Theft* 36). By the 9th century A.D., a person might need more than fifteen years of undergraduate and graduate study before he or she could qualify as a professor of law (Abou el Fadl *Great Theft* 37).

Modern Muslim scholars, recognizing the unique challenges faced by Muslims in diaspora, were therefore well within the scope of historical precedent when they concluded that "inter-madhā*b* surfing" is permissible (mubah) under the condition of darūrah (necessity). That said, darūrah is a comprehensive concept developed to "facilitate and allow for actions that are normally forbidden (Yilmaz 81)." In other words, darūrah was not developed to be applied with capriciousness or simply to individualize practice for maximum convenience. Rather, it exists within the context of limits and conditions that take into account the preservation of vital interests such as religion (dīn), person (nafs), offspring (nasl), property (mā*l*), or reason (*'*aql) (Yilmaz 81).

Contemporary Muslim American approaches to authority and to Islam itself can therefore be situated at the crossroads of American notions of the spiritual marketplace and the historical variations of Islamic jurisprudence. Self-authorized ikhtiyyar and ijtihād rely on a combination of sources that can be traced to classical Islamic sources and American discourses of freedom and individualism. These include the self and one's individual judgment, the overarching

framework of Islamic tradition, and the experience of being American and living within the context of a culture that operates within the language of the market and its attendant emphasis on personalization and individual agency.

In this framework, a family's *madhāb* is most often understood as a "cultural" manifestation of Islam, rather than a reflection of legal or jurisprudential concerns, and all madhāhib are viewed as providing equally valid offerings within a marketplace of competing ideas. In a 2001 survey sent to Imāms, presidents of mosques, and mosque board members by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, 52% of respondents reported feeling that "the teachings of a particular madhā*b* were of little or no importance" and 90% regarded the Qur'ān as "absolutely foundational" as a "source of authority in the worship and teaching at [the] mosque" and only 10% gave "human reasoning and understanding" and "the teachings of the great scholars of the past" an "absolutely foundational role" (Bagby "The American Mosque 2012" 19).

The survey also depicts an atmosphere of gender imbalance, with women making up 15% of the regular attendants of Friday prayer, although nearly two-thirds of mosques reported offering a separate, secluded prayer space for women (Bagby "The American Mosque" 11). Moreover, in 31% of the mosques, women were not allowed to serve on the governing board, and in half the mosques that permitted women to serve, none had done so in the past five years (Bagby "The American Mosque 2012" 56). Also of interest is the fact that 74% of mosques reported offering marital or family counseling services (Bagby "The American Mosque 2012" 41). The survey did not ask where or if respondents had received training in Islamic law, Islamic history, or counseling.

When "making Islamic decisions," 71% of respondents (compared to 56% in 2001) reported that they "refer to Qur'ān and Sunnah and look to purpose and modern circumstances," while 21% of respondents reported that they "refer to Qur'ān and Sunnah [precedent based on the *Ḥadīth*] and follow a literal interpretation" (Bagby "The American Mosque Project 2012" 19). Only 11% of mosque leaders in 2011 reported following the teachings of a given guild of Islamic law (compared to 6% in 2001) (Bagby "The American Mosque Project 2012" 42).

Muslim Americans, in other words, feel empowered to draw from interpretations, practices, and sources of authority that are either associated with sects of Islam that differ from that of their parents, or alternatively, are not associated with a clearly defined or concrete expression of sectarian Islam at all. A Ḥanafī is just as likely to be married to a Maliki or a Shaf'i as to another Ḥanafī, However, it is likely that neither spouse will think of this as particularly significant. If they are both Sunni, they will simply identify as "Muslim."

For example, this statement is from a 23-year-old Bangladeshi American man, born and raised in the United States and married to a Sudanese American woman:

> [My family is] nominally Sunni because of where we're from...From what I hear Bangladesh is more like the Ḥanafī School, but [my family] doesn't really care, and so I don't really care. I have no problem listening to whatever school of thought, I don't care. I'm rather undiscerning on Sunni [schools of thought]....Maybe at some point I was wondering the other day, like, would I look at the Shi'a sources? It's probably a good idea.[30]

Madhā*b,* in other words, simply reflects where one's parents happened to have been born. The family madhā*b* is thus often understood as a "cultural" manifestation of Islam, rather than a reflection of legal or jurisprudential concerns. Several participants in my interviews, in fact, had

[30] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on May 15, 2013 at 4:00 p.m.

no idea what madhā*b* their families practiced, and made educated guesses (which occasionally turned out to be incorrect) based on where their parents were from. Many recounted the circumstances under which they first heard the term madhāb, and how the only way to figure out which madhāb they belonged to was to call home and ask some variation of the question "what are we?"

The answer, however, would generally be filed away, rather than acted upon; Muslims generally see no need to change their practice, their perspective, or their local mosque upon learning, for example, that their parents were Maliki and their Imām at college was Ḥanafī. With the exception of Sh'ia Muslims, who often identify strongly as Ahmadiyya or Jafari as opposed to just "Shi'i", a vast majority of second generation Muslim Americans do not, in fact, know that there is anything to Islam beyond "Sunni" or "Shi'a" until they go to college or join an American Muslim cultural organization and become exposed to the word madhāb or guild. Many even consider the broader categories of "Sunni' and "Shia" as irrelevant, identifying as "just Muslim."

For example, from a 26 year old, unmarried Egyptian American woman:

> The term madhāb was never used in our household. [My parents] knew we lived in America and they knew that we had to accommodate our needs here and so they were very open minded about it. So if there was a madhāb like the Maliki madhāb that had something that was more accommodating to our needs as teenagers or as a family then they would take that opinion.[31]

Several participants in my interviews, in fact, had no idea which madhāb their families practiced, and assumed which madhāb they would follow based on where their parents were from. Many recounted the circumstances under which they first heard the term madhāb and how

[31] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles, CA, on September 21 2013

the only way to figure out which madhāb they belonged to was to call home and ask. When they received the answer however, they would not necessarily change any aspects of their belief system of practice. With the exception of Sh'ia Muslims, who often identify strongly as Ahmadiyya or Jafari as opposed to just "Shi'i", a vast majority second generation Muslim Americans do not, in fact, know that there is anything to Islam beyond "Sunni" or "Shi'a" until they go to college or join an American Muslim cultural organization and become exposed to the word madhāb or guild. [32]

My interviews further suggest that when a Muslim American has a question, or is interested in the "correct" way to do something, the madhā*b* of a given muftī will have very little (if anything) to do with the perceived validity of his or her opinion. Similarly, if confronted with a variety of fatawā about a given issue, the vast majority of my interview subjects reported that they would consider the options available to them, and settle on the one that makes the most sense for their individual circumstances, regardless of its relationship to a given madhāb. So too are the various options available to individuals choosing to live an Islamic lifestyle and practice Islamic values.

If madahāb are choices, then so is Islam itself, as well as identification as Muslim. Put differently: I never asked interview participants "when they knew they were Muslim," or "when they embraced Islam." But even so, many spoke about their identities as Muslims as a choice,

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[32] It should be noted that I was only able to interview six people who identified, however loosely, as Shi'i. One of them changed to "Sunni" during college. One had a Persian Shi'i mother and an Arab Sunni father and identified culturally as Shi'i "only culturally." Two identified strongly as Ahmadiyya, as opposed to Shi'i, and the remainder was an Afghan Shi'i who often worshipped with a Sunni-majority congregation because it was more convenient for her. More work, therefore, needs to be done on American Shi'i expressions of Islam.

rather than as an immutable, intrinsic, or inherent state of being. For example, one man, a 35-year-old graduate student raised by a Muslim father and Christian mother, explained his relationship to Islam in the following terms:

> [I studied Islamic history] because I wanted to know [who Muslims are] and maybe there's atrocities that was committed or bad things that were committed, I wanted to know that because I want to know my history because I *decided consciously* to be Muslim and I believe that it is the ultimate truth [*emphasis mine*]. [33]

Another young woman living in Orange County explained her faith in a similar way:

> Being Muslim in an environment after 9-11 made me ask a lot of questions. It was good for me, I think. I had people I could rely on to ask questions of, and asking questions was encouraged, and through that experience of *trying to decide who I was*, I learned about my faith and grew in my faith [*emphases mine*]." [34]

September 11 similarly affected an Arab American woman living in Los Angeles, who said:

> Obviously 9/11 was a very challenging time but [being at the age where I was relatively independent] and then having to be like, 'Am I going to adhere to this religion or is this *something that I choose*?' It was really a *choice* at that point [*all emphases mine.*]"[35]

And finally, a 35-year-old woman who had converted to Islam over the objections of her parents framed religious identity as follows:

> And you know? I think, for those of us [who were] born and raised here, we see a difference between culture, religion—you know? Ethnicity, all that stuff is separate. And, in my mind, religion—you choose! I mean, you choose that, not your ethnicity or even your parents' culture or whatever![36]

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[33] Excerpted from an interview conducted on September 16. 2013 at 10:30 am via video chat.

[34] Excerpted from an interview conducted on September 11, 2013, at 12:30 pm via video chat.

[35] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles at September 7, 2013, at 10:00 am

[36] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on September 21, 2013, at 8:30 pm.

A following section deals specifically with identity, and with September 11 and its impact on Muslim American identity. Suffice it to say for now, however, that while not all participants spoke of their identities, a majority of those who did framed it in terms of "searching for an identity" in high school, in college, or in response to a particularly meaningful event. In so doing, they imply first that "being Muslim" is not a foregone conclusion, and second that "Islam" and "being Muslim" are one of many, equally valid choices.

Jocelyn Cesari, a sociologists who focuses on Islam and Muslim communities in Europe, has observed a similar tendency for Muslims in France, writing that:

> Individualization of religious choice is presented in much of the contemporary scholarship as a democratization of the religious sphere, especially in contrast with the status of Islam in the country of origin. Being Muslim in France often translates to the loss of relationship to Islam as a cultural and social fact of life and instead questioning one's faith through the rubric of individual choice...In the Muslim world, too, people make individual choices and question their relationship to tradition. Nevertheless context of such individualism is quite different in the West. In secular democracies, the multiplicity of possible—and sometimes contradictory—choices is not only more noticeable but also more accepted (Cesari 153).

Put differently: for many Muslims in non-Muslim countries, being Muslim and being devoted to Islam is experienced overwhelmingly as a *choice* rather than an immutable way of being.

The tendency towards forum-shopping and self-supervised research raises several questions. First, once someone embraces Islam as his or her consciously chosen identity, way of life, and state of being, how does he or she decide which expressions of Islam are valid and correct? Second, how does this individualization and personalization affect the cohesiveness of

the American Muslim community? The following section will discuss how individualization, privatization, and personalization influence American Islam.

Individualization

The tendency towards individualization and personalization in diaspora has led scholars to theorize on the overall consequences of this process. In other words, does this (and will this) lead to increased liberalism of practice? Or will individualization lead to a revival of puritanism as Muslims become less equipped to challenge strict doctrines regarding the permissibility of, for example, gender segregation, veiling, or listening to music?

Olivier Roy, a political scientist at the European University Institute and author of many influential studies on Islam in diaspora, has argued that individual believers within diasporic contexts feel a heightened need to embody their religion, and furthermore, that they are vulnerable to puritan strains of Islam that emphasize strictness and personal responsibility (Roy 93). Individualization, to Roy, therefore, refers to the waning influence of traditional sources of religious authority, and consequentially can lead to a puritan strain of Islam.

I found limited support for his position among my respondents, however, given that interview participants--particularly women--so often referred to Islam as "easy" and characterized their interpretive efforts as maximizing ease and minimizing hardship. When presented with conflicting answers to a particular question or challenge, individuals generally choose the option that provides the greatest ease of practice, or resonates with his or her lifestyle.

"I find the [fatwā] that makes sense to me," or "I find the one that works for me," was a very common refrain.

Within this framework, the official accreditation of a given scholar, doctrine, or practice become far less relevant than individual preference, and "correct" answers or practices are positioned as options that minimize hardship or disruption to one's lifestyle.

Or, as one Asian American convert who I will refer to as "Cara" put it:

> Me: What school or madhāb do you identify with or follow?
> Her: Well, I know that there are different madhāb but I don't particularly like one. Or I tend to like follow Shaf'i and Maliki, I lean towards [those guilds] more than like Ḥanafī, but I don't strictly follow one or the other.... *I look at it from a case by case basis, like what fits my lifestyle and what would be like the easiest for me,* because that's how I view Islam: I view it—I don't view it as a hard religion, I try to pick the—I don't want to call it fatwā shopping—but *I just don't think it should be hard [emphases mine].*[37]

A majority of the people I spoke to--including people who regarded religion as "very important," claimed to pray five times a day, wore hijāb, fasted at Ramadan, and went to great lengths to educate their children about Islam-- were firm in their conviction that Islam isn't supposed to be burdensome, and were generally guided by the path of least resistance when deciding between and among fatawā. Therefore, when confronted with a variety of interpretations of a given issue, all of which seem authoritative, madhāhib, epistemological rigor, and institutional markers of authority are less relevant than the compatibility with daily life of a given ruling.

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[37] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine, California, on May 30, 2013 at 6:00 p.m.

I spoke to a twenty-five year old Arab American woman who is currently studying classical Arabic and taking fiqh classes with a local sheikh in hopes of attending Al-Azhar University next year. She explained her decision-making process as follows:

> I'm trying to just study on my own and get a lot of basic stuff. And right now, I just started doing fiqh with Sheikh [redacted.]...We just started the history of fiqh now so I'm not even close to picking a madhāb. And I don't even know if I would, actually. ...In America, we're so diverse. You go to the mosque and you see people literally from everywhere. So it's not like whatever area you live in, that's your madhāb. And even our scholars here are so diverse that what I end up doing most of the time is when I go to a fiqh class, for example, and [the sheikh] will say like, "This is a Maliki opinion," and so on and so forth, and I go with whatever the majority says *or if something specifically makes more sense to me then I'll go with that.* [38]

This is not to say that Muslims are solely driven by convenience when making decisions that they perceived to be relative to their faith. There is very little that is "convenient" about being a practicing Muslim in the U.S.: our work days are not oriented around prayer times, or fasting, or any number of important rites and rituals central to Islam. Our yearly calendar rarely overlaps with Muslim holidays, our restaurants rarely indicate if food is halāl, and clothing sold at the mall generally doesn't offer many options that articulate well with Muslim American women's understanding of appropriately modest dress. This pursuit of "convenience" should instead be put within the broader context of the challenges involved in practicing a minority religion.

The rationalization and posivitism of the modern world, to Weber, may have "destroyed the authority of magical powers, but it also brought into being the machine-like regulation of bureaucracy, which ultimately challenges all systems of belief "(Weber *Essays* xxvi). It is,

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[38] Excerpted from an interview conducted on September 16. 2013. at 9:30 am. The participant was in Riverside so the interview took place over video chat.

therefore, more appropriate to understand this interest in convenience, as reflecting the individual's possession of self-designated authority that is in many ways equal to that of the scholar.

The individual can choose freely to follow or discard a given "rule" or doctrinal interpretation, and feels empowered to engage in critical evaluation of these "rules," in the first place. The self is therefore the ultimate arbiter of deciding how to practice, what to practice, what is important, and what is not, and all choices are equally valid choices so long as they contribute to spiritual fulfillment and "feel" as though they make sense within the framework of Islam. Instead of being concerned with the minutiae of ritual practice, then, Muslims in the U.S. are concerned with having a personal relationship with God, their engagement in the broader Muslim community, and the ability to uphold general Islamic values.

It should also be noted that many participants said that they wanted to be able to "push back" on what a scholar or Imām had said, interrogate his opinion, and see how it articulated with their own appreciations of Islamic doctrine. This can be explained by the discourses of individualism and tolerance discussed in this chapter; however, it is also possible that these practices are a product of social class and educational attainment. All interview participants except for one had graduated from college or were in the process of getting a four-year college degree. A vast majority additionally had graduated from fairly prestigious institutions.

I also interviewed many professionals in highly paid or high status jobs, including doctors, doctoral students, medical students, corporate lawyers, an expert on public health, a civil rights lawyer, software developers, a movie producer, communications coordinators for a large organizations, and more than one CEO. Interview participants also came from families with high

levels of educational attainment: only two participants claimed that neither parent had finished college. Mostly, participants' parents had occupations of high status and high pay, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, software developers, astrophysicists, or financial analysis, or were working in other well-paid, white-collar jobs.

Participants in my interviews, in other words, may not be accustomed to a world where their opinion doesn't matter, or where they don't have a say in how the rules are made or applied. "Tradition," in most cases therefore, is one of many different options, all of which are equally valid insofar as they lead to the maximization of self-fulfillment, spiritual enlightenment, and ease of practice. In nearly every case, therefore, interview participants confronted with conflicting fatawā or conflicting information about the "right" answer to a religious question would simply find the one that worked best for them and their lifestyles rather than the one that appeared to be the most doctrinally sound or supported by the best evidence. Traditional markers of institutional authority therefore compliment and validate, rather than subsume, individual preference.

As one 25-year-old Arab American woman who I will call "Fatema" put it:

> If I hear something that I think is coo-coo, I seriously tell my husband like heck no I'm not doing that. Like if I think that it's not -- you know it's not supposed to be difficult. Like there's a lot of people that overdo things. They're like, "But are you *sure* it's halāl?" And I'm like, "Just eat it." You know what I mean? That's how I am and I feel like it's not supposed to be difficult; it's just supposed to be a way of life and you do what you got to do--I'm the type of person--like I truly believe in the saying that our religion is supposed to be easy.[39]

Fatema wears hijāb , refrains from drinking alcohol, plans on enrolling her daughter in an Islamic school, and regards Islam as a "very important" part of her life. Even so, being Muslim,

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[39] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on May 29. 2013 at 9:30 am.

to her, shouldn't be experienced as an existence filled with "coo coo" rules and regulations that make life difficult; instead, it should be thought of as a pursuit of a spiritually sound Islamic lifestyle that complements, rather than interferes with, her existence as an American, a wife, a mother, a graduate student, and an employee. As a consequence, to resolve any tension between doctrinal or ritual mandates and her chosen lifestyle, she exercises her own judgment about which rules are worth following, and which can be discarded based on context. The rules that are worth following are the ones that don't burden her overmuch but still resonate with her interpretation of the spirit of Islam.

Cara, the Asian American convert from above, explained how she decided which fatawā were trustworthy:

> *Me:* so if you encounter a *fatwā* from a mufti or Imām. that you've never heard of, how do you know if he knows what he's doing or not?
> *Her:* I usually ask other people what their opinions are about that person, and read articles by that person that he's written, and just feel if that aligns with the Islam that I follow...It isn't supposed to be hard. [40]

Fatema similarly explained her relationship with doctrine and ritual as follows:

> One of the things that my father has always said, is like there are things the Prophet has said, "It would been better if you hadn't asked. Because I haven't told you and that was a blessing. And now that you have asked, like, you have to follow what I've said." So the religion in itself is permissive until you decide to make it impermissive on yourself. [41]

Sometimes, the desire to maximize ease of practice was implied, rather than explicitly stated. One 22-year-old Syrian American man told me at the beginning of our interview that he didn't listen to music because he felt that doing so was harām. In the middle of our interview,

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[40] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine on May 30, 2013 at 6:00 pm.

[41] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on May 29. 2013 at 9:30 am.

however, his cell phone rang and the ringtone was one of the pre-set melodies that often comes with certain brands of mobile handsets. Wait, I said. I thought you said music was har*ā*m? "It is," he said, but "that's a ringtone. That's different."

But how does interest in "ease of practice" and conformity to a pre-existing daily routine relate to authority, particularly in the Weberian sense? What is the relationship between "lifestyle," or "routine" in other words, and authority? One possibility would be the relevance of "norms," or rules of conduct (Weber *Essays in Sociology* 124-125). When a large enough number of actors in a given society or organization will follow the same patterns of behavior, ordered interaction will occur and certain norms will therefore follow. But given that authority is founded upon a dynamic wherein the commands of certain actors are considered binding by others, norms and authority are, as the British sociologist Martin Spencer puts it, "polar principles of social organization: In the one case, organization rests upon orientation to a rule or a principle; in the other instance it is based upon compliance to commands" (Spencer 124-125). The total structure underlying interaction is therefore a mixture of authority and norms.

In the case of American Islam, therefore, authority seems to have become almost entirely subordinate to the individual and his or her perception of relevant norms.

The Fifth M*adhab: New Directions and Developments Within Expressions of American Muslim Practice and Belief*

The tendency to privatize and individualize religion is part of a centuries-old tradition in the U.S.: As early as the 19th century, Alexis de Toqueville observed an expression of religious

practice that was similarly privatized, personalized, and segmented, leading him to characterize the business of religion as to "purify, control, and restrain that excessive and exclusive taste for well-being" that was as common then as it is now (Bellah 222).

In this framing, religion functions to temper unbridled self-interest with concern for the welfare of others. Religious institutions prepare the individual to self-regulate and self-manage in a segmented, competitive space characterized by competition and an interest in material acquisition (Bellah 223). Sunni Muslims in the U.S. are very much the products of American religious norms, and are creating a sort of a "Fifth Madhāb" that emphasizes inclusiveness, tolerance, and individualism, draws primarily from the other four Sunni schools, and is influenced by American values such as tolerance, diversity, personalization, and the value of personal fulfillment.

On a Wednesday evening in January, for example, I attended a woman's Qur'ān discussion group at a mosque in Irvine to observe the articulation and embodiment of authority in practice. Irvine is an affluent part of Orange County, California, and when I pulled into the parking lot, I parked in a sea of Lexus's, Mercedes, Honda Accords, BMWs driven by very fashionably-dressed women.

Inside, men and boys streamed out of the main prayer hall into the foyer, stopping to put on their shoes before they head out of the side doors. Upstairs, in the women's prayer area, a group of middle-aged Arabic-speaking women sat in the middle of the floor, quietly chatting. Younger women in their late 20s and 30s, some Turkish-speaking, some Arabic-speaking, and some Urdu-speaking, stood against the wall in the hallway between the prayer hall and a small playroom/classroom, tapping on their cell phones or huddled in conversation. The door to an

adjacent room was flung open, and a group of children burst out of the room, through the crowded hallway, and to the women's prayer area. The children had been learning the Arabic alphabet and eating cupcakes. They trailed chocolate crumbs all over the nice carpet as they chase each other, screeching and laughing. They did this until their mothers eventually calmed them down enough to corral them back into the hallway, put their shoes on, and confiscate any leftover crumbs.

The playroom/classroom was now empty of children, and the Wednesday night sisters' Qur'ān study could begin. There were about twenty of us, sitting on the floor against the wall. I was the only one who wasn't wearing a headscarf. Also, my socks didn't match because it had slipped my mind that I'd have to take off my shoes before entering the mosque. It was therefore very clear that I didn't really "belong," but the women were warm and welcoming nonetheless, asking me why I'm interested in learning about Islam, and wishing me good luck on my dissertation.

The teacher of these weekly study groups is an American Muslim who graduated from Al-Azhar university and is fluent in classical Arabic as well as in Egyptian 'amiya.[42] Many of the women I interviewed had mentioned her to me unprompted, telling me that she was a huge asset to the Muslim community and that Muslim American women were especially blessed by having their very own female scholar. She arrived to the class about ten minutes late, apologized, and then took a seat at a desk in the middle of the room. She pulled an iPad out of her purse, and

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[42] Arabic is a diglossic language. Contemporary spoken Arabic is called "'amiya" or "darija" and contemporary written Arabic is called "Modern Standard Arabic." The Qur'ān , however, is written in classical Arabic, which is mutually intelligible with Modern Standard Arabic but not necessarily with most forms of 'amiya.

introduced the topic for that week's Quran study: God as al-Wahhāb, which she translated to mean "gift-giver."

The format of the class was discussion, rather than lecture-oriented: she would read relevant verses from the Qur'ān app on her iPad, translate them into English, and then invite discussion on each verse, asking the class to think about God as an unending provider of gifts, pointing out how wonderful it feels to give a gift, reminding the class that God has no shortage of gifts to give, and encouraging the class to ask God what they want without reservations.

One woman asked if it was okay to ask God for money, or for riches. The teacher responded that it is, if you're going to use it for Him and for His benefit, and to do his work. It's not OK, she explained, just to ask for a Ferrari simply because you want to impress your friends or drive a fast car. But asking to win the lottery or be financially successful is fine if you're really going to use it to glorify Him. She pointed out that the Prophet Suleiman asked God for a kingdom the likes of which no one would have after him, and God fulfilled that wish. So if Suleiman asked for something as grand as a kingdom, it must be acceptable to ask for riches. Gifts, she also stressed, can come at unexpected times and in unexpected ways: her iPhone was stolen last week, she said, but now she realized that the theft was in a way a gift, since she was now more present in the world around her instead of being buried in her phone all the time. We should therefore always be attuned to God's gifts.

The class then moved on to a thoughtful discussion about whether or not it is not okay to be rich and to have money, given, as one woman put it, that she "worked hard" to get into a good college, and "works hard" at her job now. Is it okay that she has money? Is it bad if she enjoys the nice things that come from having money? It's okay to have money and there is nothing

wrong with wanting to enjoy it, the teacher affirmed, but make *zakat*, donate to charity, and make sure you use it to benefit those who have so little. The teacher then confided to the class that she used to process donations to a mosque in another part of Orange County, and said she has never stopped marveling at the fact that those with the most gave the least. People who owned hotel chains, car dealerships, large and thriving businesses--people who were millionaires many times over--- barely gave to the mosque. And people that she knew "for a fact" had nothing, or close to nothing, were the most generous. So while we can certainly enjoy the wealth that we worked hard for, she said, we should also remember to give as we are able.

This class, I will point out again, was taught by a graduate of Al-Azhar and directed towards an audience of adult women who would most likely identify as devout, or at least practicing Muslims. However, the tone and substance differed very little from the type of Bible groups I've overheard at neighborhood coffee shops or participated in at my Christian boarding school. Although the values stressed in the class were grounded in Islamic texts, they were infused with American discourses about "working hard" to acquire material wealth, and although the teacher used Qur'ān ic stories to frame ethical dilemmas stemming from capitalism and its attendant values, the discussion drew heavily from contemporary political discussions regarding income inequality, and the role of individual benefactors and private sector actors in providing services to the poor.

Furthermore, the class was framed as a discussion, where everyone present could contribute, and where contributions were all framed as equally valid. While students respected the knowledge and authority of the scholar, they clearly felt empowered to politely challenge her

interpretation of the sources, inject their own opinions of the material, and draw their own conclusions about the meaning of "gift-giving" in the Qur'ān .

Similar discursive tendencies also informed a Friday prayer I attended two weeks earlier at the same mosque, wherein the Imām, a convert to Islam educated at Al-Azhar, discussed the Islamic implications of grocery shopping. Whenever he goes to the store, he told the at-capacity crowd, he buys Paul Newman dressing because the proceeds support charity. We should think about what we buy, where the money goes, and what kind of society we're supporting when we make a purchase, he said. Just from choosing one salad dressing over another, we can help the poor and make a difference. Every dollar, in other words, is a vote, and when we make a purchase at the grocery store, we're voting for one kind of world over another.

Paul Newman, of course, was a Jewish American actor whose foundation supports charities devoted to environmentally sustainability, nutrition, and programs for veterans (Newman Foundation). The Imām's specific shout-out to the Paul Newman foundation is therefore highly illustrative of the fact that American Muslims view "Islamic values" as complimenting, rather than acting in opposition to, "American values." To be sure, "Americans" are no more a monolith than Muslim Americans and most likely have competing visions of "American values." That said, I feel that I'm on stable ground when I claim that the free market, hard work, and the pursuit of earthly rewards are broadly embedded in discourses surrounding "American values." So too is the notion that consumerism (i.e., purchasing Paul Newman dressing) can act as a vehicle for activism, good works, and social change.

This particular mosque, moreover, is not unique in its interpretation of "Islamic values," nor their positioning of Islamic values as subordinate to individual preference and articulable

with American values. Nearly six months after I went to the women's study group, I asked Cara, the aforementioned Asian convert, how Islamic values and American values were different. She thought about it briefly and after a few "umms" and "hmms" replied that she didn't think that they were different. Well, what about television shows like the Kardashians and video games and movies that objectified women? Oh well these, she said, were not promoting Islamic values (and to be fair, I'm not sure that they are technically indicative of broadly shared American values). But stuff like "freedom" and "apple pie," she affirmed, definitely were Islamic values.

Eight months after my conversation with Cara, I asked an Arab American, married mother of two, what "Islamic values" are, and she said that they are "universal values," no different than what other major world religions would teach. Seeking clarification, I told her that for my last two years of high school, I went to a Christian boarding school attended by students of diverse faith groups. The Chaplain's sermons during weekly Chapel meetings were mobilized scripture and Christian discourses to impart lessons like "be a good person," and "don't lie or cheat or steal." Were Islamic values much different from these values? She thought a moment and said no, they weren't, "except we [Muslims] perhaps emphasize modesty a little more." [43]

These responses are representative of the kinds of answers I got when I asked about "Islamic values," and these women, like a majority of the other participants I asked, had to pause and think about the answer. In fact, one man who served on the board of a local mosque admitted that he had never thought about it before.

This proliferation of individualization and values-based Islam, however, has led to literature on the fragmentation of religious authority, and its dilution through interaction with

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[43] Excerpted from an interview conducted on September 21, 2013 at 4:00 pm in Irvine

non-religious, non Muslim environments. Islamic studies professor and Turkish history expert Ihsan Yilmaz, observing the normalization of privatizing and individualizing Islamic law in diaspora, the widespread availability of inter-madhāhib texts, intra-madhāhib websites, and inter-madhāhib fatawā books, as well as the tendency of Muslims to pick and choose from madhāhib for (what he sees as) convenience, has characterized Muslims in diaspora as "micro mujtahids, making sometimes swift decisions to solve a minor but sudden problem (Yilmaz, 81)." Yilmaz warns that:

> it is obvious that at the end of the day this approach will lead to millions of madhāhib and there will be post-modern fragmentation. In traditional Islamic jurisprudence, consensus *(ijmā'*) served as a brake on the vast array of individual interpretations of legal scholars and contributed to the creation of a largely fixed body of laws (Yilmaz 81)

Similarly, Dr. Abdal-Hakim Murad at the University of Cambridge claims that:

> with every Muslim now a proud mujtahid, and with taqlid dismissed as a sin rather than a humble and necessary virtue, the divergent views which caused such pain in our early history will surely break surface again. Instead of four madhāhib in harmony, we will have a billion madhāhib in bitter and self-righteous conflict (quoted in Yilmaz 83).

Both of these characterizations, however, are contrary to my findings. To be sure, Muslim Americans have, as discussed in detail, become comfortable with intra- and inter-madhāhib surfing. They have also become adept at personalizing Islam so it works for their lives and lifestyles. It is therefore not surprising that Yilmaz and others are concerned. To once again refer to the British sociologist Martin Spencer (himself quoting Weber):

> An order which is adhered to from motives of pure expediency is generally much less stable than one upheld on a purely customary basis though the fact that the corresponding behaviour has become habitual. The latter is much the most common type of subjective attitude. But even this type of order is in turn much less stable than an order which enjoys the prestige of being binding, or as it may be expressed, of 'legitimacy.' (Weber qtd in Spencer 124.)

In other words, the stability of a social order that rests on norms and expediency ("I find the one that works for me") is inherently less stable than one existing on the basis of authoritarianism. Taken in this light, Yilmaz et al have a point.

That said, in the case of American Islam, the result is not fragmentation. The result is in fact quite the opposite: an emerging universalist expression of Islam as Muslims from diverse ethnic backgrounds engage in a selective process of re-traditionalization. In so doing, they are crafting an instantiation of Islam available to everyone, regardless of ethnocultural background or sectarian affiliation.

This process of consultation with *Imāms*, acting in tangent with self-authorized interpretation and *itjihaād*ism, furthermore *fuels*, rather than compromises, participation in religious groups and religious classes, as well as engagement with Islamic traditions, as individuals proceed along the path towards achieving spiritual fulfillment. One Arab American, unmarried woman described the process as follows:

> I started praying with the [Muslim Student Union] in their designated space, and that got me involved because I met so many great people. We had so much in common. We'd pray and go get lunch and talk. I felt like I belonged to a group that was like-minded. They wanted to do well in school but also become better people and that was inspiring. It inspired me to be part of the MSU. The other thing I really liked is it wasn't just social events. There were social events, but the club provided Islamic classes, spiritual growth, there was community service, activism … I could go to like five different events a week. One would be a pizza lunch, another was a class about the people around the Prophet, what we could learn, another would be the history of Palestine. So many things in one club, but all the same people. It kind of mirrored the inclusiveness of Islam. And it made me realize how much of a role Islam played in my life because it was in every aspect of that.[44]

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[44] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on September 21, 2013, at 2:30 pm.

A majority of participants described their spiritual growth in similar terms, recounting events wherein they were exposed to diversity of thought and practice, and were inspired to learn more about how these various approaches fit under the umbrella of Islam. In so doing, they changed their own opinions, became more accepting of others, and gained a familiarity with classical sources of Islamic jurisprudence and Islamicate traditions. For example, one 26 year old Arab American woman characterized her exposure to madhāhib and variations in religious practice in the following way:

> But then when I went to college I think it was just a different experience because we were dealing with Muslims from all different backgrounds and ethnicities and it really need you have to figure out what real Islam is. And what I mean by that is obviously when you grow up in a cultured version of Islam -- my parents weren't really that cultural but just in general. I grew up with predominantly Arab Muslims, but then being in a college environment where you have people that are from South Asians and you have people that are different ethnicities, some converts and they would tell you something about Islam and I'd be like, "That's not true, that's not in Islam." And then you go ask a Sheikh and then it's like, "How is that possible? I never heard of that." So I think it just made me have an even more expansive idea of what Islam is and really it opened up my eyes to how Islam is a religion for everybody in my opinion. You know what I mean?[45]

She is not alone in discussing Islam in terms of her understanding that there is a difference between "religion," and "culture." Nor is she alone in expressing a desire to find out what "real Islam" is. Nor is she alone in talking about her college MSU experience in terms of developing her identity as a Muslim American, in addition to her understanding of what Islam is and how it should be practiced in the American context. Many participants framed the MSU in similar terms, saying that although they were already devout Muslims when they joined the

[45] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on September 7, 2013, at 10:00 am

MSU, the MSU was the first place wherein they became aware of how many legitimate instantiations of Islamic practices are available to Muslims.

Others join the MSU for social reasons, interested less in studying Islam or engaging in political activism than in making friends. In most cases, however, they too emerge from the MSU with a deeper understanding of their faith, an increased devotion to Islam, and a legible Muslim identity. A 21-year old college student who I will call "Begum" described her relationship with Islam in the following terms:

> When I was in high school, I was the least religious person in my family. The most I would do was pray. I didn't wear hijab. I did anything basic—what you had to do to be classified as Muslim. I didn't have the drive like I do now. I wouldn't be like, 'OK, I'm going to go to mosque and listen.' I wouldn't sit and read the Qur'ān every single night. I was like, 'Whatever, I have my life.' In high school I was very different from my family... I felt I was supposed to rebel, supposed to be different. When I came to college and met the people I met here [at the MSU], I got more into it—like when I met my friends, that sparked my interest, and when I myself started learning it, I was like, 'OK, this is actually pretty cool!'[46]

Put differently, when Begum left for college, she was a "normal" American teenager who identified as Muslim but rarely engaged with her faith on a serious or sustained level. As she learned more about Islam from self-supervised study and from discussions with friends, she began identifying with it more, and as she identified it with it more, she wished to know more. Her identity as a Muslim and her knowledge about Islam were mutually sustaining and co-developed with the support of her peers. Whereas she had "her life" in high school, she now rises early for prayer, attends and sometimes arranges extracurricular seminars on Islam and Islamic texts, and spends the occasional weekend day or Friday night with the youth group at a

[46] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine at September 23, 2014 at 2:00 pm.

local mosque. She also prays five times per day, declines to socialize in mixed-gender groups, and says that her religion is "very important" to her.

It is possible that Begum is just going through a phase and will outgrow her Muslim identity, however, I find that unlikely: with the exception of three people, all of my interview subjects who started wearing hijāb in college still wears hijāb, and everyone, with the exception of a handful of people who are currently living out of state to complete graduate, medical school, or law school degrees, has stayed in touch with the friends they made at the MSU. Finally, everyone except for two people said that Islam is just as important to them now as it was in college when the MSU was a regular part of their lives. The transformation in identity and deepening of faith that comes with membership in an MSU, therefore, seems to be long-lasting, if not permanent.

Begum's experiences are far from atypical, as every participant in my study talked about how they were forced to confront their own beliefs and practices through talking with Muslims from other cultural and sectarian backgrounds; doing so led them towards a more inclusive, expansive form of Islam that made room for other ways of practicing and believing and created the possibility of multiple, equally valid Islams to choose from and participate in. A vast majority of participants, moreover, did so within the context of Muslim Student Unions or Muslim Student Associations at colleges or universities.

Danish social scientist Garbi Schmidt, in his comparison of Swedish and American Muslims, frames MSUs as one of many organizations geared towards preserving the cohesiveness of a diasporic community originating from multiple ethnicities and sects, and suggests that MSUs are implicated in the "ethnicization" of American Muslims (Schmidt).

I found significant support for this hypothesis, given nearly all participants who were a part of an MSU in college referred to it, unprompted, as a place where they felt that they could "belong." This sense of "community" and "belonging" is among the reasons why sociologist Lori Peek frames post-9/11 increase in MSU membership as a side effect of the social exclusion Muslims experienced after 9/11, and refers to the MSU in terms of a "therapeutic community" which comforts Muslims and provides them with social solidarity and a place to feel at home (Peek "Reactions and Response" 290).[47]

The resulting social milieu, composed of people from a variety of ethnic and sectarian backgrounds, emphasizes "sameness" and allows Muslim Americans to draw from religious discourses, rather than sectarian, nationalist, or ethno-cultural discourses, as a source of authority and legitimation. Islamic values are therefore understood as universalist in orientation, sharing discursive foundations not only with Christianity, but also with "American" values in general. The positioning of madhāb as little more than a cultural marker and the treatment of inter-madhāhib opinions as equally valid offerings within a marketplace of competing ideas enable Muslim Americans draw from interpretations, practices, and sources of authority that are either associated with sects of Islam that differ from that of their parents, or alternatively, are not associated with a clearly defined or concrete expression of sectarian Islam at all.

Conclusion

[47] The following chapter will discuss Muslim student groups and their role in the Muslim community in more detail.

In a previous chapter, I discussed authority as "rest[ing]" to a certain degree on the voluntary submission of others, rather than on pure coercion (Blau 305.)" Furthermore, in the case of authority, people "a priori suspend their own judgment and accept that of an acknowledged superior without having to be convinced that his [or hers] is correct" (Blau 306) and the commands of an actor in authority are treated as binding by others absent the use of coercive force (Spencer 124).

However, as we have seen throughout the course of this chapter, while American Muslims "suspend their own judgment and accept that of an acknowledged superior without having to be convinced that his [or hers] is correct" they do so for *multiple* superiors, and for *multiple* sources of authority. In other words, they accept that the religious knowledge provided by acknowledged superiors is "correct;" it is just not necessarily more "correct" than their own judgment.

Therefore, through discussions with peers and more formalized lectures, American Muslims develop their own respective understandings of what religion is and what culture is. Furthermore, they develop a shared vocabulary, a common American Muslim culture, and a set of agreed-upon norms and values. By personalizing Islam and journeying through its various instantiations and expressions, U.S. Muslims are creating an accessible expression of Islam adapted to the practical realities of life in the U.S. Additionally, the process of sorting through various *madhāhib* in search of the "best" expression of Islam leads not to ignorance or disregard of culture, but rather to greater engagement with religious organizations and increased familiarity with Islamic traditions.

It should be stressed that the near-irrelevance of madhāb, as well as the reliance on a broadly constituted set of values, are not a reflection of American Muslims' ignorance about Islamicate culture and history. Rather, Muslims, like Americans from Protestant backgrounds, are aware of the rich history of Islamicate culture and history, but regard religious doctrine as functioning merely to provide a path to spiritual fulfillment and a personal relationship with God rather than as a set of mandatory directions.

Finally, it should also be clear that the tendencies towards discourses of the marketplace, as well as comfort with individualization, personalization, and tolerance are closely related to the structure and nature of American Muslim educational and spiritual institutions, as well as to Muslims' status as a minority in post-9/11 America. In the following chapter I consider Muslim American educational and spiritual institutions and their effects on American expressions of Islam before moving on to discuss Muslim American identity more specifically.

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Chapter V: Identity, Ethnicity, and Religiosity for U.S. Muslims: The Ethnicization of Islam

The preceding chapter discussed the trend towards individualization and personalization, arguing that U.S. Muslims feel empowered to select from various traditions and practices to create an Islam that articulates with their pre-existing notions of what it means to be Muslim, as well as with their the rhythm of their daily lives. This is not to say that Islam is solely an individual experience; rather, religion can play a strong role in the expression and articulation of group identity too, framing and structuring interaction in various cultural, institutional, and social contexts.

Chapter II also touched on the fact that there is a popular as well as scholarly understanding that religion is an important lens through which we look at the world, and through which we look at ourselves. But, as discussed in the Literature Review, religion did not always play such a prominent role in the ways in which scholars and others talked about identity. In the nineteenth century, ethnicity and race dominated discourses of identity and social difference in the American context (Ortner 64). It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that American sociologists and anthropologists became newly concerned with how religion could influence the assimilation and acculturation of minority groups into the majority culture, and investigated the ways in which religious discourse and religious belief complimented, or interfered with the embodiment of "American" identity for religious and cultural minorities.

Certainly my interviews underscored the degree to which many U.S. Muslims wrestle with their identities as Muslims and as Americans, with nearly every interview participant discussing the various ways in which "identity" acts in a dialectic process with their engagement

with Islamic texts and Muslim institutions. Their concerns about identity often sparked their process of researching Islamic texts and joining Muslim institutions, and participants frequently spoke in terms of identity when explaining why they participated in certain religious practices or celebrated certain religious holidays. Parents, furthermore, named identity preservation as a major reason for enrolling children in Islamic schools, and would sometimes cite "identity" as a reason for enjoining or forbidding certain after-school or social activities for their children.

In the following section I discuss how belief in Islam structures expressions of individual and group identity for U.S. Muslims from diverse cultural, sectarian, and ethnic backgrounds. I argue that the existence of shared beliefs and values has facilitated the shaping of U.S. Muslim identity into a recognizably "ethnic" identity while still providing room for the type of individualism I discussed in the previous chapter. Rather than hindering assimilation or acculturation, however, the existence of this ethnic identity allows U.S. Muslims to claim a place at the multicultural table. Furthermore, U.S. Muslims' processes of identification and identity-building draw from U.S. as well as Islamicate discourses and values, thus facilitating, rather than hindering, identification as Americans without undermining belief in Islam. My findings, therefore, destabilize research premised on the alleged tension between "American" and "Muslim" identities, as well as suggestions that belief in Islam hinders assimilation into American civic, social, and cultural life.

Identity and Ethnicity

It should first be noted that even though there is growing body of multidisciplinary work on the concept of ethnic identity, there is still no agreed-upon definition of an ethnic identity, nor what justifies a given set of practices, beliefs, or behaviors as constitutive of an ethnicity (Chandra 397)—somewhat surprising, given that so many anthropological and sociological inquiries rest on the premise that there are groups of people who share a common culture with each other, and have traits that distinguish themselves from non-members of that culture (Barth 9).

When anthropologists and sociologists have tried to formulate a working definition of ethnicity, they have generally explicitly or implicitly rejected Weber's definition of ethnicity as a "subjective belief in a common descent," whether or not there is evidence of blood relationship or kinship (Weber *Essays* 190). "Common descent," perceived or actual, has been more or less incidental to most recent definitions of ethnicity, which stress cultural characteristics over relational or biological characteristics.

For example, Narroll (quoted in Barth 10) defined an ethnic group as a population which:

1. biologically self-perpetuat[es]
2. shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity of cultural forms
3. makes up a field of communication and interaction
4. has a membership with identifies itself, and is identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

Barth, however, himself a foundational figure in the field of ethnic and racial studies, rejected this definition in part because culture-bearing, to him, was the *result* of ethnicity, rather than the *cause* thereof (Barth 11). Furthermore, the definition advanced by Narroll, he argued, was not terribly far from the proposition that race, culture, language, and society are co-

implicated and co-involved processes that together comprise a unit that "rejects or discriminates against others (Barth 10).

Therefore, Barth regarded culture-bearing as central to the classification of persons as an ethnic group, and furthermore, framed cultural forms not as inherent biological traits but as reflections of "external circumstances to which actors must accommodate themselves" (Barth 12)." Ethnic groups were best seen as social organizations whose members ascribed to themselves an ethnic "identity," which is determined in part by origin and background (Barth 14). For this reason, the critical focus for investigation for Barth becomes the "ethnic boundary" that defines the group as opposed to the cultural matter that it encloses (Barth 15).

Later anthropologists drew from this definition to interrogate the relationship between ethnicity and culture, arguing that ethnicity refers to the "consciousness of (ethnic) culture, to the use of culture, and at the same time, is part of culture (Vermeulen and Govers 3) Boundaries could therefore exist due to social structure, or alternatively as "boundaries of consciousness," as Cohen (1994) argued. Put in these terms, ethnicity becomes related to a study of ideology and cognitive systems, as well as subjective, symbolic, or emblematic differences between "us" and "them" (Vermeulen and Govers 3)

Alternatively, ethnicity has been defined as a subjective characteristic or mode of self-identification. For example, sociologist Richard D. Alba defines "ethnic identity" as the degree to which individuals "think of themselves and interpret their experience in terms of ethnic points of origin (Alba 3). Structural bases such as language use, kinship ties, and place of origin, to Alba, are less useful than subjective experience and self-identification. Ethnicity, then, is a product of

and means towards solidarity; it is also a principle of "social allocation" wherein individuals "are channeled into locations in the social structure based on their ethnic characteristics" (Alba 17).

The post-colonial theorist Stuart Hall, interested in discourse and its centrality to "identity," contends that identity is always a project that is "in process," and furthermore that this process is "constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with a natural closure of solidarity and allegiance based on this foundation" (Hall 16).

In spite of the recent focus on ethnicity and identity, however, "ethnic identity" (as opposed to just "ethnicity") as a category still suffers from conceptual problems, particularly given that the definition of "identity" has been overused to the point that Brubaker and Cooper (2000) lamented its overexposure and ultimate meaninglessness. Although "ethnicity" is used to refer to a group of people with a "shared identity" (Vermeulen and Grovers 5) the causal relationship between "identity" and "ethnicity" is not clear. In other words, is identity the product of ethnicity, or is ethnicity the product of identity?

Other problems result from the fact that religion is largely neglected as a category of analysis: in spite of the fact that ethnicity can rest on ideological, rather than biological commonalities, researchers have nonetheless tended to focus on ethnicities bound more or less by country of origin or race. Religion, however, can be an important nexus of connection between immigrants and non-immigrants alike. Glazer and Moynihan drew from the notion of "multiple melting pots," demonstrating through their 1970 ethnographic study of New York neighborhoods how ethnic character persisted throughout generations due to a combination of history, culture, skills, and family structure. This is not to say that they framed ethnic identity as

stable; rather, it acted in a dialectic relationship with American culture to reform and reconstitute itself in successive generations as each group became more "American." Religious identity, they suggested, would eventually overtake ethnic identity as members of the groups under consideration--"negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish," shed their respective markers of ethnicity (though not necessarily at the same pace) and adopted an "American" identity.

Philip Kayal meanwhile, in his 1973 study of Syrian Catholics, argued that attending Latin Catholic churches, rather than Syrian Catholic churches, reflected a continuation of Syrian religiosity rather than a discontinuation of it; Syrians performed the same "rites," oftentimes, but within the context of a Latin Catholic congregational experience. Similarly, Kuo and Lin, in their study of Chinese Americans in Washington D.C., theorized that organized church activities increased opportunities for interaction between immigrants and the dominant ethnic groups.

Decades later, Sociologist Prema Kurien argued in her 1998 monograph that religiosity and affiliation with religio-cultural institutions allows immigrants from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds to cultivate a cohesive group identity based on a shared religious background and identity. Instead of preventing or stunting assimilation, she says, Hindu institutions allow second generation Indians with varying traditions and customs to actively create and experiment with the performance of an American Hindu identity in which they can all share. Engagement with Hindu customs and cultural events lubricates, rather than hinders, the transition to "American" identity by allowing second generation immigrants to "assert pride in their Hindu Indian heritage [as a way] of claiming a position for themselves at the American multicultural table" (Kurien 62).

Kurien's work additionally demonstrates that the creation and performance of a "recast

and reformulated" Hindu identity allows Indian immigrants to transition from "immigrants" to "ethnics" and develop a "Hindu American community and identity" (Kurien 37). This new identity pulls from Hindu traditions and cultural rituals, but does not reflect the diversity and variety of the Hindu experience. Instead, it is a reinvention of Hinduism that enables second generation Indians, many of whom do not speak Sanskrit or even Hindu, the ability to understand as well as participate in the "beingness" of Indian American culture and identity.

Kurien, of course, is drawing from a variation of the assimilationist model proposed by Will Herberg, a prominent sociologist and expert on American Jewish studies. Herberg's now-classic 1955 monograph argued that Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism were constitutive of a triple melting pot. The fact that there was a so-called "religious revival," he argued, furthermore indicated a lack of identity among second or third generation Americans who on one hand did not have the social and linguistic skills to return to their grandparents' homes but on the other didn't feel at "home" in the American mainstream. Members of these groups therefore selected elements of their grandparents' identities as their own to contextualize their own identities as individuals and as members of larger subgroups in the United States.

Jocelyn Cesari, a researcher who has published several influential books and articles on Islam in Europe, has expressed doubts regarding the applicability of Herberg's or Glazer and Moynihan's sociological model to contemporary diasporic Muslim communities in North America or Europe, writing:

> In the case of U.S. Muslims, ethnic and cultural diversity has not actually facilitated the dissolution of ethnic boundaries in favor of a "Muslim melting pot." According to ethnographic studies on Muslim immigrants, primary relationships, particularly marriages, have tended to remain within the limits of the ethnic group. Insofar as the majority of Muslim immigrants are part of the post-1965 immigration wave, it seems

> probable [note]that ethnicity will continue to play a role in the participation of recent [note] immigrants in U.S. society. New research, therefore, advocates a pluralist rather than an assimilationist approach to American society to account for the ways in which immigrants maintain or reinvent ethnic and cultural identities even as they navigate their new cultural context (Cesari 156).

I disagree, however, with her analysis: participants in my study are clearly engaging in a process similar to the one described first by Herberg and later developed by Kurien, crafting an "ethnic" identity that acknowledges the variety of Islam and Islam-related culture and ritual that simultaneously does not necessarily present in a way that reflects this diversity. Sectarian and cultural variations in practice are set aside as Muslim Americans select and modify various local practices in pursuit of an "authentic" and cohesive expression of Islam open to all Muslim Americans.

The reasons for this tendency lie in practical realities of practicing, learning, and teaching Islam in diaspora: attendees of a Muslim "Sunday school" class, Islamic private school, Muslim Student Union, mosque, or lecture will rarely be from the same religio-cultural, sectarian, or ethnic background, leading teachers, lecturers, Imams, and scholars to draw from uncontroversial or shared aspects of belief: be nice to people. Be modest. Donate to charity. Don't eat pork or drink alcohol. Respect your parents. The process wherein individuals craft an "authentic" Muslim identity is therefore shaped to a large degree by social structures.

Second, as discussed in the previous chapter, Muslim Americans overwhelmingly engage in a combination of self-supervised research and deference to tradition, leading to multiple possibilities for the "correct" interpretation of Islam. The result is not only a range of possible expressions of Islam, but also a universalist expression of Islamic identity and culture that minimizes the memory of historical ruptures between various sects and glosses over (or ignores)

sectarian differences. Like the Hindu Americans in Prema Kurien's ethnographic study, many Muslim immigrants' religious practices are dismissed as "cultural" rather than "Islamic," or alternatively, are accepted as "Islamic" and modified slightly before becoming widely adopted by second generation American Muslims.

Third, Jocelyn Cesari has pointed out that there is little intermarriage between Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds. However, among my interview participants, intermarriage was not uncommon. Approximately a third of my participants were married at the time of our interview, and of these, a substantial portion were married to someone whose parents were not born in the same country as his or her own parents.[48]

Additionally, six people I interviewed were either the spouse of a convert, or a married convert him/herself. In all cases, the two spouses were from different ethnic groups. In one case, an Arab American had married a Mexican woman who converted to Islam before they met, in another, an Egyptian woman had married a Asian American man who converted after meeting her, and in yet another, an Asian American convert had married an Egyptian man two years after her conversion. I also interviewed two Muslim men, one self-identifying as Afghan and one as Syrian, who had married self-described "white" women who did not convert to Islam and had no plans to do so (although to be fair, the Afghan American man described his wife's conversion as a "constant and ongoing negotiation," so it is possible that she may eventually convert.)

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[48] To be sure, it is difficult to assess the significance of this statistic. As aforementioned, a disproportionate number of interview participants were South Asians of Indian or Pakistani descent. As a result, many participants weren't sure if their parents had been born in India or Pakistan, or alternatively, said that their parents were born in a place that we now refer to as Pakistan but was part of India at the time of their parents' birth.

Furthermore, the concept of "identity," as it is subjectively appreciated and wielded by self-described Muslim Americans, is constructed through a combination of symbolic, structural, and discursive means and articulated through reliance on two different, but not unrelated, sets of characteristics: that of being "Muslim" and that of being "American." The fact that Muslim Americans clearly draw from American as well as Muslim symbols and discourses in the process of identity-formation has led many researches to describe American Muslim identity as necessarily fractured, in tension, or existing in a permanent state of self-contradiction.

Sirin and Fine, examining the impacts of post-9/11 xenophobia on the adolescent development, have argued that Muslim Americans live in "on the hyphen," with identities that are "both joined and separated, by history, the present socio-political climate, geography, biography, longings, and loss" (Sirin and Fine 152). Marcia Hermansen describes North American Sufis as having a "hybrid" identity based on religious, mystical and material foundations; Mishra and Shirazi discuss "performance" of "hybrid identities in the post-9/11 American context" in their piece on Muslim women in Ohio and Texas, and sociologist Nina Asher positions South Asian and Muslim youths in post 9/11 New York as "negotiating a range of identities as hyphenated Americans."

These conclusions are not without controversy: anthropologist Gabriele Marranci has criticized research that positions Muslim identity as hyphened or fractured, arguing that these characterizations are based on "implicit or explicit social identity theories or culturalist analysis, [therefore] missing the vital relationship between the autobiographical self, identity, and identity acts" (Marranci 99). He instead proposes a model wherein "identity is the result of the delicately shaped machinery of our imagination helping to maintain a coherent autobiographical

self" (Marranci 100) and affirm as a result that Muslims are not "different from any other human being." In other words, identity relies on a feeling, as well as the process and formation of "beingness" alongside "identity acts." In starting from this point of departure, Marranci concludes, we can successfully observe the network of social interactions under consideration and the societal structures in which they are embedded; otherwise, we deny Muslim Americans the existence of a "coherence" of "self" (Marranci 100).

Herbert Gans argued in a 1994 article that American Jewish consumption of religious symbols, apart from the regular participation in religious services or religious organizations, was a form of "symbolic religiosity" not unlike "symbolic ethnicity." Although religious and ethnic acculturation proceded in different ways, "symbolic religiosity," which is most prevalent in the children of immigrants, could be seen as part of the acculturative process. [49] In this framing, the mobilization of religious symbols stems less from shared ideologies than from a desire to demarcate insiders from outsiders.

To be sure, interview participants referred repeatedly to "identity" when discussing their desire to grow a beard, for example, or wear a veil. The decision to do so, therefore, can be seen by outsiders as a desire to mark the boundaries of the Muslim community and differentiate those who do and do not belong. That said, the interview participants themselves experienced the desire to express their identities as stemming from a combination of identity expression and religious conviction, rather than solely a product of religious conviction.

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[49] For a complete discussion of this concept, see: Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity: Towards a Comparative Ethnic and Religious Tradition," *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 4: 57-592.

The post-colonial theorist and philosopher Homi Babha has argued that ethno-cultural minorities must necessarily live in a "third space," constructing their culture and identity through a combination of religious, ethno-cultural, and "American" symbols to produce new forms of identity articulation and destabilizing the presumed homogeny of American cultural norms. This articulation is creative and multivalent as Muslim Americans find ways to honor their beliefs as Muslims on one hand and their identity as Americans on the other.

In the following section I discuss how Muslim Americans navigate this "third space" to find an identity that is simultaneously Muslim and American.

Muslim American Identity: Islamicization, Americanization, Participation Without Celebration

Often, my interview participants would mobilize American symbols or values to legitimate or justify instances of activism or expressions of Muslim identity. One Arab American woman active in her University's MSA, for example, talked about free classes in civil liberties and non-violent resistance that the MSA offered to current and former members of MSA West. A Persian American man in law school said that his interest in law school and his participation in his University's MSA similarly stemmed from his concerns with post-September violations of Muslim Americans' civil liberties.

Muslim American institutions, moreover, rely heavily on explicitly American texts, symbols, and discourses as sources of legitimacy. For example, if you walk into the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) offices in Anaheim, California, you will face a large, framed copy of the Constitution next to a number of framed verses from the Qur'an. If you walk down

the hall, you will pass shelves of books and pamphlets meant to educate people about the Quran and Islam, as well as books on civil liberties. If you are lucky enough to get a coffee mug as a departing gift, you will notice that the coffee mug is decorated with an Islamicate decorative logo alongside the words "I crave coffee and civil liberties."

> According to the official website, CAIR's core principles, furthermore, are as follows:
> 1. CAIR supports free enterprise, freedom of religion and freedom of expression.
> 2. CAIR is committed to protecting the civil rights of all Americans, regardless of faith.
> 3. CAIR supports domestic policies that promote civil rights, diversity and freedom of religion.
> 4. CAIR opposes domestic policies that limit civil rights, permit racial, ethnic or religious profiling, infringe on due process, or that prevent Muslims and others from participating fully in American civic life.
> 5. CAIR is a natural ally of groups, religious or secular, that advocate justice and human rights in America and around the world.
> 6. CAIR supports foreign policies that help create free and equitable trade, encourage human rights and promote representative government based on socio-economic justice.
> 7. CAIR believes the active practice of Islam strengthens the social and religious fabric of our nation.
> 8. CAIR condemns all acts of violence against civilians by any individual, group or state.
> 9. CAIR advocates dialogue between faith communities both in America and worldwide.
> 10. CAIR supports equal and complementary rights and responsibilities for men and women.[50]

Islamic values, in other words, are seen as complimenting, rather than competing with, American values like "free enterprise, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression," "free and equitable trade," and "representative government."

The Islamic Circle of North America, a grassroots umbrella organization which "seeks to propagate Islam and to establish the Islamic way of life among American Muslims" (Esposito 146), similarly relies on a mix of American and Islamic discourses, symbols, and texts as sources of legitimacy and authority. For example, on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in 2013, the Islamic

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[50] The next chapter will address gender and Muslim American authentic identity.

Circle of North America featured a drawing of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. on its front page, and an article inviting the American Muslim community to emulate Dr. King's methods of peaceful engagement to overcome hate and intolerance.

This individual and institutional reliance on American and Muslim discourses, symbols, and sources of authority suggests that Muslim Americans are not identifying with two identities at once--"Muslim" and "American." Rather, they are identifying with a specific type of American identity that draws from Islamic discourses to present as a *Muslim* American identity. "Muslim American" identity, therefore, *is a cohesive identity,* rather than the existence of two competing identities ("Muslim" and "American") that occur at the same time. It is founded upon discourse that mobilizes Muslim as well as American symbols, and is based on a foundation of experiences, origins, and values that are shared by Muslim Americans, as opposed to the global Muslim community or Americans in general.

Another example of this tendency can be seen in Muslim American approaches to American holidays with religious origins. Participants in my study generally had one of four different approaches to the celebration of non-Muslim cultural or religious holidays: participation without celebration, "Christmasization" of Eid rituals, "Islamification" of Christmas rituals, or (most infrequently) complete withdrawal.

One woman I interviewed, a second generation Indian American who converted from Hinduism to Islam, preferred the "participation without celebration" strategy when encountering cultural or religious holidays that fell outside the scope of Islam.

> It's interesting: my husband and I were the fir—were both (like) the first generation in our family[ies] to be born and raised in America. So, our parents—well, let's say, my parents were very concerned about me assimilating, so they would make sure that—like,

> we celebrated Christmas and Easter, and all that stuff, 'cuz they didn't want me to feel left out...and, my husband's family was almost the opposite, in that they would take the kids out of school on those days so that they don't feel left out or exposed. So, the way we do it with our daughter is, we expose her to everything. And we say, "This is everything and you can (sort of) participate without—without (like) celebrating it." Like in school there's some—just like there might be a Chinese New Year activity or some other activity. Like—you do the activity, but that's not what our family does. So [my daughter] knows that [she] can learn about and participate with others but our traditions are different. So, we make sure that she knows that and we try to make that really, really fun for her.[51]

Amida, a 27-year-old second generation American married to another second generation American, approached the holiday with a similar mindest, "participating in" but not "celebrating" by "taking the perks" associated with the holiday spirit:

> [My husband and I] don't do anything for Christmas but I love the way everywhere you go it smells so good and all the decorations and the music. People find that annoying but I love it and I always tell my friends---it's probably because it's not my holiday--but I feel like I just take all the perks of it but I don't have to deal with the crap of like actually buying the gifts and all the stress and the money and yeah. But I'm not going to lie I love that time of the year![52]

Alternatively, Muslim Americans may decide to "Americanize" or "Christmasize" their own holidays by setting up Ramadan gift exchanges and decorating the house with paper ornaments or strings of holiday lights. Suhaib Webb, popular Muslim American Imam with an award winning website and tens of thousands of Twitter followers, posted an article on December 25, 2010, expressing concern that Muslims were "forgetting their identities" by celebrating Christmas. Readers were advised to instead make Eid a "really cool and desirable event," with "banners, lights, candies, and the works" (Ederer)

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[51] Excerpted from an interview conducted over video chat on September 29, 2013, at 8:30 pm.

[52] Excerpted from an inteview conducted over video chat on September 24, 2013, at 10:30 am

One 25-year-old unmarried, Arab American woman similarly celebrates the holiday with lights, a tree, and a huge family gathering:

> ....What we do on Eid is that we will have my grandma [who is not Muslim] come over in the morning and we have a treasure hunt in the house and we make it into something fun and we decorate the house and stuff, doing the Christmas tree. We have lights on our window and stuff like that. And my grandma will bring presents over the night before. And so we're trying to make it a really fun thing for the little kids. And my grandma is completely cool with us making Eid the big thing and Christmas is [a smaller event for her immediate family.[53]

Another married woman made a "countdown to Eid" calendar modeled after an Advent calendar so her son could have fun counting down the days until Eid, and another family said they "really stressed Eid,"[54] giving their children wrapped presents and making decorations together so the kids wouldn't feel left out when their Christian and Jewish friends got presents for Christmas and Hannukah.

Alternatively, some families choose to "Islamify" Christmas, positioning it as a time to be with family, reflect on one's blessings, and engage in charitable acts. Families pursuing this option might decorate a palm tree with Christmas lights, wrap presents to give away during Eid, or have a family dinner. Another young woman said she liked Christmas for two reasons: 1) there are lots of peppermint-flavored drinks and desserts available, and 2) everyone is "happy" and there is an emphasis on charity that resonates with her values as a Muslim.[55]

Muslim Americans, in other words, are producing new articulations of being Muslim and with it, new articulations of being American. Rather than identifying as "Muslim (not

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[53] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on November 16, 2013, at 9:30 a.m.

[54] Excerpted from an interview conducted over video chat at 10 am on November 13, 2013.

[55] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine at September 23, 2014 at 2:00 pm.

American)" they are identifying with a specific type of American identity founded upon discourse that mobilizes Muslim as well as American symbols, and is based on a foundation of experiences, origins, and values that are shared by Muslim Americans, as opposed to the global Muslim community or Americans in general.

That said, some Muslim Americans choose the option of "withdrawal," wherein they completely ignore or decline to mark the passing of a non-Muslim holiday. This option, while seldom invoked, was most frequently used on Halloween, given that many mothers I spoke to expressed concern about the "Satanic" origins of the holiday as well as the sexualized costumes available to young girls.

I asked one woman, an Arab American mother of two, how she handled the holidays. I told her about the other families I'd spoken to--the ones that start playing Christmas music on Black Friday, and decorate the palm tree with holiday lights. Did her family make any of these compromises, or enjoy similar ways of engaging with Christmas? "No way," she said. "Not in my house." There were no Christmas carols because she didn't believe in listening to music, and no decorating palm trees with holiday lights because this was *shirk.* But what about her kids feeling left out of what all the other kids are doing, I asked? They were in Islamic schools, so all their friends were Muslim.[56]

Another woman, a Pakistani American wife and mother I will refer to as Fatema, spoke to me about an argument that she'd had with her mother-in-law about her son's participation in a school costume party. Her mother-in-law kept reminding her that it had its origins in Satanic rites and rituals. "Don't you think I know that?" Fatema had replied. This was the first year that her

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[56] Excerpted from an interview conducted over video chat on December 19, 2013, at 2:30 pm.

son was old enough to voice an opinion, and he had made it very, very clear that wanted to attend this costume party. It was two weeks until Halloween and Fatema still hadn't decided what she was going to do: let him wear a costume to school so he could be like all the other kids (but also possibly honor Satan and irritate her mother in law) or pull him out of school that day (saving him from Satan and her from her mother in law but exposing her son to the ire of the other kids)? Next year she would send him to an Islamic school, she said, so she wouldn't have to deal with it. But this year she would have to figure something out. [57]

"And Then September 11 Happened"

My research shows support for these assertions that public identification with Islam is a highly gendered and highly generational experience, with age in particular emerging as highly predictive of one's reaction to September 11 and post-September 11 Islamophobia.[58] A majority of participants between the age of 25 and 35 responded to September 11 by increasing visible markers of Muslim identity (such as putting on a headscarf or growing a beard) and engaging with religious institutions such as mosques, study circles, or youth groups on with increased frequency. Their parents, however, nearly all of whom were first generation Americans, often chose to scale back their religious identities while simultaneously engaging in selective displays of "American" identity (i.e. wearing an American flag pin.)

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[57] Excerpted from an interview conducted over video chat on October 8 2013 at 8:30 pm.

[58] Gender will be discussed in the following chapter.

Many other participants who were high school or college-aged on September 11, 2001 wanted to express their Muslim identities through growing a beard or wearing a hijāb, however, were prevented from doing so as their parents forced or strongly encouraged them to shave their beards, stop wearing hijāb, or shed visible markers of identity out of fear for their safety.

This comment from one man, a 34-year-old Indian Muslim, is typical:

> *Him:* So then September 11 happened my first semester [at college.] I used to live at home because my parents lived [near campus] and my mom wouldn't let me leave the house until I shaved and dressed appropriately.
> *Me:* Were you resistant to that?
> *Him:* Yeah, I was. And I had taken on a very strict attitude [about the correct interpretation of Islam]. So I was just very upset with her. And I did it because she wouldn't let me leave and go to class. But when I got there, everyone was kind of shocked because they've gotten used to me looking a certain way...People didn't recognize me. And then a lot of stuff happened on campus – vigils and meetings and speakers and all sorts of stuff. Then one of the people that was basically the president of the MSA and I became really good friends at that time and I helped out a lot. The MSA was very small. It was just like basically him, me, and a couple other people.
> *Me:* Did you grow your beard out again after the initial fear---
> *Him:* No. I didn't for some time because my mother wouldn't let me. She was just kind of like, "Better not do that for a while." [59]

This experience is highly representative of other participants in his age group. One 34-year-old woman, for example, was getting dressed for school on the morning of September 12 and discovered that her mother had hidden all of her headscarves. She says she still hasn't gotten them back.[60] Another participant said that her friends would leave for school in the morning with scarves and long skirts tucked into their backpacks. They would change into them on the way to school and take them off on the way home, hoping to avoid conflict with their parents.

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[59] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine at 12:00 pm on September 25, 2013

[60] Excerpted from an interview conducted on video chat at 11:00 am on November 13. 2013

Can their parents' fear be traced to the fact that they are new Americans, and the fact that they grew up in South Asian and Arab countries where there are few legal protections for difference or dissent? Would the parents have reacted differently if they were from countries that had a strong tradition of protecting minority expressions of religion or culture? What if the parents had been second generation Americans, confident in their knowledge of harassment laws and conditioned to believe that some measure of justice was available to hate crime victims? Without more study, it is difficult to say.

However, it is worth noting that their children, who were of various ethno-linguistic and sectarian backgrounds, had little in common other than growing up Muslim in post-9/11 America. Their desire to wear visible markers of Muslim (rather than Arab, South Asian, or Central identity in the months after 9/11) sometimes for the first time in their lives, is therefore difficult to trace to their membership in their respective ethnic communities or their relative rootedness in ethnic enclaves.

Age is also a strong predictor for whether or not an interview subject would mention themes related to harassment, Islamphobia, or bullying, with participants who were in elementary school or high school on September 11, 2001, frequently telling stories about experiences with harassment and how it affected their relationship with Islam. One 22-year-old Arab American man, for example, said that he was the only Muslim in his elementary school, and after 9/11, claimed that the other kids relentlessly called him a terrorist, beat him up, and generally made his life so miserable that his parents decided to pull him out of school and homeschool him. Another young told me about a time when a man yelled at her sister in front of

her children at a Souplantation in the suburbs and called her a terrorist.[61] Sadly, these stories were not uncommon, and not limited solely to interview participants who chose to "advertise" their Muslim identities by wearing headscarves in the case of women or beards in the case of men. Participants older than 24 also frequently reported that before September 11, no one really knew what Muslims were, leading to opportunities for productive dialogue and a relatively uncomplicated existence on the other. For example, the woman whose sister had been accosted at the Souplantation started wearing hijab in the 1990s. At the time, she said, most people thought she was wearing "this weird thing on her head" because she had cancer. No one called her a terrorist or told her to "go back to her country" because no one really knew what the headscarf meant or what it said about who she was.[62] Another woman, looking back on what life was like before September 11, said "before, no one knew anything about Muslims so there was an opportunity for education. Now everyone thinks they know everything. There's no space left for more information."[63]

Age also did not influence how often participants experienced general feelings of alienation or difference, with many participants specifically remembering and describing moments where their identities as Muslims and as Others were made salient. For example, Cara, the aforementioned Asian American convert to Islam, said that professors often assume that she is not American by virtue of the fact that she wears hijāb:

> ....A professor said 'you're so lucky that like when professors see you, they you have you know like so much outside knowledge of the world, outside of the U.S.' and I had to

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[61] Excerpted from an interview conducted via video chat at 10:00 am on November 10, 2013

[62] Excerpted from an interview conducted via video chat at 10:00 am on November 10, 2013

[63] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Anaheim at 10:30 am September 12, 2012.

> explain to her that like, I grew up in Orange County. I left the United States once, and I went to Tijuana. And just like the usual things that like a hijābi encounters regularly that people just assume that you're not American, they assume that you're not an international student and they're like surprised when you can speak English without an accent.[64]

One Arab American in his mid-twenties spoke with me over Skype not long after moving from from Southern California to Michigan to attend graduate school. He was living near a part of Michigan with a large and vibrant Arab Muslim community. While he hadn't experienced outright harassment since moving, he did notice that people engaged with him as though he was "Muslim," rather than "Muslim American" or just "American."

> After 9/11 people are just more aware of like Islam, Muslims and they associate images and faces with what it means to be Muslim, like I have that kind of face, skin color... And so I think people in Michigan at least can identify me as Muslim. And it's frustrating because I'm not like the "super-Muslim" type person any more, but I wish you could sometimes tell people, "I also lose sleep at night over America's education system. It's not just you," but somehow that's lost on people.[65]

Another Syrian American graduate student complained that her professors would repeatedly ask her questions about curricula in the Middle East, or how the system of education is different in Syria. "I don't know," she would always respond. "I'm from San Diego."

Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists have theorized that exposure to hostility, alienation, and discrimination can have serious, or at least significant, impacts on group and individual identity. Rubén Rumbaut, a Cuban American sociologist and widely cited expert on immigration and assimilation, has argued that constant harassment of cultural "Others" can lead ethnic identity to "thicken," hardening group consciousness, erecting boundaries between "us"

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[64] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine on September 30, 2013, at 6 pm.

[65] Excerpted from an interview conducted over video chat at 11:30 am on September 11, 2013

and "them," and promoting ethnic group solidarity as well as political mobilization (Rumbaut 16). Social psychologists Jetten et al additionally suggest in a 2001 paper that members of a group whose identity is under siege will come to value their ingroup identification (in this case, that of being "Muslim") more than their outgroup identification (that of being "American.")

In a 2005 study, sociologist Lori Peek analyzed the creation, development, and enactment of religious identity among Muslim American students in New York shortly after 9/11. Peek identified three stages of religious identity development, which she termed "religion as ascribed identity," "religion as chosen identity," and "religion as declared identity". As the participants moved through these stages, their self-reported devotion to Islam became more intense, their religious practice increased, and their identification as Muslims was strengthened.

I found a significant amount of support for the model she proposes, with participants moving in various stages of involvement with religious expression and practice as they came to terms with their identities as Muslims and as Americans. A vast majority of participants, furthermore, reported that they didn't fully embrace Islam, and with it, their identity as Muslims, until adulthood. This embrace usually occurred after a period of rebellion or self-discovery during high school or early in college. Identification with Islam and knowledge about Islam co-developed, with participants engaging in self-authorized, self-motivated, studies of Islam and Islamic texts as their identification with Islam was strengthened.

With the exception of converts, nearly all participants reported participating in identity-building activities as children, attending Sunday School with other Muslim children to learn Islamic history and basic Arabic, or socializing with Muslim children at events held at local mosques or cultural centers. Others went to private Islamic schools like the Orange Crescent or

Horizons, which serves students and their families from Kindergarten through 6th grade, and some did all three: Islamic school during the week, Sunday School over the weekend, and youth group activities on an intermittent basis.

The point of these activities was to not only to educate children in the basics of Islam and familiarize themselves Islamic history, values, and discourse, but also to strengthen their attachment to Islam and to the Muslim community, and provide them with a group of Muslim peers that they could socialize with and relate to.

In rare cases, participants felt a strong, self-generated connection with Islam while they participated in these kinds of early childhood activities. For example, one woman, a 26-year-old Egyptian currently in graduate school, described her relationship with Islam as follows:

> Growing up I was always religious. I always practiced my religion, I stayed away from the things that are prohibited in my religion and I think in college -- and also I had a lot of Muslim friends growing up. So for me it was very strong and like I identified strongly with my religion.[66]

She also attended activities at the mosque and prayed regularly. But she is the exception. Nearly every other participant accepted that they had to attend Sunday school and engage in various other cultural or religious celebrations simply because their parents told them to rather than because they themselves identified as devout Muslims. The vast majority reported no larger effort to ask questions about *why* they had to do these things, or what they meant. Religious and cultural events were regarded less as opportunities for spiritual development than as venues for meeting and interacting with other in a setting where they didn't have to worry about subtle or overt accusations of racism.

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[66] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles at 12:30 pm on November 15. 2013.

Participants had similar attitudes towards prayer, with the majority explaining that as children and young teenagers, they did pray as instructed, but did so simply because it was something they were *supposed* to do. In other words, prayer was a box to check alongside a series of other boxes: homework done? Check. Clothes ready for school tomorrow? Check. Said my prayers? Check. Prayer was thus not an opportunity to connect with God, but rather a task that had to be completed at various points throughout the day because it was something that a person was "supposed" to do if he were Muslim.

Into middle school and much of high school, then, participants identified with Islam in that they knew that they were "Muslims" and their parents were "Muslim," and that being "Muslim" meant that they did not eat bacon and so on; they did not yet, however, view Islam as a lens through which to view the world, as a discursive framework for conceiving of themselves, or as a locus of attachment to the global Muslim community.

Previously, we heard from Begum, who had described her relationship with Islam during high school in the following terms:

> When I was in high school, I was the least religious person in my family. The most I would do was pray. I didn't wear hijab. I did anything basic—what you had to do to be classified as Muslim. I didn't have the drive like I do now. I wouldn't be like, 'OK, I'm going to go to mosque and listen.' I wouldn't sit and read the Quran every single night. I was like, 'Whatever, I have my life.' In high school I was very different from my family.[67]

A 38-year-old Afghan American man who I will call Ahmad spoke of his relationship to Islam during high school in a similar fashion. Like Begum, he was nominally Muslim. He prayed when he was supposed to, abstained from eating pork as he was supposed to, and attended

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[67] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine at September 23, 2014 at 2:00 pm.

religio-cultural events when he was supposed to. He did this because he was "Muslim," but he was only "Muslim" because being "Muslim" was something bequeathed to him by his parents, like his hair color or eye color:

> So for me going through high school, religion wasn't really a philosophical, or theological thing that I had. It was just part of like my identity per se. I was sort of like balancing that between wanting to go out partying, go out with girls and stuff, and religion.[68]

Ahmad was Muslim, then, in that is was the identity *ascribed* to him by virtue of his time and place of birth rather than because it was a conscious choice about how to interact with and view the world. When he went to college, however, something changed:

> So I finally got out of the house. I'm independent. I'm with my friends. Supposedly I'm doing all the things that they're supposed to make me happy. I'm going out. I'm going clubbing almost every other day. I'm hanging out with my friends. I'm going out with girls...I'm doing all the things that were supposed to be making me happy. But there was nothing, I felt empty inside...[I met a woman and moved in with her, but after we broke up] all of a sudden I'm also back to being empty. I lose that one person... So now I start praying regularly. I'm like, "Okay I'm going to give this religion a chance." So I started praying 5 times a day. I said I'm going to do it for 40 days; I'm not going to miss a prayer. Then I start feeling very, very good.[69]

Begum described her college experience in similar terms:

> When I was in high school, I felt I was supposed to rebel, supposed to be different. When I came to college and met the people I met here, I got more into it—like when I met my friends, that sparked my interest, and when I myself started learning it, I was like, 'OK, this is actually pretty cool!'

"Choosing Islam," for Begum as well as for Ahmad, was a process rather than a moment. For Ahmad, it coincided with the departure of a loved one and added meaning and structure to his life. For Begum, it occurred as she began willingly participating in daily rituals, adhering to

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[68] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on May 28, 2013, at 4 pm.

[69] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on May 28, 2013, at 4 pm.

its values, and regarding herself as a member of the global Muslim community. She began attending and eventually arranging extracurricular seminars on Islam and Islamic texts, and joined a few Muslim youth groups. Now, she prays five times per day, declines to socialize in mixed-gender groups, and says that her religion is "very important" to her.

Declaration of identity for Ahmad and Begum also involved adopting new ways of dress and grooming. In Begum's case, she decided to wear hijab, a transition, she said, that "wasn't that bad:"

> My family and the people I'm friends with--they all wear hijab. All my friends at school wear hijab...The hijab is a very bold statement. You are walking talking Islam. People are going to come up and ask you questions and expect certain behaviors.

Both Begum and Ahmed, like many participants in my study, spoke of Muslim youth groups, Muslim Student Unions and Associations, and Muslim cultural organizations as the only place they felt they "belonged," and reported significant changes to their belief systems, outward appearance, and values as a result of their experiences in Muslim student groups and organizations.

It should be mentioned that I never set out to study identity or post-9/11 Islamophobia. I never asked about them, and never said the words "September 11," "bullying," "alienation," "identity," or "Islamophobia." However, participants brought them up anyway, and did so with such frequency that it seemed impossible to ignore. While many American Muslims are clearly grappling with issues of belongingness and identification, however, their "ingroup" identification as Muslims does not necessarily mean that Muslim Americans feel less American, or feel less affinity with American values and ideals.

The adoption of "Muslim garb" by interview participants, furthermore, correlated in no way to the expression of "conservative," or "anti-American" values, however defined. Ahmed, who had a chest-length beard and wore a thawb, referred several times to his wife as his "partner," for example, expressing frustration with younger male friends who acted as their wives' or girlfriends' self-appointed "mentors." "It's like, she's not a little kid, is what I tell them," he said. "She's your partner."

The day after I interviewed Ahmed, however, I interviewed another student, this one a Pakistani American, who arrived at the interview wearing flip-flops and board shorts. He had studied in Pakistan to become hafiz,[70] did not believe in listening to music, and felt uncomfortable praying behind a Shi'a for fear that God would not accept his prayers. In other words, I found no correlation between misogynist, archaic, or xenophobic attitudes and "Islamic garb," and the adoption of Muslim markers of identity had little or no bearing on a given participant's identification as American.

That said, there were three interview participants who indicated (either explicitly or implicitly) that identification with Islam was incompatible with or took precedence over identification as an American.

One interview participant who I will call "Tara" had an Arab American, Muslim father and a Caucasian American mother who had eventually chosen to convert to Islam. Tara spoke to me about her experiences with September 11 in the following terms:[71]

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[70] A "hafiz" is a person who can recite the entirety of the Qur'ān from memory

[71] Excerpted from an interview conducted at 9:30 am on September 16, 2013

> *Tara:* Two months after I made the decision to start hijab, September 11 happened. I remember sitting at home watching the news and just realizing, "Oh, my God, this is going to be really tough." And so I was still going to Islamic school at that time but that year we couldn't go to school on time because there were so many bomb threats to the masjid. And so we couldn't go to school for like three weeks, and we knew why....Then when we actually started going to school, there were a bunch of people standing in front of the mosque with signs.
> *Me*: I'm sorry you had to go through that.
> *Tara*: No, they were good signs--they were Americans and they were protesting against the fact that there had been so many bomb threats to the school and to the mosque...A "you can't blame Muslims" type of thing. And they were actually standing there guarding the school. It was really awesome and it was something that showed me, "Okay. Not everyone hates you." But it was also scary just to go to school and know that you had all these bomb threats and there are people outside guarding our school.

Tara was born in this country. She was also raised in this country by her father, a first generation American of Arab origin, and her mother, an Caucasian American from the Midwest who was raised Catholic and eventually converted to Islam. Nonetheless, Tara refers to the people standing outside her school as "Americans," implying that this is a useful marker of identification. There is no reason, of course, why it should be given that her school was in a Southern California bedroom community, surrounded by businesses presumably run by Americans and near tract housing presumably occupied by Americans.

The school itself is an accredited Muslim private school serving Kindergarten through sixth graders, staffed by Muslims who teach an English language curriculum that sufficiently prepares students to enter public, American middle schools upon completion of sixth grade. There is no reason, in other words, to assume that foreigners regularly descended upon her school or neighborhood or that her school was specifically devoted to serving foreigners. Her use of the word "American," therefore, to describe the people who assembled in front of it, betrays

ongoing alienation from American identity, and a feeling of separateness from the American community in general.

Another woman referred to "Americans" in a way that similarly belied her self-identification as somehow not American: Fatema, the Pakistani American wife and mother we heard from above, described her non-Muslim neighbors as "American" in the aforementioned discussion about whether or not it was acceptable to celebrate Halloween with her children. "Our neighbors are American, so of course they celebrate Halloween." She then corrected herself: "Of course, we're American too. But you know what I mean."[72]

Finally, one married Arab American who moved from Egypt to the U.S. at the age of 2 reflected on her experience wearing hijāb and said that she had rarely encountered problems or harassment. She sourced this to her confidence in her identity, explaining "Americans like it when you're confident, when you know who you are. They respond well to that." [73]

These three women, however, are outliers; no one else referred to non-Muslim Americans as "Americans" or to themselves in terms that indicated feelings of separateness from American culture or values. Instead, they constantly affirmed their identification as Americans and their comfort with "mainstream" American society, politics, and culture. One woman who had recently returned from a six-month long visit to Pakistan talked to me about all the problems she had adjusting while she was there, saying she faced challenges with culture clashes because "I'm American! I was raised here! I speak the language! I went to school here, I was born here, I'm American!"

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[72] Excerpted from an interview conducted over video chat on October 8, 2013 at 8:30 pm.

[73] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Fountain Valley on February 20, 2014, at 2:00 pm.

Conclusion

The concept of identity is foundational to contemporary social psychology and animates research across disciplinary and methodological approaches (Peek 216). A highly contested term, identity has been used to describe one's senses of selfhood relative to various persons, places, and contexts, as well as social affiliations, perceived group memberships, and categorizations of the self (Tajfel). Approaches to the definition and study of identity differ according to emphases on social structure on one hand and the processes of identity formation on the other (Peek 218).

When cultural theorists and social scientists have engaged with ethnicity and identity, they have often situated ethnic minority identity as hybridized, potentially unstable, and dynamic. Homi Bhaba, for example, drawing from the work of T.S. Eliot, writes that migrants of the contemporary era have taken with them a "*partial* culture" (emphasis in original) that is the "contaminated, yet connective tissue between cultures" that "proposes a social subject constituted through cultural hybridization, the over determination of communal or group differences, the articulation of baffling alikeness and banal divergence (Bhaha 54)." Muslim American identity, in particular, has been positioned as a "historically constructed" and "socially bound" phenomenon (Sirin and Fine), influenced by the salience of their religion in the post-9/11 context and the alleged tension presented between being "Muslim" and being "American."

My research, however shows little support for the idea that Muslim Americans themselves are consciously driven or influenced by this alleged tension. In other words, participants experience the state of being Muslim American as a cohesive state of being, based

on overlapping principles that animate American notions of citizenship and Islamic ideas about spirituality.

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Chapter VI: Identity, Authenticity, and Gender: (Re)Evaluating Ḥijāb in the Contemporary American Context

In Chapter IV, I discussed the role of individualization, self-supervised research, and personal choice in shaping the articulation of U.S. Islam, stressing that U.S. Muslims are interested less in conforming to a set of ritual prescriptions than in experiencing a personal relationship with God and living in a manner consistent with "Islamic values," broadly defined. These values, furthermore, as well as the process of engaging with Islamic texts and Muslim institutions in search of religious knowledge, structures how U.S. Muslims experience and express their identities as Muslims and Americans.

The articulation of U.S. Muslim identity, however, can be particularly salient for Muslim women given that ḥijāb--defined and discussed below--is generally considered mandatory by U.S. Media *Muftīs*[74] and faith leaders, as well as by U.S. Muslims in general: all but three of my female-identified interview participants wore ḥijāb and only one had never worn it and had no plans to do so in the future. Additionally, every contemporary, Internet-based source I consulted regarded ḥijāb as completely mandatory, and the elementary school that allowed me to observe for a day required ḥijāb as part of its dress code for female students. One Imām I interviewed also claimed, unprompted, that the sources were "explicit" in this regard and that there was "no

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[74] A following chapter will examine popular Media *Muftīs*, paying specific attention to the sources of authority they mobilize in making leadership claims. For now, however, "Media *Muftīs*" refers to self-identified Imāms or Muftis with substantial social media footprints, or alternatively, the "scholars-in-residence" or "muftis-in-residence" for websites popular with U.S. Muslims. Many such websites serve tens of millions of U.S. Muslims a year, and there are a handful of Media *Muftīs*who post YouTube sermons and issue "fatawa" that reach hundreds of thousands of U.S. Muslims every month. Their reach should therefore not be underestimated.

question" that ḥijāb is required.[75]

A tension, heretofore unexplored in the literature, emerged between interview participants' views of ḥijāb and their views towards the aforementioned tendencies towards personalization, individualization, and ease of practice. Specifically, when confronted with questions about the permissibility of a range of activities, included but not limited to owning a dog, wearing nail polish, attending events where alcohol was served, celebrating Halloween, and listening to music, the vast majority of interview respondents claimed that one's "personal" preference or one's "personal" readings of the sources was sufficient guidance and that there was no "wrong" answer; all answers were regarded as equally valid so long as they maximized one's personal relationship with God and contributed to one's self-authorized interpretation of what it meant to live according to Islamic values. However, when asked if wearing ḥijāb was mandatory, all but one woman stated unequivocally that it is mandated by the Qurʾān. On this matter, it seemed, there is only one possible "correct" answer.

Contemporary sociologists and political scientists, in their investigations of the resurgence in popularity of ḥijāb have drawn on Rumbaut's concept of "reactive ethnicity," arguing that Muslims have adopted external markers of Muslim ethno-cultural identity in response to post-9/11 Islamophobia and hostility to Muslims. However, these explanations, which will be explored in detail in the sections that follow, fail to explain why women are far more likely than men to adopt salient markers of Muslim identity in pursuit of Qurʾānic mandates surrounding modesty.

I ground this chapter in data gleaned from my interviews, as well as in an analysis of

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[75] Interview conducted in Irvine on July 21, 2013 at 2:30 pm

popular literature aimed at U.S. Muslims, examining ḥijāb within the overlapping frameworks of anthropological, sociological, and feminist theory. In the process, I reveal possible uses of the veil from the standpoint of veiled women themselves and situate these meanings within the context of scholarly and popular discourses surrounding ideological and sociological purposes ascribed to the veil by scholars, Imāms, and women themselves.

First, I begin with a discussion on the prevailing view within the Muslim community that veiling is a mandatory and necessary part of U.S. Muslim women's dress. Next, I discuss ḥijāb as experienced by women themselves, arguing that ḥijāb is less a function of theological necessity than a facet of identity declaration and performance of idealized femininity for U.S. Muslim women. Finally, I connect concerns with identity and "authentic" expression of Islam to the notion of the "good" Muslim woman, using literature from gender studies and anthropology as a lens through which to understand the recent popularity of ḥijāb amongst U.S. Muslims, and its significance for U.S. Muslim women.

The Mandatory and Unchanging Nature of Ḥijāb

The word "*ḥijāb*" is used today to refer to a certain type of head-covering worn by self-identified Muslim women; however, it comes from the Arabic word *hajaba*, meaning "to prevent from seeing," and has often been used in Islamic texts to refer to a physical barrier or screen. In the Qurʾān, the word is used to refer to a curtain that served as a barrier between the wives of the Prophet Muhammad and other Muslim men. Qurʾānic discussions of women's dress, however,

do not use the word "ḥijāb," referring instead to a type of head-covering called a *khimar* (pl. *khumur*), which was worn by women and even some men in seventh century Arabia.

Elsewhere, the Qurʾān, refers to a type of robe called a jilbāb (pl. jalabib). While the Qurʾān makes no mention of women covering the face, the Ḥadīth contain references to the Prophet's wives uncovering their faces during pilgrimage, which suggests they did cover their faces at other times. Some aḥadīth also suggest that upon reaching puberty, women are to cover all of their bodies except their hands, faces, and feet when in front of men other than their husbands and close members of the family. In Islamic scholarship, ḥijāb may also refer to broader notions of morality, modesty, and privacy, all of which are mandated for men as well as for women.

Within the academic community, therefore, there has been an ongoing debate regarding the proper definition of these words, and their appropriate interpretation in the contemporary context. Fatima Merniss, pointing out the fact that the word "ḥijāb" as used in the Qurʾān refers to a curtain or partition (*Male Elite* 87), is critical of the notion that a "ḥijāb" solely refers to a garment worn by women to cover parts of the body that are "awrah," or private. Asma Barlas has also engaged in painstaking analyses of the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth to properly place the meaning of Qurʾānic mandates surrounding modesty within its historical and lexical context, concluding that although the Qurʾān mandates that women and men comport themselves modestly, "there is absolutely nothing in these practices that supports the conservative Muslim position on….the practice of veiling" (Barlas 16).

Amina Wadud, a scholar and a self-identified Muslim feminist, has stated that she does not consider the ḥijāb a religious obligation, nor "ascribe to it any religious value per se" (Wadud

143). The insistence on ḥijāb as an essential aspect of Muslim women's practice has led her to refer to ḥijāb as the "Sixth Pillar" (219) of Islam, and she has expressed concern over the degree to which ḥijāb is stressed as a criterion of women's religious practice. A devout Muslim herself, she has not only chosen not to wear the veil, but also to engage in highly visible efforts to lead mixed-gender audiences in prayer in an effort to introduce anti-hierarchical modes of practice into the U.S. context. Additionally, she has called for renewed interpretive efforts geared towards gender equality; these efforts, she stresses, should be construed as evidence of devotion to Islam and faith in the Qurʾān , rather than a rejection of Islam and a rejection of God's word (Wadud 144).

Fatima Mernissi has additionally questioned the value in positioning veiling as the ultimate measure of a Muslim woman's piety, lamenting:

> What a strange fate for Muslim memory, to be called upon in order to censure and punish [Muslim women]! What a strange memory, where even dead men and women do not escape attempts at assassination, if by chance they threaten to raise the ḥijāb that covers the mediocrity and servility that is presented to us as tradition. How did the tradition succeed in transforming the Muslim woman into that submissive, marginal creature who buries herself and only goes out in the world timidly and huddled in her veils? Why does the Muslim man need such a mutilated companion? (Mernissi *Beyond the Veil*) 194.

Leaders of the Muslim U.S. community, however, including the most popular Media Muftīs in the U.S., are nearly unanimous in their conviction that wearing ḥijāb is unequivocally mandatory according to the Qurʾān. For example, I met with the scholar in residence of a large Southern California mosque. Unprompted, he gave me his opinion on ḥijāb, saying that it was "mandatory, no question." I pressed him a little bit, mentioning that Professor Abou el Fadl (who he knew to be one of my advisors) does not regard ḥijāb as mandatory. He responded that

although he has the utmost respect for Professor Abou el Fadl, it is clear that Professor Abou el Fadl is in the minority, and reiterated that the ḥijāb is mandatory according to the Qurʾān.

A second Imām, this one a scholar-in-residence at an Orange County Muslim school, also informed me—also unsolicited--that ḥijāb is mandatory according to the Qurʾān and the Prophet. All girls who attend the school, therefore, must begin wearing ḥijāb in sixth grade with no exceptions. Are there any girls whose parents ask that their daughters not be required to wear ḥijāb when they are at school? Not so far, he said. And if a girl herself doesn't want to wear ḥijāb? This has never come up, he says. But any girl refusing to wear it would face disciplinary action for violating the dress code.

Nearly every Media Muftī popular in the U.S. has issued an opinion on the mandatory nature of ḥijāb, quoting from the Qurʾān as well as relevant Ḥadīth and Qurʾānic commentary when appropriate. For example, in early 2012 a reader wrote to the website of a very popular U.S. Imām, Suhaib Webb,[76] asking for an opinion on whether or not ḥijāb was mandatory in the U.S. context. After all, didn't norms and customs change with time and place? Suhaib Webb himself wrote a lengthy proof:

> …Indeed, as you noted in your question, there are certain rulings in Islam that can change according to place, time and situation. The general principle is that the rulings themselves don't change, but the articulation of such rulings can. This means the ruling – whether permissible, forbidden or disliked – is still met; however, it is done so in a manner that facilitates its practice for Allah's servants, while meeting the requirements set by the faith…The *ḥijāb* is identified by all the scholars (except for a few non-Orthodox scholars

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[76] Suhaib Webb is a convert to Islam and the leader of Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center. He also runs an Islam-oriented website, previously known as SuhaibWebb.com but now called virtualmosque.com, that was extremely popular with interview participants as well as with U.S. Muslims in general. Many interview participants, in fact, referred unprompted to Suhaib Webb, as well as to other Islam-oriented websites like Muslim Medicine, Sunni Path, and Islamicity. I discuss These websites discussed in detail in a following section.

> over the last 20 years) as a fixed obligation which cannot change unless a qualified legal scholar deems that a sister's situation demands it. Examples of this would be the Inquisition in Spain and the recent wars in Bosnia and Rwanda. However, it should be noted that such a change is, at least most of the time, considered temporal at best as it would fall under what are known as *nawazil* - temporary trials whose outcomes, for the most part, are not permanent…We do not have an opinion that says ḥijāb is not [mandatory], that one can show the neck, etc. There are no authentic reports of the Companions taking off their hijāb at all. I advise you to wear the hijāb instead of the Niqab. I base this on the fact that it is a contentious issue and we have a legal axiom that allows us, in the face of contentious issues, to take the more appropriate course for our time and place. Secondly, adapt the method you wear the ḥijāb . There is nothing wrong with wearing Western clothes as long as they meet Islamic requirements. I hold this opinion is at is articulated by the Maliki school.Abu Barkat in al-Sharh al-Saghir (one of the most reliable books for Fatwa in the school) states that a woman's `awrah (private parts, intimate parts) is in general, "Everything save her face and hands." Islam means to surrender and surrender involves struggle. I encourage you to struggle and continue to ask Allah for His help...(Webb "Is Hijab an Obligation?")

Islamicity.com,[77] another website popular with U.S. Muslims, has also issued several opinions regarding ḥijāb, all of which claim that wearing one is mandatory unless a woman's life is in danger. One such opinion, for example, was issued in response to a woman who said she feared her non-Muslim family would disown her if she started wearing ḥijāb. The scholar in residence gave the following opinion:

> Unless [your non-Muslim parents] are close minded and your life is threatened then try to cover your hair with whatever you can other than the Islamic veil if possible, until you are independent and can live on your own away from them or hopefully get married to a righteous Muslim husband who will protect you (Amr Elsamny "New Muslimah").

A significant portion of my interview participants referred to Suhaib Webb (now known as "Virtual Mosque") as one of their favorite Islam-related websites, visiting the site many times

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[77] Islamicity.com is one of the most popular English-language Islam-oriented websites in the world. A plurality of its visitors are located in the U.S., and a handful of interview participants referred to visiting or consulting with the "Ask Imām" section of Islamicity. This website, as well as other websites popular amongst U.S. Muslims, will be discussed in a following section as well as in the next chapter.

per week or even on a daily basis. Many participants, in fact, expressed unsolicited admiration for Suhaib Webb and referred to articles or opinions that he had posted on his site, and said they commented on his articles regularly.

Even so, the vast majority of interview participants did not discuss their decision to wear ḥijāb in terms of theological or epistemological arguments—something worth noting given that ḥijāb-related discussions on Suhaib Webb's site, as well as on most popular Islam-related websites, are so often rooted in theological and juristic evidence. Instead, women would generally rely on discourse relating to their "beingness" as Muslims, their desire to express their identities as Muslims, or their interest in modeling "good" Muslim behavior on behalf of the Muslim community. Often, women would claim they decided to wear ḥijāb because it "felt right," or because they were learning more about Islam and, in the process, it became obvious that it was the "right" thing to do.

As with previously discussed religious rituals and beliefs then, then, it is reductive to frame ḥijāb as a solely religious practice stemming exclusively from religious concerns. Instead, it may best be understood as a reflection of religious mandates as well as identity claims, indicative of an interest in practicing a version of Islam that feels "right" in addition to submission to theological or ritual mandates regarding dress; this may explain why ḥijāb is exempt from the highly personalized, individualized process of decision making discussed at length in Chapter III. In the next sections I discuss ḥijāb within the framework of gender and sociological theoretical frameworks to uncover the symbolic significance of ḥijāb, and its relationship to gender, Islam, and identity within the U.S. Muslim community; I then move on to

situate ḥijāb within the literature treating gender and its relationship to cultural and religious authenticity.

The Veil and Muslim Identity

Given the frequency with which women refer to ḥijāb in terms of identity, it may make sense to frame ḥijāb less as an aspect of theology than as a facet of the "ethnicization" of U.S. Muslims explored in an earlier chapter. This is a particularly compelling approach to understanding ḥijāb given that participants nearly always positioned ḥijāb it as a logical outcome of learning about Islam and "becoming" Muslim: I asked an unmarried Arab American woman, for example, when she started wearing ḥijāb. She described the catalyst for doing so as related to her desire to "belong" to a group with which she could identify:

> I think partly because of [not fitting in elsewhere], I ended up sort of choosing Islam as my identity. Because I feel like when you're a teenager, you're sort of looking for an identity. Because at the time when I started wearing my head scarf, I realized that I wasn't going to fit in. And I wasn't going to fit in overseas because I'm still the American kid who doesn't speak Arabic. And so I think that that actually brought me a lot closer to Islam. That and the fact that I was learning more and more about it.[78]

Similarly, another woman, this one a Persian American activist who is currently studying Islamic jurisprudence put her decision to wear ḥijāb in the following terms:

> As a 14 through 17 year old, you're discovering your own identity in general…During high school I was part of the MSA [Muslim Student Association] and we'd have prayers and we'd do community service, we'd bring in speakers to talk about how faith and upbringing can come together and give us a Muslim-American identity. Then in my senior year, I was president of the MSA. I felt like I had to create something for younger

[78] Excerpted from an interview conducted via video chat on September 16, 2013, at 9:30 am

> people coming to school and give them a place they'd feel comfortable being Muslim and American in high school. All these identities are crashing together, and it was to make it possible for them to come together. And it was also a time where I was kind of a little awkward and getting out of my awkward phase and finding confidence, and in 12th grade —my senior year—I started wearing ḥijāb. It was a decision that kind of came from nowhere, but didn't … my mom and my aunt didn't wear it, and in middle school my mom told me I was too young to even think about things like that. But my decision to wear coincided with finding my identity and being more confident in who I was.[79]

It is not surprising that the veil is so strongly implicated in expressions of Muslim identity: As Derrida (91), Laclau (45), Butler (112, 114), and Hall (18) point out, identity functions as a point of attachment by virtue of exclusion. Every identity has a boundary and is a closed circle; the creation of social identity is an act of power by virtue of its ability to include some and exclude others. In the case of American Muslims, therefore ḥijāb may be a mechanism for drawing a circle of belonging that simultaneously includes all ethno-cultural and sectarian groups who identify as Muslim while excluding any non-Muslims. Wearing ḥijāb not only provides a visual marker of difference, but also an ideological marker of difference and affirms a belief in the value of modesty, thus highlighting and contrasting Muslim and non-Muslim attitudes towards the body in a way that makes room for all ethno-cultural Muslim groups.

Similarly, the mid-century German philosopher and sociologist Paul Barth argued in a 1966 monograph that boundary maintenance is dependent on the co-existence, rather than separation, of two different groups. Each group reinforces and creates differences by shaping and re-shaping identities, and with them, the articulations of various boundaries in a dialectical process wherein various features (imagined or actual) are purported to unite or separate the two groups. The features that are highlighted or minimized may be sourced in historically significant,

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[79] Excerpted from an interview conducted via video chat on October 18. 2013, at 9:30 am.

objective, or scientific differences, however, it is just as likely that they will be selected for their efficacy as markers of difference.

Social identity in this way is linked to a culturally specific set of values, norms, behaviors, and modes of communication which are deployed to show who "belongs" to a given group and who does not. Women's bodies, in this context, are identified as "belonging" or "not belonging" to certain groups by virtue of what is and what isn't revealed to the male gaze; wearing ḥijāb, furthermore, identifies women's bodies as embodiments as well as extensions of the Muslim community.

Geertz, however, in his interrogation of 'nationalism,' 'nation,' and 'nationality,' , argues that these and similar theoretical frameworks fail to account for, or alternatively confused, political, psychological, and demographic factors driving contemporary political, religio-cultural, or nationalist movements (Geertz *Primordial Ties* 119). Conflict between nationalist aspirations and minority ethnic groups, he argues, results from tension between the desire for universal engagement on one hand and an interest in distinctiveness on the other:

> The one aim is to be noticed: it is a search for an identity, and a demand that the identity will be publicly acknowledged as having importance, a social assertion of 'being somebody in the world.' The other demand is practical: it is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, greater social justice and beyond that of 'playing a part in the larger arena of world politics' (Geertz *Primordial Ties* 119).

The members of a given ethnic group thus function as a "primordial group" wherein membership is predicated on blood ties (real or actual), shared language, regional affiliation, or a common religion (Geertz *Primordial Ties* 119). These "primordial ties," to Geertz, are more powerful and more significant than the ties of party, class, or citizenship given that subordinating

these "specific and familiar" identifications in favor of a

> generalized commitment to an overarching and somewhat alien civil order is to risk a loss of definition as an autonomous person either through absorption into a culturally undifferentiated mass or, what is even worse, through domination by some other rival ethnic, racial, or linguistic community…. (Geertz *Primordial Ties* 120).

More recently, the sociologist Mary Waters, drawing from the notion of engagement versus divisiveness, posited that ethnic identity for minority groups stems in part from the fact that American culture is characterized by individuality on one hand and standardization on the other. The development of ethnic identity mitigates the tension posed by these contradictory values, providing individuals with a sense of community while still allowing them to feel "different" as ethnic Americans (Waters 206-207).

This tension between individuality and standardization, and between the self-as-object versus the self-as-subject proposed in Waters' model, is reflected in comments made by female interview participants. For example, one woman who moved from Orange County to Dearborn, Michigan for graduate school moved back immediately upon completing her Master's degree because she hated Dearborn so much. She was so used to being the "only Muslim," she said, that it was uncomfortable to be surrounded entirely by Muslims, and have everyone making assumptions about her. As one of a handful of Muslims in her high school, and as a member of a minority during college, she had become accustomed to feeling, in her words, "different." And now, surrounded by Muslim women who also wore ḥijāb, she was no longer "different," and it was profoundly uncomfortable to have everyone think that they knew exactly what she was and who she was:

I grew up in a context where I always had the opportunity to explain who I was and what

> I was and what I believed due to being a minority. And in Dearborn, I couldn't handle the assumptions. And I was so used to explaining about my scarf—'Do you have cancer?' 'Are you hot?'—and the women there had never had to explain why they wore a scarf or what being Muslim was. I met one woman who had started her first teaching job [in a nearby town] and was so bothered and confused about the questions [about her scarf] but I grew up only ever explaining! [80]

She returned to Orange County, and despite her strong ties to the local Muslim community, loves the fact that at her job she "gets to" talk to people who aren't Muslim.

This comment was not atypical: one woman, the aforementioned Persian American activist, said that she had been the only girl in her entire middle school wearing ḥijāb, and became very disappointed on the first day of high school when three other girls in ḥijāb showed up[81]. And still another young woman talked about the opportunities she received from being the only Muslim girl in her Catholic school: giving presentations about Islam to the school and to the community, for example, and helping draft a curriculum sensitive to the needs of future Muslim students.[82]

While these experiences certainly make Geertz' and Waters' explanation compelling, neither of these models can explain why these markers of ethnic identity surged in the Muslim community after 9/11, nor does it explain why so many more Muslim women than Muslim men adopted such salient markers of identity. Tension between individuality and standardization existed long before 9/11, after all, so why is it now that so many more women are adopting ḥijāb? Political scientists and sociologists, many of whom became specifically interested in

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[80] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Anaheim at 10:30 am September 12, 2012.

[81]Excerpted from an interview conducted via video chat on on September 16, 2013, at 9:30

[82] Excerpted from an interview conducted on September 21, 2013 at 4:00 pm in Irvine

Muslim identity the early 21st century, have explained the post-9/11 uptick in ethnic identity expression for Muslims by positing that Islamophobia and hostility to Muslims in North America and Europe have solidified, rather than undermined, publicly expressed identification with Islam.

For example, anthropologists Haleh Afshar, Rob Aitken and Myfanwy Franks assert that British Muslim women wearing the headscarf in post-9/11 are making a highly politicized choice, "publicly branding themselves as Muslims at a time when such a label carries the potential fear of making them vulnerable to open hostility" (Afshar et al 263). Sociologists David Voas and Fenella Fleischmann suggested in a 2012 paper that American Muslims responded to post-September 11 hostility towards Islam with a) increased religiosity, b) a scaling back on religious identity, belief and practice, or c) with no effect on religious commitment.

To be sure, a handful of interview participants described their decision to wear ḥijāb as a direct response to a larger milieu of exclusion, hostility, and general feelings of Otherness. Exposure to bullying, racism, and xenophobia for women as well as for men,, had the paradoxical effect of leading to a greater interest in Islam, and with it, adoption of a legibly Muslim identity. However, the majority of participants embraced Islam and a Muslim identity absent pervasive Islamphobia, or alternatively, did not identify Islamophobia as prompting or even related to their decision to wear ḥijāb .

Put another way, my interviews and participant-observations show that U.S. Muslim women often experienced their decision to wear ḥijāb less as a reaction to being *excluded* from mainstream American culture than as a reaction to the benefits of being *included* by the U.S. Muslim community, and, crucially, stemming from a desire to feel a connection with God. Most often, the experience of being *included* in a Muslim organization or community setting, rather

than that of being *excluded* from a broader school or university setting, acted in combination with the promise of following the teachings of Islam catalyze women into wearing the headscarf.

For example, a handful of women explained their choice to wear a headscarf as directly linked to their interest in being "close" to God, or alternatively, as an expression of their closeness to God. One woman became very animated when she spoke about her ḥijāb and its ability to bring her closer to God, practically yelling, "I wear this because I belong to God! That's what this means, that I belong to God!" underscoring her point by jabbing her finger at my face several times.[83] Another woman said that sometimes her husband expresses discomfort with the fact that she wears ḥijāb; she reminds him, however, that she wears it "for God," and not for him.[84]

The model proposed by Voas and Fleischmann, as well as Rumbaut's model of reactive identity are therefore problematic in that they leave out the ways in which theological discourse can shape manifestations of ethnic identity; they are also problematic in that they fail to account for the fact that expression for U.S. Muslims is manifested very differently for men and for women: although nearly every woman I spoke to was immediately identifiable as a Muslim, the same cannot be said for most of the men I interviewed. More specifically, in a vast majority of cases, the women would arrive to an interview in ḥijāb and a long-sleeved blouse or tunic. Some would wear their ḥijāb with tunics layered over fashionable skinny jeans and chunky jewelry; just as often, however, they would wear it over a long flowing skirt or dress. Infrequently, they would wear ḥijāb with traditional Middle Eastern or North African dresses.

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[83] Excerpted from an interview conducted at 1:30 pm in Los Angeles, California,

[84] Excerpted from an interview conducted on September 21, 2013 at 4:00 pm in Irvine

Some of the interviews I conducted took place in a fairly intense heat wave, and a few women nonetheless showed up in long sleeves, one of them wearing a turtleneck and another in a jacket with a silk headscarf. Men whom I interviewed during this heat wave, on the other hand, showed up in shorts, tee-shirts, and flip flops. A few had beards; most, however, were clean-shaven, and only one wore a thobe.[85] When the heat wave subsided, they came to the interviews in jeans and tee-shirts, or if it was immediately after work, in suits and ties.

It is therefore worth asking why identity expression manifests so differently for men and for women. Put differently, while community leaders, Media Muftīs, and interview participants themselves stress the importance of modesty for men and for women, men are not encouraged to practice modesty in a way that makes their identities as Muslims salient; women, on the other hand, are.

Islamic Studies scholar Katherine Bullock has argued that the presence of an occupier or the perception of cultural encroachment can lead to the positioning of various figures, practices, and habits as indicators of the extent to which (real or imagined) cultural traditions have held steadfast in the face of outside challenges (86-87, 105-106). These cultural traditions are often somewhat haphazardly chosen, and act as "selective reincarnations of particular visions of the past" (Paparek 70). They are also generally labeled "traditions" even if there is scattered evidence of their centrality to a given set of historical practices, lifestyles, or ideologies. Most often, women are appointed the keepers of cultural authenticity and the preservers of these so-called "traditional" values. In this framework, emphasis on modesty and the norms regarding

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[85] A thobe is an ankle-length dress with long sleeves traditionally worn by men in Arab countries near the Persian Gulf.

preferred articulations of modesty are less related to historical or Qurʾānic evidence of sartorial practice than to a desire to project community values on women's bodies.

Taking this argument to its logical extension, and positioning ḥijāb within the context of the post-colonial era, a woman who wears ḥijāb is an extension of the global Muslim community, an embodiment of Islamic values, a vehicle for expressing solidarity with the Muslim community, and a means through which women can protest Western values that they disagree with. In other words, wearing ḥijāb is viewed as consistent with Qurʾānic mandates; it is also, however, a symbolic stand against Western hegemony, the objectification of women, and capitalism in addition to an assertion of social solidarity and a challenge to the political status quo.

For example, Karen Tranberg Hansen characterizes Turkish women's use of headscarves and coats as in the 1970s as "political chic" rather than devotion to Islam itself (382) . Yael Navaro-Yashin , meanwhile, in her study of late twentieth-century Turkey, has argued that the resurgence of ḥijāb less a reflection of increased piety than part of a broader project of commodifying Muslim identity (223). And Katherine Bullock frames the popularity of the veil in North Africa and the Middle East as resulting from multiple, local factors, including political protest (91).

In her study of gender activism in Egypt, Margot Badran regards the veil as a "ready external symbol" of Islam its attendant political baggage (206), quoting a television announcer, fired for donning the veil:

> the ḥijāb is a matter of identity and self-discovery after a long fall and being lost in Westernization when colonialism imposed its clothes on us…that's why the ḥijāb was and must be a national issue of great importance (qtd in Badran 206).

The notion that "colonization imposed its clothes on [Muslim women]" may also resonate with many U.S. Muslim women today: one woman I spoke to, in explaining why ḥijāb is mandatory, said that Egyptian women in the 20th century wore mini-skirts because "they were colonized, they had the colonizer's mentality," and then went on to explain that she gets very frustrated with women who claim that ḥijāb is not mandatory, laying blame primarily on contemporary cultural emphases on the individual, as well as the hyper-sexualization of society:

> …In my opinion you can question whether you want to wear it day and night I have no issue with that, because you have every right to say -- if I want to do something I have every right to say, "I want to do it or not do it." You have the right at the end of the day that's between you and God and I'm not going to judge you for that. But to question whether or not it is mandatory this is a very, very, very recent debate. And I think it has to do with our culture [of individualization.] If you're going to sit here and tell me like oh ḥijāb [is not mandatory] I'm like fine go to the Islamic sources, go learn in an Al-Azhar for 10 years, come back and prove to me that ḥijāb is not [required]. But honestly it's like the hyper sexualization of society, it's the individualism of society. People are like, "I want to do what I want to do." And I'm like, "That's totally cool. Do whatever you want to do but don't tell me Islam doesn't tell you that you should be following this command." …I'm willing to have a debate with you and sit down and talk to you about it. But the majority of people who are saying ḥijāb is not [mandatory] are people who wore it and had a bad experience or don't want to wear it, or question why do I have to do this? So they go and they read one or two websites online and they are like, "Okay cover your bosom." Obviously that makes no sense and they make their decision on that.[86]

Another woman said that she sends her daughter to an Islamic school because she doesn't want her exposed to "Western values" that objectify women through skimpy clothing and emphases on physical appearance. Yet another young woman expressed disgust at "Western"

[86] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on November 15, 2013.

television shows like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians,* which promote materialism, "show boobs all the time," and make women "feel bad about [themselves]."[87]

This discourse is reflected in the arguments of popular Media Muftīs who often resort to a mix of contemporary, faux-hip "you go girl" and "anti-Western" discourse when attempting to persuade Muslim women as to the moral correctness of wearing ḥijāb. For example, in the "Hot Articles" section of Yusuf Estes'[88] website, there is a post titled "She Won't Wear Ḥijāb!" which provides a "Convesation" *[sic]* for women to follow when they are trying to convince other Muslim women to wear ḥijāb *[all emphases in original]:*

> […]
> First of all, ḥijāb was founded by men who wanted to control women."
> ***"Really? I did not know men could control women by ḥijāb….what about fashions that are designed and promoted by male-dominated corporations, set you free? Men have no control on exposing women and using them as a commodity?! Give me a break… Doesn't [sic] TV, magazines and movies tell you what to wear, and how to be `attractive'?"***
> "Of course, it's fashion."
> ***"Isn't that control? Pressuring you to wear what they want you to wear?...Not just controlling you, but also controlling the market…I mean, you are told to look skinny and anorexic like that woman on the cover of the magazine, by men who design those magazines and sell those products."***
> "I don't get it. What does ḥijāb have to do with products."
> ***"It has everything to do with that. Don't you see? Ḥijāb is a threat to consumerism, women who spend billions of dollars to look skinny and live by standards of fashion designed by men…and then here is Islam, saying trash all that nonsense [sic] and focus on your soul, not on your looks, and do not worry what men think of your looks."***
> "Like I don't have to buy ḥijāb? Isn't ḥijāb a product?"
> ***"Yes, it is. It is a product that sets you free from male-dominated consumerism."***

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[87] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine on May 30, 2013, at 6:00 pm.

[88] Yusuf Estes is a convert to Islam who regularly reaches millions of English-speaking Muslims through a mix of personal appearances, lectures delivered on YouTube, Tweets, Facebook posts, and articles and essays on his website. A handful of interview respondents said that they visited his website regularly or listened to his lectures or podcasts on a regular basis, however, he is most popular amongst middle-aged Muslim Americans and converts.

"Stop lecturing me! **I WILL NOT WEAR ḤIJĀB!**
It is awkward, outdated, and totally not suitable for this society ... Moreover, I am only 20 and too young to wear ḥijāb!"
"Fine. Say that to your Lord, when you face Him on Judgment Day."
[…]
"Shut up and I don't want to hear more about ḥijāb niqab schmijab Punjab! *[sic]*"
[Silence]
She stared at the mirror, tired of arguing with herself all this time.
Successful enough, she managed to shut the voices in her head, with her own opinions triumphant in victory on the matter, and a final modern decision accepted by the society - but rejected by the Faith:
"Yes!" - to curls on the hair - ***"No!" - to ḥijāb!*** (Aldisot)

Ḥijāb, according to the above "convesation," is not only commanded by God, it is a vehicle for empowering oneself as a woman, as well as a way to resist Western commercialism and capitalist hegemony. Women who turn their backs on ḥijāb are therefore turning their backs on God while embracing Western ideals that manipulate them and reduce them to sexual objects.

This argument, as well as the idea that the ḥijāb-wearing woman is rejecting Westernism and colonialism, is closely linked to the idea of the "good" Muslim woman, who embodies Muslim values like modesty and humility in contrast to Western modes of femininity that commercialize and exploit the female body. The next section will discuss discourses surrounding the "good" Muslim woman, and its relationship to ḥijāb and Muslim collective and individual identity.

Ḥijāb and the "Good" Muslim Woman

Returning to the "Convesation [sic]" from Yusuf Estes' blog, it is important to point out that this line of reasoning is not at all atypical for websites directed to and popular among the

U.S. Muslim community. Even when a blogger, Imām, scholar-in-residence, or community leader has written a proof, or otherwise equivocally stated that ḥijāb is religiously mandatory, s/he will often nonetheless continue to underline this point by writing essays or giving lectures devoted to encouraging women to wear ḥijāb, praising those that already do, or suggesting that the faithful advise close female friends or family members to wear ḥijāb. Often, these lectures and essays center around the notion that ḥijāb is the mark of a "pious" or "good" Muslim woman, and that the ḥijāb "honors" her, "empowers" her, and "protects" her.

For example, on Suhaib Webb's website, a 2012 article called "Ḥijāb is Not to Protect Men But to Honor Women," written by a website contributor (rather than Suhaib Webb himself), lays out an argument informed by discourses similar to those underlying "She Won't Wear Ḥijāb!" After stressing that men should not harass, insult, or degrade women who do not wear ḥijāb or who practice "inappropriate" or immodest standards of dress, the author goes on explain the virtues of wearing ḥijāb, and how it "protects" and "elevates" a woman in a way that assures her "dignity:" [*emphasis in original]*

> **Ḥijāb is not there to protect men. If you think it is there to protect you as a man, we have turned an act to be done for Allah (swt), into an act to be done for us**. It is there to protect women, so do not pervert the purpose of this command of God (swt). There is no doubt that we come across immodesty on TV, at school, work, and all over. We should not use the fact that a sister is dressed in a way that does not fit God's commandments (or our personal interpretation of God's commandments) into a reason for having bad manners, a lack of respect, and a lack of humility
> **[…]**
> **Men should advise the women of their family and encourage them on this topic in a way that befits the Prophetic character.** No one should take this to mean that ḥijāb is not an important part of a Muslim's woman's obligations towards God. But that is the key. Towards God. Ḥijāb should not become inflated as a symbol that boosts the religious standing of a woman's family, nor a flag of political Islam, nor a tool to show off her piety, nor a cloth of guilt that makes her hate it. It is instead, a command from God that comes in the most beautiful manner, for her own protection, her own elevation, and her

own dignity (Ahmed).

Ḥijāb, according to the author, "protects" women, though from what is not made explicit or clear. Additionally, it is considered appropriate, if not encouraged, to "advise" adult women as to the benefits of ḥijāb.

Islamicity.com, meanwhile, used a similar line of reasoning in a response to a question posed by a reader in January, 2012, who wrote to the site asking if all Muslim women must wear ḥijāb.

> Sister,
>
> Wearing ḥijāb is an order from God in holy Qurʾān, and females do not have the option to wear it or not, if they want to be considered among pious moslims [sic] (Islamicity).

And finally, returning to the "convesation [sic] for Muslim Sisters" in the "Hot Articles" section of Yusuf Estes' website, it should be noted that the above excerpt was taken from the end of the scripted conversation. The beginning of the script is as follows:

> "I'm so tired…Of all these people judging me…Like that woman, every time I sit with her, she tells me to wear ḥijāb."
> ***"Maybe she was just giving you advice… it's her duty to encourage you do to good."***
> "Trust me. That was no encouragement. And what do you mean `good` ?"
> ***"Well, wearing ḥijāb, that would be a good thing to do."***
> […]
> Yes, but what you wear is not important. What's important
> is to have a good healthy heart."
> ***"What you wear is not important? Then why do you spend an hour every morning fixing up?...You spend money on cosmetics, not to mention all the time you spend on fixing your hair and low-carb dieting…So, your appearance IS important."***
> "No. I said wearing ḥijāb is not an important thing in religion."
> ***"If it's not an important thing in religion, why is it mentioned in the Holy Qurʾān?"***
> "You know I can't follow all that's in Qurʾān…[and] I don't like ḥijāb, it limits my freedom."

"But the lotions, lipsticks, mascara and other cosmetics set you free?!
[…]
"Why do you reduce religion to a piece of cloth anyway?"
"Why do you reduce womanhood to high heals[sic] and lipstick colors?...Ḥijāb is not just a piece of cloth. It is obeying God in a difficult environment. It is courage, faith in action, and true womanhood.
But your short sleeves, tight pants…" (Ahmed)

"Ḥijāb," in other words, is evidence of "true womanhood." The alternative—"high heals [sic] and lipstick colors" on the other hand, is equated to the commercialization of the female body and capitulation to Western cultural hegemony. The ḥijāb wearing woman is therefore not only upholding the standards of modesty mandated by God, she is also taking on the mantle of "true" womanhood and idealized femininity. This framing, of course, is closely related to the notion of "authentic" Muslim identity, given that it positions the ḥijāb-wearing woman as the ideal embodiment of Muslim values and a model representative for the non-Muslim community.

All of these examples point to a mutually implicated relationship between female modesty, piety, Muslim identity, and the idealized embodiment of God's word. The fact that Suhaib Webb and Yusuf Estes articles, furthermore, resort to the discourse of Western feminism (using words like "elevate," "dignity," and "empowerment," for example, and discussing the degree to which "male-dominated corporations control women") suggests an interest in addressing the tension posed by dominant American constructions of gender and Qurʾānic notions of complementarity between men and women.

These same tensions often informed interview participant's discussions of ḥijāb. Like Media Muftīs excerpted above, women often resorted to the discourse of women's empowerment as they expressed concern with the tendency of American media to exploit and objectify

women's bodies, saying that they viewed ḥijāb mode of dress that allows men to see them as people, rather than as sexual objects. Women also constantly referred to a relentless pressure from television and the movies to dress provocatively, and contrasted this pressure with their own decision to wear ḥijāb and dress modestly.

It is also interesting to note that although so much of the popular literature on ḥijāb places women in a dichotomy between "pious" and "not pious," as excerpted above, this particular tendency was not reflected in my discussion with women who wore ḥijāb. To be sure, women were firm in their conviction that wearing ḥijāb was mandatory, stressing that modesty is a key Islamic value and an important driver of what it means to be Muslim. Women also expressed frustration with the fact that "some people," as they often would put it, judge women who do not wear ḥijāb. That said, none of the women I interviewed insinuated or implied that women who do not wear ḥijāb were any less pious or less devout than women who do wear ḥijāb, criticized women who choose to wear makeup with ḥijāb , or wear ḥijāb with fashionable clothing (rather than, say, Arab or Middle Eastern dress).

Even so, it bears mentioning that the one woman I interviewed who had not been and never intended to be a ḥijābi specifically asked me to write in this paper that there is a "hierarchy" in the Muslim community. "If you don't wear ḥijāb," she said, "you can't be in a leadership position [in the Muslim community]."[89] You won't be popular, she said, and you won't be in the "inner circle" of key Muslim social and political organizations. The ḥijāb-wearing girls in her college MSA, she continued, were "clique-y" and it was impossible to be an officer in the organization if you were a woman that did not wear ḥijāb. In fact, she claimed that

[89] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on February 17, 2013 at 7:30 p.m.

she specifically sought me out to participate in an interview because she feared I was only getting "one side of the story," and that this "side" did not reflect the fact that Muslim women in the community who don't wear ḥijāb face peer pressure, alienation, or condemnation from their peers.

Of course, it is difficult to substantiate her claims, given that she was the only woman who I interviewed that believed that wearing ḥijāb was not mandatory. She was also the only woman who did not wear ḥijāb, had never worn ḥijāb, and never intended to wear ḥijāb. That said, in their study of Muslim-identified women attending college in the Midwest, Rhys H. Williams and Gira Vashi found that many interview participants expressed similar concerns and observations, with quite a few interview participants telling the authors that they wore ḥijāb to ingratiate themselves to the girls at the MSA (281). Many of their study participants, in fact, actively feared that they would be snubbed or ignored by their female peers if they did not wear ḥijāb (Williams and Vashi 281). Similarly, Schmidt has argued that ḥijāb-wearing women are granted a degree of religious and moral authority not accorded to peers who do not wear ḥijāb (104-105).

Furthermore, like the women in my own study, the women who spoke to Vashi and Williams did not claim to wear ḥijāb out of concern for avoiding the moral judgment of others, nor to avoid succumbing to sexual temptation; rather they claimed to wear it to avoid the *social* judgment of others and allegations of sexual impropriety. This is particularly curious given that community leaders, Imāms, and Media Muftīs rely so frequently on discourse surrounding sexual temptation when discussing the importance of ḥijāb. The reasons that women wear ḥijāb,

therefore, cannot solely be traced to a desire to uphold social order and minimize temptation between the sexes.

To be sure, theological discourse and interpretations of Qurʾānic mandates do play a role in women's decision to wear ḥijāb. As discussed at length, authority rests on the voluntary submission of others rather than on the use of force (Blau 305.) In the case of authority, people "a priori suspend their own judgment and accept that of an acknowledged superior without having to be convinced that his [or hers] is correct" (Blau 306) and the commands of an actor in authority are treated as binding by others absent the use of coercive force (Spencer 124). Women, in the case of ḥijāb, are voluntarily "submitting" to Qurʾānic directives to wear ḥijāb, and are doing so absent the treat of coercion or bribery. However, as we have seen, the Qurʾān is but one of several reasons that women give for wearing ḥijāb. Furthermore, it is difficult to conclude that U.S. Muslim women wear ḥijāb solely of deference to "traditional authority, which Weber framed as a belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the ability to occupy a position of authority by virtue of their occupation or membership in a privileged group.[90]

Examples of traditional authority include patriarchal and patrimonial social structures, and it is undeniable that U.S. Muslim culture, as well as U.S. society in general, is highly patriarchal and explicitly gendered. It is also true that Media Muftīs tend to deploy patriarchal authority in their attempts to persuade women to wear ḥijāb; instances of this include claims that ḥijāb "protects" women or safeguards their honor, as well as claims that the Prophet's wives wore ḥijāb. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to argue that U.S. Muslim women wear ḥijāb

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[90] My discussion of Weber is informed by the analysis conducted by Ritzer, "Structures of Authority," pages 128-136 of *Sociological Theory*, third edition.

solely due to deference to patriarchal culture or patriarchal authority given that they so firmly claim ownership of the decision to wear ḥijāb. Therefore, while women partially wear ḥijāb due to theological concerns, they also do so out of a desire to express piety and articulate their identities as Muslims.

It is also worth noting that even though women overwhelmingly regard ḥijāb as mandatory as revealed in the Qurʾān, they frequently express frustration when men in their communities remind them that it is mandatory, further destabilizing arguments that women wear ḥijāb solely out of deference to traditional authority. For example, upon noting the lack of women's voices in the scholarly as well as religious and popular literature treating ḥijāb, I made the decision that I would not ask my male interview subjects about ḥijāb. I told this to one of my female interview subjects, and she suddenly became very animated. *"Good*!" She practically yelled. "You know why? Because it's none of their *business,* that's why!"[91]

But the notion that you "cannot be that good a Muslim" if you don't wear ḥijāb cannot necessarily be remedied simply by wearing ḥijāb. In other words, even though failing to wear ḥijāb puts women at risk for being perceived as impious, choosing to wear ḥijāb is no guarantee that they will be perceived as pious. First, women who wear ḥijāb may risk condemnation for failing to wear ḥijāb in the "correct" way—by exposing too much hair, for example, or by wearing it with the "wrong" clothes.

As one of my interview participants, a young woman who identifies as a Muslim feminist, explained about the preoccupation with ḥijāb:[92]

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[91] Excerpted from an interview conducted via video chat on May 5, 2013, at 11 am.

[92] Excerpted from an interview conducted via video chat on May 5, 2013, at 11 am.

> It's great if you do not ask men [their opinion about wearing ḥijāb] because, frankly, they're not entitled to an opinion of them because they don't know what it's like to be a woman. They don't know what it's like to be reduced to your beauty and to be then expected to hide it. They don't know that. They don't see that because they don't view ḥijāb from the perspective of the woman… and there is this entire nonsense of like, "Oh, you know, she's a pearl and ḥijāb is her shell or a woman is candy and ḥijāb is the wrapper"…It's so much nonsense about, like if you don't wear ḥijāb, you can't possibly be that good a Muslim! People are concerned about ḥijāb which is such a minor aspect of the faith. They're concerned with the color of your ḥijāb, whether or not you wear skinny jeans. How high up your bun is. Whether or not you wear make-up when you wear ḥijāb. Whether or not you are allowed to wear ḥijāb. All these kind of things become from this entitlement to control the female body. I don't see any concern of equal proportions when it comes to prayers, when it comes to domestic violence. When it comes to people who can't afford to go to hajj. Nobody cares about that. The ḥijāb is the big issue because you have to wear it and if you don't, you are just outside of Islam.

Second, wearing ḥijāb may expose women to more instances of advice, well-intended or otherwise, about whether or not she is engaging in appropriate pastimes or hobbies. Many women expressed frustration about externally and internally imposed "checks" on their behavior when they were wearing ḥijāb. It is possible that by wearing ḥijāb, women were perceived by members of their community as embodying and representing Islam; perfect strangers would therefore feel comfortable "advising" them on the appropriateness of their behavior and the degree to which they were accurately representing a wholesome vision of Islam.

For example, one woman, highly attuned to the fact that she "represents" Islam by virtue of wearing a scarf, discussed her concerns in the following terms:

> I'm like yes, I'm going to make mistakes because I'm just like every other Muslim and I'm just like every other human being on this earth, I'm going to make a mistake and sometimes I will be wearing a scarf when I make that mistake and hopefully God will forgive me for it. [93]

[93] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on November 15, 2013.

She said that a few of her friends had removed headscarves because they felt that they were representations of Islam when they were wearing ḥijāb, and were unequipped to model the high standards of behavior expected of them as living portraits of their religion. She continued, "And I think a lot of people that wear their ḥijāb they are like going through a lot of -- that end up taking it off, they are going through those issues. Like, 'Oh my God, but I want to do this or I'm a smoker.' I remember one of my friends who took off her scarf because she was like, 'I smoke.'"'

The Muslim feminist blogger and activist, quoted above, put it this way:

> A man's body and the man's life decisions are always his own. Whether in the Muslim community or any other community. They're always his own, they're his choices, they're his entitlement. The woman's decision there is like on her family on the community as a whole, on the children, on the parents. The female body is like public property but the male body is just so—but like, this is not just in the Muslim community. In general, it is this, like, concern with the female body because that concern with the female body comes from an entitlement to control it…It's ridiculous how concerned people are with [ḥijāb]. And I've written about this [on my blog] like a thousand times and it comes from this. Its patriarchy at play. Because, like I said, it comes from entitlement to control the female body. This idea that everyone has a say in how a woman is supposed to carry herself so I've written about this. And I got feedback from Muslim men and for some reason they think I'm supposed to care about how my perception of the ḥijāb makes them feel. In my writing, I have said that nobody can say that such and such woman is not allowed to wear ḥijāb because she does not follow Islam correctly. Because ḥijāb is not a trophy you get. And people have argued or they try to argue that a woman who doesn't practice Islam properly or a woman who's going to have a boyfriend should now wear a ḥijāb because she's representing Islam as a whole and therefore her having a boyfriend, or her cursing or her misbehaving is a misrepresentation of Islam. Like it's that sense is like rhetoric. This idea that you represent Islam and therefore you have to represent Islam in a way that is pleasing to me.

In this context the ḥijāb functions not only as a marker of belonging, but also an embodiment of ideological positions surrounding modesty and gender relations. Ḥijāb is therefore widely considered obligatory for women while no corresponding form of dress is

considered similarly mandated for men. Even after a woman chooses to wear ḥijāb, she might still be exposed to debates about what sorts of behaviors are and aren't appropriate for her to engage in, given that she has been charged with acting as an unofficially appointed representative of her faith: wearing makeup, wearing skinny jeans, having a boyfriend, therefore, are potential transgressions not only against one's personal relationship with God, but against the whole Muslim community. It is also a failure to represent Islam in a way that the viewer thinks it should be represented.

It is no surprise, therefore, that so many women expressed so much frustration at the discourse surrounding ḥijāb within the Muslim community: women who do not wear ḥijāb risk being categorized as "impious" and "advised" about proper dress; women who do wear ḥijāb, on the other hand, are exposed not only to Islamophobia from the non-Muslim community but also accusations of misrepresenting Islam, representing it wrong, or practicing an inauthentic version of Islam from within the Muslim community.

It is also worth asking why wearing ḥijāb is seen as inviting, rather than deterring, further commentary on a woman's possible repertoire of behaviors. In other words: women who don't wear ḥijāb might be advised to wear ḥijāb, however, they are not advised to curtail other aspects of their behavior or social lives. Women who do wear ḥijāb, on the other hand, are advised to wear ḥijāb in a different way, or with more "appropriate" clothing in addition to being encouraged to restrict their behaviors, restrict their sartorial repertoire, and refrain from engaging in certain social activities.

Sociologist Erving Goffman has argued that self-presentation is fundamental to identity as it is expressed and experienced within the context of everyday social interactions. Identity, in

other words, is inextricable from self-presentation; this in turn is related to social interaction, which, he argues is a "performance" wherein the individual "presents himself and his activity to others. [This] guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them (Goffman *Presentation* i).

For example, returning to Begum—the college student we heard from in Chapters III and IV, wearing ḥijāb clearly "defines" her role as an individual, as well as the repertoire of her expected behaviors. She finds that individuals expect certain things of her, and act a certain way around her. Muslim men and non-Muslim men alike often avoid her gaze, she says, or make a point of moving out of her way when she passes through a narrow space so as to avoid physically touching her. She appreciates these efforts and considers them gestures of deference and respect.[94]

Impression management, cultivated through a mix of dress and behavior, is fundamental to the establishment of social identity, and both are closely intertwined with concept of the "front," which is "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions... to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman *Presentation*. 27). This front not only projects the role of a given individual within the context of social interaction, but also signals the collection of events likely to occur in her presence. Additionally, the "front" can in and of itself act as a check on an individual's behavior through inviting opprobrium or discomfort when she fails to conform to the expectations set before her:

> [problems can arise] when assumptions upon which the responses of participants [in a given social situation] had been predicated become untenable, and the participants find themselves lodged in an interaction for which the situation has been wrongly defined and

[94] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine at September 23, 2014 at 2:00 pm.

> is now no longer defined. At such moments the individual whose presentation has been discredited may feel ashamed, and all the participants may feel ill at ease, nonplussed, out of countenance, embarrassed, experiencing the kind of anomie that is generated when the minute social system of face-to-face interaction breaks down (Goffman *Presenation* 6).

Ḥijāb, therefore, is guiding a viewer's expectations of a woman's behavior. In the event that she violates these expectations, everyone is unsettled. They feel as though they have been misled by her appearance, or as though she has made a promise and then broken it. A woman who isn't wearing ḥijāb, on the other hand, has made no such promise, and is not telegraphing anything religiously significant about the range of behaviors that one can expect from her.

This may sound to an outsider like it would be a terrible burden at worst and an annoyance at best. However, many women said that they enjoyed the project of modeling Islam because doing so prompted them to behave in a way that they knew would be pleasing to God. Second, it is important to stress that al of the women who wore ḥijāb did so voluntarily as adults, with the exception of a handful who began wearing ḥijāb in high school. In no case did anyone discuss being forced to wear a headscarf, and nor did anyone hint that her safety would be in danger if she removed it.

Finally, I only spoke to one woman who stopped wearing ḥijāb because she felt that it constrained what she could and couldn't do. Going to a concert, or meeting with non-Muslim friends in a venue that serves alcohol, even if she herself refrained from drinking, were apparently things that ḥijābis "do not do." She recalled one incident wherein she wanted to go see the Wallflowers, a mainstream, non-threatening, and milquetoast indie rock band; well-meaning friends and relatives seemed shocked that she would do so in ḥijāb. This was the last straw, she said. She took it off, went to the concert, and never wore ḥijāb again. She is still,

however, an active member of the Muslim community, attends mosque regularly, and identifies as a devout and practicing Muslim.[95]

A vast majority of the women I spoke to were not only comfortable with ḥijāb, but talked at length about why they had consciously and actively made the choice to wear it. One woman explained it to me in the following terms:

> It's like wearing a t-shirt, I have to wear a t-shirt, I'm not going to walk around naked, you know what I mean? It's a part of who I am, it's a requirement, I wear it and I'm happy with it and at the end of the day if I do something wrong or if someone looks at me in a mean way it doesn't mean that they are looking at me in a mean way because I'm wearing a scarf. That's my own personal interpretation of it at some point. They could be looking at me meanly because they don't like whatever sweater I'm wearing, you never know! [96]

Conclusion

It may be difficult for an outsider to understand why college-educated, affluent, intelligent women would choose to embrace and participate in a community with such a social order that so openly differentiates between men and women and the degree to which they are expected to visibly comply with Islamic values. However, the fact that U.S. Muslims are regularly exposed to two competing messages about gender—one advocating for equal rights and the other concerned with cultural decadence--has meant that women are operating within a liminal and contested space for ethnic, religious, and identity development. Religion may help young U.S. Muslims configure and articulate their understandings of how gender should be experienced and performed.

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[95] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Anaheim on September 14, 2012 at 2:30 pm

[96] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on November 15, 2013.

It is important to remember, in addition, that non-Muslim, "mainstream" American space, discourse, and society openly casts men and women into different roles that are far from equal. The women I interviewed are not wrong when they point out that U.S. women are pressured relentlessly to obtain an unrealistic standard of beauty, and valued primarily, if not solely, for their ability to conform to this standard of beauty. Many women additionally went to great lengths to explain how the veil is "empowering" for them given that it decreased the potential that they will be objectified, which in turn facilitated increased deference and respect from Muslim and non-Muslim men alike.

In other words, although Muslim women, like all women, experience considerable pressure from their peers to self-present in a certain way, they do not ultimately choose to wear ḥijāb to appease their friends, or their husbands or fathers; they wear it because they want to do so in order to realize their identity as Muslims, and to follow what they feel is the best interpretation of Islam and its attendant teachings. Wearing ḥijāb, therefore, can be seen as a way for Muslim women to affirm their pride in their own identities and assert their devotion to Islam while simultaneously rejecting the commercialized, misogynist aspects of Western and U.S. culture; it is also a way for them to express their solidarity to, and experience a sense of belonging within, the local and global Muslim communities.

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VII: Media Muftīs: Computer Mediated Environments and Concepts of Authority for U.S. Muslims

Several times in this dissertation I have stressed that flexibility, personalization, and dynamism inform Islamic law and Islamic practice. This individualism allows Muslims in diverse settings to practice "authentic" versions of their faith and facilitate adaptability to change: for example, the availability of '*arf* as a tool of epistemological methodology enables people to practice Islam without giving up important local customs, and *maslaha* can lead to tradeoffs between the needs of the individual and the needs of the greater community in which he or she is embedded. Additionally, *'arf* and *maslaha* can turn the interpretation and application of law into a dialectical process between the people and their spiritual leaders.

These and other related epistemological tools can also serve people and groups interested in confronting established sources of authority, or claiming the mantle of authenticity as their own. In various periods of upheaval and conflict, Islam and Islamic law can, therefore, very easily become sites of conflict wherein various actors challenge pre-existing hierarchies devoted to walling off the consumption and production of religious knowledge, present arguments for supporting different articulations of "authentic" Islamic practice, and engage in interpretive projects absent the constraints of traditional hermeneutical frameworks or markers of authority to do so. The internet has emerged as a particularly productive and vibrant medium wherein these kinds of transitions and discussions occur, providing a venue for laypeople, experts, and activists to circulate and criticize religious texts, participate in on-line forums to talk about the reality of practicing Islam, and produce and consume religious knowledge in self-authorized, collaborative

ventures with others who are similarly self-authorized.

The "disruption" of traditional forms of religious worship in online setting is generally framed as stemming from multifaceted tendencies: Islamic websites, unlike books of tafsīr (exegisis and commentary), are easy to read and clearly written, enabling the participation of new audiences and reaching different people. Additionally, participants in a chat room, message board, or social networking platform may spark conversation where traditional sources are silent. New "spaces," detached from territoriality of physical space, have emerged, allowing laypeople, scholars, experts, activists, and non-believers to pursue religious literacy, discuss issues of concern, offer support in times of crisis, form social coalitions, and interrogate religious norms and practices, and social media allows for perpetual connectivity within and among Muslim communities.

It is, of course, undeniable that Muslim intellectuals (self-styled and otherwise), activists, lay-people, and other beneficiaries of Internet technology are now consuming, producing, and challenging religious authority in previously unimaginable ways. Contemporary muftīs—classically educated or self-educated---are therefore subjected to new modes of accountability as well as an unprecedented level of visibility: the public can post responses to muftīs' opinions on a message board or participate in on-line comment systems designed for this purpose. Lay people can also easily verify a muftī's credentials, compare old opinions to new ones to ensure that a muftī demonstrates ideological consistency, engage in forum-shopping for a muftī with desirable political or social inclinations, and compare the opinions of one muftī to that of another.

It is also unequivocally true that Islam, particularly as it is practiced in the global north, is experiencing a moment of profound visibility, and that the Internet has played a key role in the

shaping of American Islam and American Muslim identity in the post 9/11 context. In the months immediately after 9/11, for example, the rate of online conversions increased tenfold (Bunt *iMuslims* 88). Today's online muftī must, therefore, have a carefully cultivated "brand" if he wants to reach a large audience of U.S. Muslims who see him as a trustworthy person who not only possesses credible knowledge, but also is attuned to challenges faced by young people living in diasporic contexts.

The resulting milieu, according to researchers like Gary Bunt as well as Jon Anderson and Dale Eickelman has challenged top-down frameworks of authority, reconfigured pre-existing hierarchies, exposed the faithful to new sources of religious authority, and introduced new venues for creating religious knowledge. The act of worship as well as existence of centuries-old hierarchies have experienced profound upheaval due to the fact that laypeople can now easily access, circulate, produce, criticize, and react to religious knowledge on their own time and on their own terms.

In this chapter I discuss these claims within the overarching themes of authority and authenticity, bulding on Saminaz Zaman's conception of the "Media Muftī" to interrogate how U.S. Muslims understand and interact with interpretive authority in on-line milieus, and determine which religious knowledge is authoritative on one hand or not credible on the other. In the first section, I discuss how Media Muftīs project authoritativeness; in so doing, I challenge narratives regarding the "disruption" of religious hierarchies by examining the gendered nature of online religious knowledge production and the ways that gender is performed in online spaces. I argue that the gendered nature of the digital body compromises claims regarding the egalitarian nature of the online milieu. I then move on to discuss the fact that Media Muftīs generally draw

from a combination of American discourses, Arab motifs, and classical Islamic sources to create their own, unique personal "brands," a tendency that suggests the ongoing importance of traditional sources of authority. Next, I critically assess the tendency of American Muslims to regard on-line sources of information as a supplement to (rather than a replacement for) face-to-face interactions with knowledgeable individuals, and consider traditional markers of authority (such as knowledge of classic Arabic and a degree from a credentialed university) as critical in establishing credibility and projecting command over Islamic knowledge; these two tendencies destabilize claims surrounding the disruptive effect of the Internet on traditional hierarchies.

English, Authority, and Computer Mediated Environments

Thanks to the combined efforts of South Asian Islamic governments (Mandaville "Reimagining Islam" 176), Muslim educational foundations, and various Islamic publishers, a scarcity of English-language Islamic resources are a "thing of the past" (Lofti 3). Muslims wishing to consume or produce authoritative religious knowledge are now able to do so in English, reach a global audience capable of understanding and responding to their views, and have an array of reliable sources available to them with or without mastery of Arabic (Kort 364). Furthermore, English-speaking Muslims can also produce and distribute religious knowledge by virtue of the fact that they easily reach a global audience capable of understanding and responding to their views; the porous and promiscuous nature of the Internet means that with very few exceptions, anyone from anywhere can access any website and become exposed to

alternative or non-traditional sources of knowledge.[97]

The prevalence of English on the web has also given American Muslims unprecedented levels of access to and control over the on-line production and dissemination of Islamic knowledge, with U.S. Muslims accounting for the majority of consumers and producers of so-called "Virtual Islam" (Cesari 111). English has, therefore, become the *lingua franca* of Internet Islam and, as some researchers argue, is the tongue of the new "vernacular Islam," a version of Islam that exists between the super-literacy of the elite and the mass non-literacy of most Muslims in the world (Zaman).

The prevalence of English on the web has not only altered the terms of religious knowledge consumption, but also the framework for religious knowledge production. Muslim intellectuals, muftīs, and Imāms from non-Anglophone countries have concluded that English is a "preferred medium to call attention to new ideas. One leading Arab religious intellectual has even observed that to spread new ideas in the Islamic world it helps to have one's ideas known in the English speaking world and taken seriously by English speakers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike" (Eickelman and Anderson 8).

While Arab religious authorities may still address local audiences using Arabic, therefore, they will often favor English over Arabic or even French when trying to obtain a more cosmopolitan reach. In sum, English has, as one researcher put it, "de-emphasize(d) an Arab/ Middle Eastern Arabic speaking monopoly on Islamic discourse, opening up debate and

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[97] There are, of course, exceptions: Netflix, for example, is only available in certain countries, and not all content is available in all countries. China has also blocked access to many non-Chinese websites using the "Great Firewall of China." These are exceptions, however, rather than that rule. For now, the majority of the publicly accessible web is available to anyone with an Internet connection no matter where he or she is in the world.

discussion between Muslims worldwide…" (Kort 364).

Many scholars interested in the effects of the Internet on pre-existing structures argue that this increased English-language literacy, acting in tandem with the frequent use of English and the digitization and dissemination of knowledge, has successfully disrupted pre-existing monopolies on religious authority, enabling a new class of interpreters who can disseminate or produce religious knowledge regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or social class. The dominant logic amongst many sociologists and anthropologists, furthermore, is that these online religious activities will soon fragment, displace, or erode religious authority by supplanting power, or furnishing an equivalent authority in place of another (Cheong 74-75).

Scholars vary, however, in their determinations of just *how* and *why* this erosion will happen: early work on online communities generally located their defining feature as anonymous, which was presumed to result in negative interactions and a lack of social bonds. Asynchronous, anonymous interaction via the written word and the occasional animated gif, was thought to present an environment devoid of social cues or possibilities for meaningful social interaction. In other words, an ethnographer or anthropologist would find no *data* in the cold, detached milieu of cyberspace. More recent work, however, has acknowledged that a) members of online communities can and do form social bonds, b) that their online activities can translate into offline shifts in action, ideology, and identity, and c) users have a variety of methods for communicating social cues absent body language, shifts in tone of voice, hand gestures, etc.

Arturo Escobar, an early pioneer in the field of cybercultural studies, noted that computers and information technology were ushering in a regime of "technosociality," a process of sociocultural construction that along with Rabinow's "biosociality" formed the basis of

"cyberculture" (Escobar "Welcome to Cyberia" 214). The characteristics of cyberculture, he admitted, were not yet fully understood, however it was already clear that cyberculture should be understood as the "overarching field of forces and meanings in which the complex production of life, labor, and language takes place" (Escobar "Welcome to Cyberia" 217).

Technosociality has since come to refer to the inhabitation of an online network as a social environment, wherein no fissures exist between the individual, technology, and "society," however defined. Computers, smart phones, and other technological instruments in this framework are reconceptualized as "contexts which bring about new ways of being, new chains of values and new sensibilities about time, space, and the events of culture" (Holmes 73).

Virtual communities, meanwhile, emerge from social aggregations that coalesce online to form subcultures regardless of—or perhaps due to--their disconnectedness from shared place and time. Such subcultures exist in the Geertzian sense of possessing "historically transmitted patterns of meanings embedded in symbols" (Geertz qtd in Kozinets "On Netnotraphy" 367) and are made of a "web" of constituent members who have formed "personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold 5). Members of an online community are members of a subculture by virtue of their shared fluency in signs and symbols. Individuals can remain interconnectedness in an online-world unmediated by offline constraints of time and place, using emoticons, elipses, choices in spelling, and nuances of capitalization to creates substitutes for body language, facial expression, or tone of voice.

Researches attempting to study the Internet and its relationship to authority have, however, frequently argued that computer-mediated environments disrupt traditional hierarchies in various ways. In his foundational 1993 work on cyberculture, Howard Rheingold referred

repeatedly to cyber-communities' ability to form networks of power which were essentially based solely on reciprocal sharing of information, but were nonetheless capable of disrupting the monopoly of power held by existing political hierarchies (Rheingold 9). Of course, participants in these virtual salons, engaging in the stimulating and exciting process of sharing information and trading knowledge, in 1993, as now, are more likely than not to be English-speaking people from the global north. The conversations that take place on line, just like the conversations that take place in "real life," are therefore generally dominated by a small group of people who are disproportionately empowered to affect change. An individual's political or geographic location, class, race, gender, and age all influence the possibility of online access, and off-line hierarchies related to gender and race are frequently re-enacted and re-created in online spaces.

Other scholars, focusing in particular on the Internet and its impacts on religious hierarchy, have similarly argued that the Internet displaces "traditional" sources of religious knowledge and traditional forms of worship, claiming that:

> the mainstream conception linking religious authority and the Internet is normative, taking hold in the shadow of utopian and dystopian thinking and research in the context of virtual communities….Earlier research on religion online made extreme claims about religious authority in mainstream and new religious contexts….[arguing] that new flows of religious information and knowledge posed corrosive effects on the influence and jurisdiction of religious authorities (Cheong 75).

In this framing, as in Rheingold's, the online milieu is regarded as inherently egalitarian, enabling members of a religious community to circumvent interactions with traditional sources of authority and experience a space with few restrictions.

Lorne Dawson and Douglas Cowan, for example, write that "something mysterious happens when covens go online… Older, established conventions are traded in for newer, often

less precise understandings" and criterion of membership can become more "elastic" (Dawson and Cowan 2). Prebish similarly characterizes cyberspace as a "cybersangha," wherein interaction is despatialized, deterritorialized, and open to all (Prebish 145). Still, these claims rest on unstable ground, given that there is no theoretical framework accounting for *how* or *why* "older conventions" are traded in for "newer, often less precise understandings."

An alternative view is that the Internet challenges authority by "expanding access to religious information in a way that can undermine the plausibility structure of a religious system" (Cheong 76). Anderson, for example, regards the Internet as a "new public space which enables a new class of interpreters who are facilitated by this medium to address and thereby reframe Islam's authority and expression for those like themselves and others who come there" (Anderson 45). The Internet, he adds, "does not facilitate the spokesperson-advocate of established institutions, but draws instead on a broader range of interpreters or newly visible interpreters" (Anderson 45).

The resulting milieu, according to Gary Bunt in *iMuslims* and Jon Anderson in *The Internet add Islam's New Interpreters,* challenges top-down frameworks of authority, reconfigures pre-existing hierarchies, exposes self-identified Muslims and non-Muslims alike to new sources of religious authority, and introduces new venues for creating religious knowledge. Bunt in particular has concludes in *iMuslims* that Internet has emerged as a uniquely productive and vibrant medium wherein these kinds of transitions and discussions occur, providing a venue for laypeople, experts, and activists to circulate and criticize religious texts, participate in on-line forums to talk about the reality of practicing Islam, and produce and consume religious knowledge in self-authorized, collaborative ventures with others who are similarly self-

authorized.

However, while it is certainly the case that English is the *lingua franca* of the Web and the preferred language for reaching mass audiences, it is difficult to conclude that the *quantity* of English-language Islamicate knowledge has led to an erosion in the perceived *quality* of the Arabic language and its conduciveness for accessing "real" authentic knowledge. Put differently, the fact that so many Imams use English does not demonstrate that Arabic has been supplanted as a marker of authoritative, authentic Islam.

Historically, within the context of Islamic culture and thought, it is not an exaggeration to say Arabic has traditionally been regarded as nothing short of a God-given language, and the centrality of Arabic to the historical development of Islamic jurisprudence, culture, and philosophical thought cannot be overstated. This attitude, as well as the idea that Islam is permanently yoked to Arabic has been prevalent for centuries even in non-Arab countries and among non-Arab scholars and thinkers. For example, Turkish Islamic thinker Sakib Arslan "held that the community was defined by its religion, and since Arabs formed the core of the Islamic *umma* [community], Arabic was the true language of Islam, so that every Muslim had to learn Arabic" (Versteegh and Versteegh 177).

My analysis reveals that while English is important for an Imām or muftīs interested in global reach, command over Arabic remains crucial for scholars wishing to claim any credibility or authority in Islamic law. While the most successful Media Muftīs communicate to their audiences in English, therefore, they refer constantly to their knowledge of Arabic, use Arabic words in place of English ones when discussing religious concepts, and wield their knowledge of Arabic as an important source of authority.

For example, Suhaib Webb is a popular Muslim American convert who serves as Imām at a Boston mosque, and was named one of the 500 Most Influential Muslims in the World by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center in 2010. Born in Oklahoma, he converted to Islam at the age of 20 and, as his biography puts it,

> … left his career in the music industry to pursue his passion in education. He earned a Bachelor's in Education from the University of Central Oklahoma and received intensive private training in the Islamic Sciences under a renowned Muslim Scholar of Senegalese descent…From 2004-2010, Suhaib Webb studied at the world's preeminent Islamic institution of learning, Al-Azhar University, in the College of Shari`ah. During this time, after several years of studying the Arabic Language and the Islamic legal tradition, he also served as the head of the English Translation Department at Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah….Outside of his studies at Al-Azhar, Suhaib Webb completed the memorization of the Qur'ān in the city of Makkah, Saudi Arabia. He has been granted numerous traditional teaching licenses (ijazat), adhering to centuries-old Islamic scholarly practice of ensuring the highest standards of scholarship (Webb "About Us: Webb")

His website, suhaibwebb.com, has won several awards,[98] including the 2009 Brass Crescent "Blog of the Year Award," and my interview participants consistently identified his website as one that they visited frequently and considered a source of reliable information about Islam. Furthermore, many interview participants also identified Suhaib Webb himself as as person that they greatly admire and look up to.

Www.SuhaibWebb.com (now www.virtualmosque.com) explicitly self-identifies as a "virtual mosque," but functions primarily to disseminate information and generate discussions about Islam in the U.S. Suhaib Webb himself writes a plurality of the posts specifically devoted to religious concepts or dealing with problems specifically tied to religion or religious identity, but he also has a staff of volunteers who write essays on topics related to gender, raising

[98] In early 2015, SuhaibWebb.com became VirtualMosque.com. However, the content appears to be exactly the same as before and accessing Suhaibwebb.com will simply redirect to Virtualmosque.com.

children, dealing with Islamophobia, and navigating the challenges of living as a Muslim in the U.S.

Although all of the posts on Suhaib Webb's website are in English, Arabic plays a central role in discussions surrounding religious worship, piety, and religious knowledge. For example, some posts have characterized Arabic as the "living language" of the "infallible word of God" and "language of your homeland" and have argued that learning Arabic is the "next proper step" in correctly articulating sacred Islamic knowledge (Ederer "Arabization"). Other posts on the website position command of Arabic as crucial to understanding the message of the Qur'ān (Amirebrahimi "Taraweeh") as well as the fiqh (Rios "Usul").

Some of these posts were written by guest authors or website staff, but Suhaib Webb himself has posted articles and essays positioning Arabic as the "language of revelation" (Webb "Learn Arabic") and equating mastery of Arabic to mastery of Shar'ia:

> "If it is established that a person is a beginner in his understanding of the Arabic language, then he is a beginner in understanding Shari'ah; if he is average in his understanding of Arabic, then he his average in his understanding of Shari'ah and if he attains mastery in his understanding of Arabic, then the same will hold true for his understanding of Shari'ah. Thus, [if he masters the language] his understanding of the Shari'ah and its objectives will be like the understanding of the Companions."
> *Imām al-Shatibi al-Muwafatqat vol. 4 pg. 115* (Webb "Imam al-Shatibi")

The aesthetics of the website itself, moreover, draws heavily from Arabo-Islamicate motifs and patterns. Until January of 2015, the logo was the word "Suhaib" in Arabic letters, linked together to form the shape of a square.[99] Whenever a post on the site mentions the name of the Prophet, the words "May Peace Be Upon Him" appear immediately thereafter in Arabic calligraphic script. Thumbnail images for posts often—though not always— use idealized Arabo-

[99] After the site redesign, the logo became a minaret topped with a crescent.

Islamic and vaguely Eastern imagery such as birds flying around the spire of a mosque, bright blue doors reminiscent of those found in North African qisbahs, Oriental prayer rugs, Arabic calligraphy, and men wearing traditional Arab *khameez*.

Suhaib Webb is not alone in using Arabo-Islamic motifs so prominently, however, or in arguing about the centrality of Arabic to Islamic knowledge. The website of Hamza Yusuf, another popular Media Muftī, similarly makes liberal use of Arab motifs and imagery. Yusuf, like Suhaib Webb, is a white convert to Islam who grew up in Northern California. Born Mark Hanson, he changed his name after converting to Islam, a transition that was prompted due to a near-death experience at age 17 (Curtis *Sourcebook* 405). Soon after converting, he enrolled at Al-Ain University in the United Arab Emirates to pursue his studies of Islam and classical Arabic for four years; according to his biography, he also studied privately with "Shaikh Baya bin Salik, head of the Islamic court in Al-'Ain; Shaikh Muhammad Shaybani, Muftī of Abu Dhabi; Shaikh Hamad al-Wali; and Shaikh Muhammad al-Fatrati of Al-Azhar University. In 1984, Hamza Yusuf entered the Bilal ibn Rabah Madrasa of Tizi, Algeria and studied with Shaikh Sidi Bou Sai'd" (The Modern Religion).

Eventually, Yusuf returned to the United States and started Zaytuna Institute, a private Muslim college that promises to "revive Islam's educational and intellectual legacy and to popularize traditional learning among Western Muslims [within the] American liberal arts tradition (*Curtis Sourcebook* 405)." Zaytuna's website, like that of Suhaib Webb's, also borrows liberally from Arabo-Islamic art, with "bismillah" in Arabic calligraphy on the upper right-hand side of the home page and a logo that features a crescent moon, a mosque, and a tree etched in white over an olive green background. Zaytuna College, according to the homepage of its

website, has:

> developed a unique curriculum for a Bachelor's program that relies on various pedagogical approaches such as selective memorization and critical analysis. The curriculum emphasizes key foundational texts; an in-depth examination of critical methodological issues; a solid command of the Arabic language; a familiarity with the most important Islamic sciences; and a firm grounding in the tools of learning with an emphasis on the qualitative elements of the traditional liberal arts.

Zaytuna has a good reputation amongst the people I interviewed, with many interview subjects expressing a desire to attend in the future or claiming to regularly sit in on "on-line" classes, however, Hamza Yusuf himself does not have the cult of personality surrounding figures like the American media muftīs Yusuf Estes and Suhaib Webb, or the Egyptian muftī Yusuf Qaradawi. Hamza Yusuf's official website, sandala.org, is not magazine-like, and functions less a virtual mosque or a community center than as a virtual bazaar where visitors can read an occasional post but is primarily offered the opportunity to purchase Islam-oriented books, CDs, and DVDs. Like SuhaibWebb.org, and now Virtualmosque.com, however, the aesthetics of sandala.org draws from Arabo-Islamic imagery, using an "exotic" font called Bayan for subheadings and featuring a geometric orange and grey border that lines the bottom of the site, and a teardrop-shaped orange logo.

My argument here isn't to refute the notion that Arabic is an essential part of Islamic education, or to challenge the idea that the Qur'ān is only considered the revealed word of God in its original language of Arabic. Rather, my point is to challenge the argument that the Internet has profoundly disturbed pre-existing authority structures regarding religious knowledge production in the Muslim community, and question the notion that the *quantity* of Islam-related materials in English is indicative of the perceived *quality* these materials.

To be sure, while non-Arabic speaking Muslims can now access material that was previously available only in Arabic, much of this material has been selected, interpreted, curated, or otherwise provided by muftīs who not only possess an education in classical Islamic law and fluency in Arabic, but also unambiguously draw from their fluency in Arabic and academic backgrounds as sources of credibility and authority. While it is therefore clearly the case that a Muslim with no formal Islamic education and no command of Arabic could, if desired, begin a web page and start posting about Islamic law, it is not at all clear that they would attract an audience a fraction as large as those reached by Media Muftīs like Suhaib Webb and Hamza Yusuf, who combine their charismatic authority—particularly in the case of Suhaib Webb—with the traditional authority of an Al Azhar education.

Furthermore, knowledge of Arabic—as demonstrated—is still touted as essential for Muslims interested in truly understanding Islam. As a result, the production of "authentic" Islamic knowledge is still very much linked to Arabic language and yoked to an idealized version of Arab culture, while credibility is projected through harnessing Arabic words, Arabo-Islamicate motifs, and Arabic texts.

How should we understand the relationship between Arabic, authenticity, and authority, then, particularly insofar as it occurs in computer-mediated environments? Weber linked the existence of a common language as a "first place" element for the formation of national sentiment (Weber *Selections* 178). The language and the literature based on it, furthermore, are "the only cultural value at all accessible to the masses who ascend towards participation in culture…Common cultural values can provide a unifying national bond" (Weber *Selections* 178).

That said, Weber was also keenly aware of the economic necessity of a common

language, which is not only necessary for cohesion, but also important for economic advancement (Weber *Selections* 178): Capitalist interests are "anchored in the maintenance and cultivation of the popular language," he argues, given that the interests of "publishers, editors, authors, and contributors" to printed media are all predicated on the existence of a common language legible to all" (Weber *Selections* 178).

These explanations, however, fail to account for the role of language in displaying or reproducing systems of authority, as well as its centrality to manifestations of authenticity. Bourdieu also wrote at length on the relationships between the state, authority, and language, linking the existence of linguistic hegemony to its position within an "integrated linguistic market" sponsored and legitimated by the state, and validated (as well as valued) by its role in the labor market (Bourdieu 744). But this too fails to account for the prevalence of Arabic, given that knowledge of Arabic is linked to spiritual, rather than economic advancement; furthermore, Arabic retains its value for English-speaking Muslims in the U.S., the U.K, and South Asia in spite of the fact that it is neither sponsored nor legitimated by the state.

Anthropologist and linguist Michael Silverstein (205) argues that the choice of language can signal membership and belonging, separating insiders from outsiders by virtue of their ability to understand and ascribe meaning to various speech acts . Choice of language creates and reinforces boundaries, demonstrates and creates solidarity, and causes distance on one hand or closeness on the other by including some and excluding others. But again, this too fails to explain why the vast majority of these websites are in English, and why Arabic loanwords (such as fatawā, for example, or hijāb) are transliterated rather than written in Arabic script. It furthermore fails to account for how knowledge of a certain language—in this case, Arabic-- is

communicative of cultural, ethnic, or ideological authenticity.

Returning to Geertz, it is worth reviewing that in his treatment of communal and political loyalties, Geertz took on the conceptual haze surrounding the terms 'nationalism,' 'nation,' and 'nationality,' arguing that prevailing theoretical frameworks failed to account for, or alternatively confused, political, psychological, and demographic factors driving contemporary political or nationalist movements (Geertz "Primordial" 119). Conflict between nationalist aspirations and minority ethnic groups, he argued, was the result of tension between the desire for universal engagement on one hand and an interest in distinctiveness on the other:

> The one aim is to be noticed: it is a search for an identity, and a demand that the identity will be publicly acknowledged as having importance, a social assertion of 'being somebody in the world.' The other demand is practical: it is a demand for progress, for a rising standard of living, more effective political order, greater social justice and beyond that of 'playing a part in the larger arena of world politics' (Geertz "Primordial" 119).

As discussed in Chapter V, members of a given ethnic group, to Geertz, function as a "primordial group" wherein membership is predicated on blood ties (real or actual), shared language, regional affiliation, or a common religion (Geertz "Primoridal" 119). Again, these "primordial ties" are more powerful and more significant than the ties of party, class, or citizenship given that subordinating these "specific and familiar" identifications in favor of a

> generalized commitment to an overarching and somewhat alien civil order is to risk a loss of definition as an autonomous person either through absorption into a culturally undifferentiated mass or, what is even worse, through domination by some other rival ethnic, racial, or linguistic community…. (Geertz "Primoridal Ties" 120).

In this reading, command of classical and Qur'ānic Arabic can be thought of as a marker of identity and autonomy as well as an indicator of resilience against Western hegemony. It

furthermore can be thought of as demostrative of an interest to routinize the charismatic authority of the Prophet (given that he spoke Arabic and revealed the Word in Arabic), showing the continuity of the Muslim community throughout time and space, loyalty to traditions anchored by the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth as well as the validity of their authority. Finally, command of Arabic not only legitimizes the superior social status of the Imām or muftī by positioning him as uniquely qualified to access sacred knowledge, it links the identity of the speaker to the broader social category of Muslim jurists, who have, throughout time and space, been expected to have a command of classical and Qur'ānic Arabic.

Islamic Law as a Source of Authority

Islamic law and traditional centers of Islamic jurisprudence also figure prominently into online projections of authority. In a 1999 article, sociologist Peter Mandaville argued that digitized books and articles might allow the systematization of religious knowledge, but would not necessarily lead to a disruption of traditional centers of authority like Qom and Al-Azhar (Mandaville "Digital Islam" 22). It would seem that he was—and is—correct, given that the most successful Media Muftīs not only possess fluency in Arabic, but also have prominently displayed and frequently referenced credentials in Islamic Studies from a university in the Middle East. Media Muftīs may therefore produce religious knowledge within a collaborative milieu as Bunt has suggested, given that they often engage with commenters and write articles in response to reader emails, but the substance of the knowledge itself is informed by –or at least, presented as though it is informed by— the muftī's knowledge of classical Islamic law as he has

learned it (or claimed to have learned it) in a traditional center of Islamic learning. As Saminaz Zaman put it in his exploration of the "Media Muftī" and online authority:

> Contrary to Bunt, Eickelman, and Anderson's predictions…the online mosque will never replace their brick and mortar counterparts. The Internet has led to a democratization of Islamic knowledge, but simply keeping a blog or administering a website does not carry the same weight as an al-Azhar education (Zaman 467).

It is difficult to argue with this conclusion, given that Al-Azhar, and indeed the Middle East itself, are powerful "brands" invested with centuries of institutional charisma. Studying at Al-Azhar may be desirable for its intellectual rigor, but studying in the Middle East or North Africa, even at a university lacking in international reputation, also carries traditional authority due to perceived connections with the early Muslim community and the fact that the Middle East is the birthplace of Islam. Credentials from the "Arab world," rather from a similarly (or more) rigorous university in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, or the United States, emphasize "primordial ties" to place as well as language, and provide the illusion of uninterrupted continuity from revelation until the present. A credential from a Middle Eastern or North African university furthermore suggests that the recipient has had prolonged access to authentic Islamic tradition which, in and of itself, can be a powerful source of authority. After all, the reason why sacredness is such an effective and widespread form of legitimation is because, as Weber expert Craig Matheson notes:

> Sacralization of social institutions makes them seem beyond human caprice. As many students of comparative religion have noticed, the essence of the sacred is its 'otherness' as a power confronting man [sic] to which he must submit. The principle of legitimation is what Sjoberg terms the 'appeal to absolutes' or a claim to legitimation by forces independent of human action, such as we see embodied in the divine right of kings (Matheson 202).

Expertise is also a powerful source of legitimation, which compels obedience because the power-holder possesses some type of knowledge that allows him to know what is best for a given group, or best qualifies him to hold power (Matheson 200). Appeal to expertise can also be linked to special insight into foundational laws or historic principles which make a given actor best suited to govern or exercise authority (Matheson 200).

Muftīs who have graduated from Al Azhar, studied Islamic sciences in the Middle East, or even studied under a person of African or Middle Eastern background outside of an institutional setting, therefore, generally prominently advertise the fact that they have done so; in the process, they are laying claim to the special kind of expertise that stems from their credentials as well as their primordial ties to the early Muslim community and their connection to the elite group of classical jurists who studied at these universities in the classical period of Islam.

For example, Suhaib Webb (over 56,000 Twitter followers as of the end of 2014) first studied the Islamic sciences under a "renowned Muslim Scholar of Senegalese descent" before attending the "world's preeminent Islamic institution of learning, Al-Azhar University, in the College of Shari`ah."

Hamza Yusuf (over 76,000 Twitter followers) moved to the United Arab Emirates in 1979, and then:

> …studied Islamic Institute of Al-'Ain for four years, augmenting his studies with lessons by leading scholars of the Islamic world [including]…Shaikh Baya bin Salik, head of the Islamic court in Al-'Ain; Shaikh Muhammad Shaybani, Muftī of Abu Dhabi; Shaikh Hamad al-Wali; and Shaikh Muhammad al-Fatrati of Al-Azhar University. In 1984, Hamza Yusuf entered the Bilal ibn Rabah Madrasa of Tizi, Algeria and studied with Shaikh Sidi Bou Sai'd. After being expelled from Algeria by the government, he travelled [sic] to a unique madrassa in Mauritania and studied with the most noble scholar Shaykh Murabit al-Hajj bin Fahfu.. (Islam: The Modern Religion)

Zaid Shakir (40,000 Twitter followers) studied Arabic in Egypt for a year, returned to the United States, and then

> left for Syria to pursue his studies in the traditional Islamic sciences. For seven years in Syria, and briefly in Morocco, he immersed himself in an intense study of Arabic, Islamic law, Qur'ānic studies, and spirituality with some of the top Muslim scholars of our age. In 2001, he graduated from Syria's prestigious Abu Noor University with a BA in Islamic Sciences…(New Islamic Directions).

My point is not to evaluate the respective quality of institutions like Al Azhar, Abu Noor, or El 'Ain, or to argue that it is unreasonable to learn Arabic by living in a Middle Eastern or North African country. Rather, I am arguing that the fact of administering a website is not enough to establish credibility on its own, or to convincingly project a mastery of authentic or authoritative religious knowledge. Each of these muftīs have taken great pains to not only demonstrate their knowledge of Arabic, but also to advertise their connections to institutions like Al-Azhar, institutions with traditional authority and powerful brand recognition.

The perceived legitimacy of these muftīs , therefore, rests to a great extent on their association with Al-Alzhar and the Middle East and on the institutionalization of Arabic as the language of Islamic law. The muftīs with the largest reach and the most followers combine charismatic authority with the kind of traditional authority that comes from an education in classical Islamic Sciences at centuries-old institutions of learning in the Middle East and Africa.

It would, therefore, seem that in spite of the fact that there is no official clergy in Islam, and contrary to Bunt's assertion in *iMuslims* that the Internet has enabled a "horizontal knowledge model" wherein religious knowledge is produced collaboratively, Islamic knowledge production is still very much a professionalized endeavor, wherein the purported necessity of Arabic fluency, combined with the ongoing resonance of classical epistemological approaches to

Islamic law, has calcified, rather than disrupted, the existence of a class of persons seen as having special abilities to untangle the complexity of Islamic knowledge. It is therefore difficult to reconcile the existence and reach of "professional" muftīs with assertions that the Internet has disrupted hierarchies and ushered in new classes of actors and interpreters.

Second, as Heidi Campbell pointed out in "Who's Got the Power", in much of the literature concerned with the Internet, power, and authority, researchers simply use words like "power," "legitimacy," and "authority" without defining them, or alternatively, researchers may claim that traditional sources of power and authority have been undermined, compromised, or disturbed, without interrogating interrogate how authority is disrupted, how it has been changed, or how we can reliably measure this shift.

Finally, it should also be noted that "authority" and "legitimacy" are not interchangeable terms either: "legitimacy," to Weber, is concerned with "orders," which are the systems of "determinate maxims or rules" that frame, constrain, and shape the behavior of individual actors (Weber "Essays" 124). A "legitimate order" is a normative system that rests on the fact that the actors participating in the system consider it to be correct, or right. As summarized, translated, and analyzed by the American sociologist Martin E. Spencer, Weber cites four bases through which individuals may agree with or accept the legitimacy of a given order:

> By tradition: a belief in the legitimacy of what has always existed; b) by virtue of affectual attitudes, especially emotional, legitimizing the validity of what [is] newly revealed or a model to imitate; c) by virtue of a rational belief in its absolute value, thus lending it the validity of an absolute and final commitment; d) because it has been established in a manner which is recognized to be legal…An order which is adhered to from motives of pure expedience is generally much less stable than one upheld on a purely customary basis through the fact that the corresponding behavior has become habitual. The latter is the most common type of subjective attitude. But even this type of order is in turn much less stable than an order which enjoys the prestige of being

> considered binding or, as it may be expressed, of 'legitimacy.'' (qtd in Spencer 124-125)

The essence of authority, therefore, is a relationship between two or more actors in which the commands of certain actors are treated as binding (Spencer 125). Legal authority furthermore rests on claims to legitimacy via the "legality" of rationally established rules. With legal authority, the individual is generally prepared to accept a "class of orders from specific persons"—in this case, muftīs issuing legal opinions (Albrow 154).

In the specific case of U.S. Islam and the Internet, it is difficult to see exactly how local authority or traditional hierarchies have been disrupted by computer mediated environments and horizontal knowledge models, given that the rôle of the Media Muftī is directed towards providing religious knowledge which, as he well knows, will be regarded as one option out of many, with the layperson ultimately empowered to decide which stance on a given issue is the correct stance. In other words, as revealed by my interviews with subjects and my analysis of comments threads and message board interactions from sites like SuhaibWebb.com, Islamicity, and Sunni Path, I found no evidence suggesting that the commands, decisions, or conclusions of the muftī were considered binding.

In fact, the Media Muftī may be the *last* option for Muslim Americans searching for information about Islam: a vast majority of my interview participants admitted to going on line regularly to search for answers about Islam, they did so knowing that the "real" answers would come from local sources. As one 22-year-old Afghan American woman put it:

> I will, I will go to Suhaibwebb.com and see if I can find my answers. I also have, like, I guess what I do is if it's like a specific issue I would Google it, as bad as that is. And then that will lead me to… ideally it would lead me to Qur'ānic verses or to Hadith. And then

> I go to those verses in the Qur'ān…and I read that, like, in context, and what-not. And I try to make sense of it like that so I take it with, like, a ton of salt, not just a grain. [100]

Or from Cara, the Asian American convert:

> *Me: So when you have a question about Islam, from like a prayer time to like if your dog licks you, you know, when can you pray or whatever, where is the first place you usually turn in order to get answers?*
> *Cara:* I usually ask other knowledgeable members in my community, I mean my MSA community, like they tell me something and I don't necessarily follow it right away, I want to know what they think, and then –because I know a sheikh's phone number so I can just like text him questions. Because he's made himself so accessible to young people, it's a lot easier for me to be in contact with a scholar who has like studied at al-Azhar.
> *Me: So when you say you turn to knowledgeable members of your own community—how do you, what makes you think of them as more knowledgeable?*
> *Cara*: I know that some members of the community have like studied in South Africa and in Mauritania and these people are known—and also, just like, from day to day interactions you can tell that they know more than you do, or like the average Muslim.
> *Me: So if you encounter a fatwā from a muftī or an Imām that you've never heard of, how do you know if he knows what he's doing or not—the muftī, I mean, not the person who brought your attention to him?*
> *Cara:* I usually ask other people what their opinions are about that person, and read articles by that person that he's written, and just feel if that aligns with the Islam that I follow. [101]

Most other interview participants reported asking questions of their parents, older siblings, or 'knowledgeable' friends from the Muslim community. A few claimed that they knew an Imām that they could text, and the rest simply engaged in self-supervised research.

Many others I spoke with turned to their parents or friends or to local Imām or muftī , and claimed that they never used the Internet to search for and find religious knowledge, or alternatively, only used the internet to search for religious knowledge that they would later verify

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[100] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on June 4, 2013, at 3:30 p.m.

[101] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Irvine, California, on May 30, 2013 at 6:00 p.m.

with people or non-web-based sources that they considered reliable. Most participants therefore consider the Islamic knowledge on the Internet in the same way that many of us regard the medical advice given on WebMD: yes, we may turn to it in search of immediate answers or if we are unable to access affordable health care options. But the *real* and preferred answer, the one that we trust and act on, will come from a qualified person who has earned traditionally-sourced credentials and has a physical presence in the "real" world.

That said, the advice of a real world, credentialed doctor is considered to be "binding" in that we generally endeavor to follow her advice, or at the very least, we more or less acknowledge the wisdom and the "correctness" of her advise even if we cannot follow it for whatever reason; the advice of a real-world muftī, on the other hand, is not necessarily considered "binding" given that individuals will generally only follow or agree with it if it confirms their own ideas of the "correct" answer, their own interpretations of relevant texts, and the rhythms of their daily lives.

Muslims seeking the advice of an scholar, online or otherwise, will therefore consider his advice, subject it to critical evaluation, and choose to follow it if and only if it works best for their individual circumstances. As a 23-year old South Asian man explained,

> I may listen to scholars, or I may not listen. I think [scholars] are an excellent resource, but in the end I think the fundamental nature of our religions is that you're responsible to your Creator in the end. It doesn't matter whoever says what, that you have that responsibility, and I can't delegate that to anyone else. Even if they say they are right and everyone around them says they're right. [Scholars] have this hierarchy of the development of their laws, and development of their theology that says they are right, [but] that doesn't mean anything to me.[102]

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[102] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on May 28, 2013, at 4:00 p.m.

A highly illustrative example of this tendency took place in April of 2012, when a Suhaib Webb himself posted a fatwā addressing whether or not women could pray if they were wearing nail polish. Webb drew from several Hānafi sources to explain that it was impossible to achieve ritual purity if women had painted their nails, given that nail polish was usually not breathable. He suggested that women wishing to wear nail polish select breathable nail polish instead, thus ensuring that water would permeate to the nail and allow them to make wuḍū (wash themselves) before prayer. A flurry of comments followed, many of which included expressions of doubt that breathable nail polish was as breathable as advertised.

Months later, with the list of comments still growing, the muftī posted a video of a science experiment comparing the breathable nail polish with a standard, non-breathable brand:

> One of my students applied standard pink nail polish and purple [breathable nail polish] on a coffee filter and allowed both to dry. She then placed another coffee filter below the painted one, squeezed two drops of water over the polish, and applied some pressure with her finger. After about ten seconds it was clear that the water was prevented from seeping through (even to the back side of the first filter) on the standard polish but clearly went through the [breathable nail polish] and even wet the second filter. This is sufficient to show that the claims made by the manufacturer are correct and water does indeed permeate through to the nail.

Therefore, he concluded, women could wear the breathable nail polish and make wuḍū.

The article continued to draw comments after the video was posted. Some people argued about the soundness of the muftī's reasoning; most, however, were either expressing joy that they could wear nail polish and pray, criticizing the people who were expressing joy about wearing nail polish while praying, or questioning the intelligence and spiritual health of people who were concerned with the question in the first place.

People that I spoke to in person within the context of interviews as well as within the

context of casual conversation argued that concerns with nail polish were worth addressing if they helped just one woman feel comfortable praying, but many expressed frustration that the issue had generated so much controversy in the first place. As one 26-year-old, college-educated unmarried Arab American woman put it:

> [Discussing details about whether or not you can pray if you're wearing nail polish] is an easy debate. But let's sit here talk about – okay, guys, let's talk about who God is and let's talk about God's love for us and whatever. Everybody knows that [this is what is important], nobody questions it, but as an outsider looking in, they are like, 'Man these people have problems. All they talk about is these little things and they are so strict and I don't want to be a Muslim if I can't have my dog.' Because that's the only debate that they see but when they understand that 99% of Islam is not [these little things]--[sighs] you know what I mean? It's like, there is no question about it. It's just sad [to get concerned about little things like nail polish] and I think that at the end of the day, the devil wants to play with people in a certain way so a lot of times it's like if you are a religious person the devil is going to come to you and make you fight over the little things because that's the easiest target. [103]

A 24 year old South Asian American woman, addressing the issue of nail polish and the controversy generated by the fatwā, put it more succinctly: "Man," she said. "The maturity of my community." And then she shook her head, rolled her eyes, and sighed heavily. In other words: the topic that the muftī chose to address was far less important, to these women, than bigger issues surrounding spiritual values and the love of God. The "little things" like ritual purity, regardless of the muftī's stance on it, his willingness to address it in the first place, and his interest in posting a video confirming the scientific correctness of his answer was possibly related to "the devil [coming] to make you fight over the little things" rather than words of wisdom from an esteemed Muslim intellectual.

It should also be noted that while the overarching source of authority framing Suhaib

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[103] Excerpted from an interview conducted in Los Angeles on September 7, 2013, at 10:00 am.

Webb's decision were the classical Hānafi texts that grounded his analysis—"charismatic justice," to Weber –(*Essays in Sociology* 216)), the decision was reinforced by a video using the scientific method to prove that the breathable nail polish was in fact breathable and allowed water to permeate to the surface of the nail--"empirical justice", to Weber (*Essays in Sociology* 216). Webb's own authority as an Imām therefore rests just as heavily on the scientific method as on his own mastery of classical Islamic jurisprudence. In other words, the traditional authority invested in his station as a muftī was not a foregone conclusion. Neither was the "institutional charisma" generally attributed to the office of muftī (Matheson). Recognizing that visitors to his website were not willing to "a priori suspend their own judgment and accept that of an acknowledged superior without having to be convinced that his [or hers] is correct," (Weber *Social and Economic Organization* 324-325) Suhaib Webb resorted to proving the soundness of his religious judgment using the scientific method.

The muftī also acknowledged that "There are several sisters who don't know that nail polish prevents wuḍū', and probably just as many who don't care and will wear it anyways. But for those who do care, this analysis might help clarify things." Put differently: some people don't know that they are not actually achieving wuḍū'; some people know but don't care that they are not actually achieving wuḍū'; some people do care and maybe this will help them, and some people will do what I say and some won't but all these options are fine with me.

Remember that authority, in the Weberian sense, implies "the ability to require performance that is based upon the performer's belief in the rightness of the system" and that "authority is based on socialization, the internalization of cultural norms and values…" (qtd in Allan 169). Legal or rational authority is legitimate domination resting on "rational grounds –

resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issues commands" (Weber *Economy and Society* 215). It is legitimated through the institutional authority associated with a given office, as well as through sanctity of tradition, which is found wherever action is compelled via the sanctity of "immemorial tradition" (Matheson 1987).

Finally, given that power is "the chance a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a social action even against the resistance of other who are participating in the action" (Weber *Economy and Society* 126), it seems that Internet muftīs, like their real life counterparts, have very little authority after all: few people, if any, consider their decisions binding, nor suspend their own judgment to defer to that of the muftī's, nor consider them empowered to issue compulsory commands.

The virtual Imām or muftī, then, moreso than the "real life" muftī or Imām, must therefore constantly reaffirm his command over "authentic" Islam given that his authority is primarily charismatic: after all, individuals (as we have seen) subordinate the opinion of the muftī or Imam to that of their own. This would indicate that the office itself, be it online or in real life, is no longer invested with institutional charisma and that the sanctity of certain norms are no longer taken as a given.

Charismatic authority, as we will recall, "[rests] on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (Weber *Economy and Society* 215). Charismatic authority, therefore, is the opposite of, or at least in tension with, bureaucratic authority (Weber *Selections* 228); it is also the most unstable form of authority given that the bearer may at any moment:

> lose his charisma, feel himself, like Jesus on the cross, to be 'abandoned by God' and show himself to his followers as being 'bereft of power', and then his mission is dead and his followers must hopefully await and search out a new charismatic leader. He himself, however, is abandoned by his following, because 'pure charisma' recognizes no legitimacy other than that conferred by personal power, which must be constantly reaffirmed (Weber *Selections* 229)

The bearer of charismatic authority must therefore constantly remind others of the legitimacy of his position through the use of Islamicate and Arabic symbols, references to personalized study with Arab or North African scholars, the prominent display of credentials earned from institutions like Al Azhar and Al Ain, and frequent use of Arabic.

Conclusions

The Internet has fundamentally transformed the relationship between and among those tasked with creating, receiving, and disseminating information, as well as the attachment of messages to territorial or temporal context: participants in a chat room, message board, or social networking platform, may continue a conversation even where traditional sources of knowledge leave off, or are silent.

The internet has also led to the creation of communities that are simultaneously "local" and "global," allowing Muslims from various countries, traditions, and cultures to create an online "space" for actors who would otherwise have likely never talked to each other. With the exception of Muslims who live in countries with strict firewalls or vigorous programs of Internet censorship, Muslim discussion forums are usually open to anyone with Internet access, providing little more than the occasional shibboleth to root out imposters. Therefore, while there are

different Internets for different people, there are no "American-only" websites for Muslim Americans, and Americans do not represent a majority—or at times, a plurality--of visitors to the most popular Islam-related online communities in the U.S. The presence of multi-ethnic, multi-national online communities has introduced multiple frames of reference, complicated pre-existing assumptions about what is and should be "normal," disturbed assumptions framing '*arf*, and created new modes for interpreting religious texts and discourses.

The Internet finally allows for a dialectic between the public and activists, scholars, and political ideologues who were previously limited to *disseminating* ideas rather than *receiving* them. Islamic discourse, as it occurs online, is thus subjected to a global market of ideas. While it is difficult to conlclude that all aspects of pre-existing hiérarchies have been compromised, therefore, it is clear that the Internet has eliminated, or at least truncated, the gap between production and consumption.

However, in spite of these profound changes in communication and social norms, and in spite of the fact that nearly every interview subject went online to get information about Islam, my research reveals that the Internet is most commonly seen as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, face-to-face interactions with scholars from accredited institutions who possess fluency in Arabic and extensive knowledge about classical sources of jurisprudence. This suggests that the Internet's disruption of authority is not profound as conventional wisdom might suggest: First, the markers of legitimacy have not changed drastically with the onset of the digital age: credentials in Arabic are still crucial for an Imām or scholar wishing to claim any credibility or authority in Islamic law, and so too is familiarity with classical Islamic epistemological methodologies and a demonstrated reliance on classical Islamic texts. Second, white converts to

Islam are disproportionately represented amongst the superstar Media Muftīs" popular with U.S. Muslims, suggesting that authority in digital environments is not completely divested from non-computer-mediated forms of traditional authority, nor embodied cultural capital. Finally, the muftīs with the largest social media footprints rely on a combination of classical Islamic knowledge with the "charisma of American celebrity" (Zaman 468) to create a brand that resonates with young people in diasporic conditions while remaining anchored to "traditional" beliefs and values.

That said, the type of authority possessed by Internet Imams and muftīs is incredibly unstable, linked more to their individual charisma rather than to their demonstrated command of Islamic law or familiarity with classical sources of Islamic jurisprudence. This is evidenced by the fact that so few of my interview participants claimed to actually follow the prescriptions of Internet Imams or muftīs; it is further evidenced by the fact that Suhaib Webb himself not only admitted on his own website, as discussed earlier, that his advice regarding breathable nail polish would most likely be disregarded by those who do not agree with him, and additionally solidified the rightness of his opinion through use of the scientific method rather than through an appeal to his mastery of hermeneutics or juristic epistemology.

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VIII: Concluding Thoughts and Observations

The purpose of this project was to investigate sources of authority and authenticity in American Shar'ia law for Muslim Americans living in Orange and Los Angeles Counties. In particular, I set out to address several more specific questions: first, what are the methodological, textual, and institutional sources of authority driving interpretations of Islam in the U.S. context (i.e., is Shar'ia law reliant on certain schools of jurisprudence, literal interpretations of the text, trust in the interpretive efforts of local or international leaders, or other?). Second, how have classical guilds of Islamic law and their respective interpretations changed in diaspora, particularly insofar as family law is concerned? And finally, which cultural, religious, or legal symbols are mobilized to legitimate the preservation of certain practices and the modification of others?

To address these questions, I drew from anthropological, sociological, and ethnographic methodologies to tease out how Muslims identify and evaluate relevant of authority and concepts of authenticity. I chose Orange and Los Angeles Counties as my field site because they are home to a thriving, diverse community of Muslims, and offer dozens of cultural, political, and religious organizations, including the Los Angeles chapter of the Council of American and Islamic Relations, several college Muslim Student Unions, over a half dozen private Islamic schools, and a wide selection of mosques.

My sources provided a textured and nuanced portrait of Islam as practiced in Southern California, and led me to advance the following arguments. First, I argue that although Muslim Americans identify Islamic law and "traditional" Islamic values as crucial to larger processes of

decision-making, their appreciation of what is and what isn't authentic Islamic law, as well as their appreciation of what is and isn't "tradition," is informed to a large degree by their own experiences, self-guided research, and overarching concerns about group and individual identity. This is not to say that there is no room for formally trained experts in Islamic law, but rather that the opinions and analyses of these experts are by and large regarded as on par with that of the individual. "Tradition" is one of many valid options available to the individual, and more of than not, individuals base their knowledge of Islam and on "correct" interpretations of Islam not only on the opinions of experts, but on conclusions drawn from self-supervised, self-guided research.

This self-guided research occurs in multiple settings and draws from multiple sources, particularly in Orange and L.A. Counties, which are rich with resources for U.S. Muslims interested in learning about their faith. Muslims might attend lectures at a local mosque, or just talk with friends in social settings. In so doing, they engage with the diverse expressions and facets of Islamic culture and history to develop a common vocabulary suited to the realities of life in the U.S., and open to Muslims of all ethno-cultural backgrounds. In many cases, the Muslim Student Union sparked participants' first instance of self-guided study and exploration, and was a crucial catalyst for the development of participants' identities as Muslims. This was true even for Muslims who already identified as devout when they joined the MSU; they too frequently experienced the MSU as the first place where they felt they could "belong," and the site of their initial exposure to multiple possibilities for practicing "authentic" Islam. The MSU, I argue, is therefore plays an important role in the "ethnicization" of American Muslim identity as well as in the development of U.S. Islam itself.

It should, of course, be noted that there is at least one notable exception to the range of options offered by self-guided research and personal experience, and a limitation to the range of possible "authentic" versions of Islam: while most interview participants claimed that there was no single valid opinion on the permissibility of keeping a dog as a pet, wearing nail polish to pray, following the moon-sighting method versus the calculation method for observing Ramadan, or listening to music, an overwhelming number of participants claimed that the Qur'ān unequivocally requires women to wear ḥijāb.

Even so, it is reductive to conclude simply that women wear ḥijāb for religious purposes; rather, ḥijāb functions not only as a marker of belonging as well as a signal for individual as well as communal positions surrounding modesty and gender relations. Wearing ḥijāb, therefore, can be seen as a way for Muslim women to affirm their pride in their own identities and assert their devotion to Islam while simultaneously rejecting the commercialized, misogynist aspects of Western and U.S. culture; it is also a way for them to express their solidarity to, and experience a sense of belonging within, the local and global Muslim communities.

Many of these tensions and tendencies, of course, are products of the time and place in which they occur. The tendencies towards discourses of the marketplace, as well as comfort with individualization, personalization, and tolerance are closely related to the structure and nature of American Muslim educational and spiritual institutions, as well as to Muslims' status as a minority in post-9/11 America. Additionally, the Internet has fundamentally transformed the relationship between and among those tasked with creating, receiving, and disseminating information, as well as the attachment of messages to territorial or temporal context: everyone is now empowered to broadcast his or her message to the entire globe, and—perhaps more

significantly--- everyone is taught that his or her message is worth broadcasting.

Participants often referred to certain websites as sources that they frequently turned to when in search of information about Islam, however, the vast majority of participants nonetheless saw the Internet as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, face-to-face interactions with scholars from accredited institutions who possess fluency in Arabic and extensive knowledge about classical sources of jurisprudence. To the extent that U.S. Muslims turn to the Internet for information, they do so in order to legitimate self-authorized, self-generated conclusions about the authenticity of Islamic knowledge

Future Directions for Research

I embarked on this project for several reasons. First, after 9/11, scholars from a variety of disciplines began turning their attention to with Islam and Muslims in the U.S., churning out a flurry of articles and monographs interrogating topics ranging from identity to assimilation to gender. However, in spite of this scholarly activity, there were few studies devoted to studying Islam itself, nor to studying Shar'ia law or Islamic jurisprudence as it has developed and has been applied in the U.S. This isn't to say that there is no work on U.S. Muslims, but, as noted earlier, that the literature tends to focus on *Muslims* rather than *Islam*, with much attention paid to the negotiation of "hyphenated" or "hybrid" identity, or alternatively, the Muslim community's response to the events of 9/11. Explorations of Islam itself or of developments in Islamic jurisprudence in diaspora is scant, and Muslim Americans' methodological framework for interpreting the Shar'ia is rarely if ever investigated. Shar'ia law has been taken for granted as

existing, but there is little information on what it is, where it comes from, or what it looks like.

At the same time, there is a very vocal group of "experts" on Shari'a law and Islam who, despite a lack of qualifications, have become advisors to policymakers and given the opportunity to offer commentary in mainstream media outlets with significant national audiences.[104] These include Pamela Geller, who founded Stop Islamization of America in 2009 along with Robert Spencer; David Horowitz, who founded the Sharia Awareness Action Network, and Daniel Pipes, founder and director of the Middle East Forum and its Campus Watch project. This project can therefore provide a much-needed resource for policy makers, scholars, journalists, and members of the public interested in scholarly information about American instantiations of Shar'ia law.

Even so, there are still plenty of opportunities for further research and much to discover: as discussed in the Introduction, my reliance on snowball sampling resulted in the over-representation of affluent, college-educated Muslims from South Asian and Arab backgrounds. There may therefore class-based, race-based, or generational differences that I was unable to access.

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[104] For an excellent analysis of public perceptions of Islam and Muslims, and the way this public perception has been shaped by people such as Pamela Geller et al, see Rob L. Wagner's "Institutionalized Islamophobia in the U.S." *The Nation*, Aug. 14, 2012 http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/international/14-Aug-2012/institutionalized-islamophobia-in-us Last visited Aug, 19, 2012