Critical Education

Quelling Dissent

Disciplining Liberalism on Muslim College Students' Speech and Action

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Abstract

In this article I explore how Muslim students understand and respond to the construction of the Muslim in American public discourse. In particular I explore how liberal narratives of gender and citizenship limit the forms of democratic practice Muslims students feel they can engage in. I explore how youth from this community take on, respond to, and re-deploy some of these images in their definitions of self.

Introduction

Whether it is "terror babies", mosques being run by terrorists, the threat of "creeping sharia," or "secret Muslims, (including U.S. President Obama) infiltrating the United States," elected American officials have used the floor of House of Representatives to state such fantastical scenarios. Although such ridiculous comments might easily be heard at a right wing rally, or on a blog, one takes pause when national leaders making such statements about a specific community with little backlash. Nonetheless, questioning the humanity and 'right to life' of Muslim bodies in the United States is undeniable in the American experience. Few other racialized communities can be discussed in such base ways with little public reaction or censure. Even on national television, politicians and public figures frequently debate the "Muslim question" i.e., should Muslims be allowed to live in the West. This narrative not only ignores the centuries of Muslim life in the United States, but rests on questioning the fundamental personhood of the Muslim him/herself. This is the environment in which Muslim youth are growing up and I seek to examine how Muslim students' identities are formed within this context and specifically how notions of citizenship are taken up, responded to and re-deployed by Muslim students.

The experiences of young Muslims illuminate contemporary issues of youth criminalization and race in the United States. As the post 9-11 security state continues to expand its' domestic policing of youth of color, suspicion of Muslim communities are cultivated not only through the contemporary political context, but are animated through histories of anti-Muslim racism, religious otherness and political suspicion in Western world in order to enact a unique form of cultural violence. This research helps illuminate how such histories of continue to have resonance in the contemporary world and affect young peoples lives in the United States today.

Within this paper I examine how Muslim students feel they are treated as bodies that exist outside of liberal conceptions of gender and citizenship. The students with whom I worked expressed the construction of Muslim in public discourse was not simply "bad", but rather a reflection of the Muslim as being wholly outside of the narratives of Americanism and liberalism. I argue that the Muslim is constructed as the inhospitable, untamable, uneasy participant in liberal democracy. I explore the articulation of these relationships with this community of U.S. citizens, who believe they are seen as suspects, yet *are* citizens. I examine the narratives of liberal citizenship through the students reframing of what it means to participate as "Americans" critical of the state, yet cognizant of potential political and cultural reprisals of critique.

Pertinent Histories and Literatures: Muslims Communities Under Suspicion

Although Muslim communities have historically served as a suspect class in the United States (Daulatzai, 2012), since 2001 there has been a resurgence of anti-Muslim violence, bigotry and racism. This has only increased in the years following. Between 2009 and 2010, there was a 50% rise in anti- Muslim vandalism, a 150% rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric, and a 300% rise in violence against individuals assumed to be Muslim (CAIR, 2011). Between these two years over a dozen attacks at mosques occurred across

the United States. Such attacks included physical assaults upon worshipers, arson, and vandalism (ACLU, 2012). In public discourse Muslim identities are simplified, marginalized and censured, oftentimes on 'both sides' of political debate. In March 2011 the U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security began a series of hearings entitled "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response" chaired by Long Island Representative Peter King. These hearings focused on American Muslim "radicalization" including the supposed ways the Muslim community has supported anti-U.S. terrorism. As impetus for these hearings, King stated that extremists run more than 80 percent of the mosques in America. Yet King showed no evidence of this claim (nor can any be found), or even provided a definition of "extremism." Furthermore, in 2007 King said there are "too many mosques in this country...We should be looking at them more carefully and finding out how we can infiltrate them" (Politico, 2007). The discourses justifying the U.S. War on Terror (2001), the invasion of Iraq (2003) and the King hearings (2011) serve as apt examples of the political context Muslim youth have experienced since 2001. For young Muslims, regardless of their citizenship status, there is a clear sense that their political beliefs and affiliations are questioned and under scrutiny.

The history of anti-Muslim ideologies, hysteria and legislation did not begin in 2001. Violence targeting the Muslim Other has been endemic to the Western world for over half a millennium stretching back to Spanish inquisition (Majid, 2009). Since 2001, this identity has been under higher levels of scrutiny (Rana, 2011) and contemporary media figures, politicians, cultural activists, and everyday citizens regularly voice fears of a Muslim presence in the U.S. Furthermore, the figure of the Muslim has shifted assignments in American racial schematic: Islam was closely aligned to North Africans privateers during the American independence moment (GhaneaBassiri, 2010); African slaves and slave rebellions in the Caribbean (Diouf, 1998); Ottomans in Antebellum America (Marr, 2006); African Americans through the later 19th and 20th century (Jackson, 2005; Turner, 2003); and South Asians and Middle Easterners over the past 30 years (Said, 1997). The Muslim exists as a historically elusive figure in the U.S. There have been varying images of the Muslim, but s/he has never been someone who is domestic or domesticated.

The construction of the Muslim today is not simply responsive to contemporary politics, but is informed by the historic image of the Muslim. The construction of Muslim communities globally, and their image domestically, is central to the historic context of anti-Muslim discrimination and racism in the United States. Muslim communities in the U.S. have been imagined as tentacles of international governments, terrorist groups or as representatives of 'self-contained social and cultural contexts in which fixed civilizational values exist' (Asad, 2007,12). Thus, Muslims, no matter their citizenship status, political positions, cultural values or theological suppositions are deemed foreign and threatening.

The term Muslim itself elementally refers to those who a part of a community associated with Islam. Clearly, that is not what the term Muslim indexes in contemporary political life. As explored in the literature above, the term Muslim is not simply associated with a spiritual tradition that spans the globe, making up nearly one fourth of the worlds population (CAIR, 2011). Instead, the term Muslim indexes violence, hostility and anti-liberal and pre-modern notions of gender, culture, identity and political

engagement (Asad, 1993). I contend these meanings are based in Muslim otherness and violence and have real life ramifications on the lives and experiences of young Muslims in the United States.

Theoretical Frame: The Underside of Liberalism

Liberalism is a contested term with varied interpretations. Proponents would agree that the key features of liberal governance are: individual liberty, rationality, and a marked distinction between the public and private spheres (Locke, 1980; Rawls, 2005). Although liberalism, as a broad array of ideas, has historically taken shape in temporally, geographically and ideologically specific ways, classical liberalism places primary value upon maintaining individual liberty through a marked distinction between the spheres of the state and the individual. Although some liberal theorists (often those associated with libertarianism) contend that the role of the state should be minimized at nearly all costs, rights-oriented theorists contend that individual rights cannot exist without the basic economic and social needs of all citizens being met, for without these basic needs, individuals cannot exercise their full gamut of rights (Rawls, 1971). A rights oriented liberalism is most often associated with the contemporary liberal political state, particularly seen through granting citizenship, voting rights and civil protections to non-white men.

Although such claims appeal to a notion of a universal human equality, scholars from diverse academic disciplines have critiqued this normative notion of liberalism as being a historic and political illusion. In Formations of the Secular (2003), Talad Asad contends that the construction of the Other in Enlightenment thought is central to the imperial process and Western liberalism—for it was through defining the Other that the West was able to define its' own normativity. Although liberal governments have progressively granted up citizenship rights, such gradual enfranchisement hides "past exclusions and obfuscates that at the heart of liberalism is an illiberal determination of who is a member of the incorporated community and who is not" (Marx, 2003). Contemporary political theorists contend that the modern liberal state cannot be divorced from racial and sexual hierarchies, arguing that the foundations of contractual relationships and legal rights/citizenship are based upon contractual relations that cannot simply be rectified though changing the most blatant forms of racial and gender, otherness. Such otherness is endemic to the modern liberal state (Goldberg, 2001; Mills, 1999, Pateman, 1988; Pateman & Mills, 2007). The liberalist focus on individual rights and the relationship of persons to the state imagines an ideal where bodies and histories associated with such bodies are not relevant.

American social theorists of race have argued the focus on access to individual rights conceals inherently unequal structures of power (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) within the American political system. Guarantees of equality are not equally accessible to all citizens (let alone residents). As Mahmood (2004) states, "liberalism has an anemic and anomic model of the individual, one that does not take full account of the ways in which the individual is socially produced and personified the social within herself" (150). By privileging the individual, while writing entire groups of people outside of political subjectivity, a member of an outsider group can never achieve full political legibility.

Beyond a theoretical conversation about the role of the contemporary liberal state, there are material ramifications for specific bodies not being able to claim full citizenship rights. The liberal state has increased access of individuals and groups who were not originally considered within its' boundaries, but continues to unequally engage those bodies as well tools exclude others. Some of these tensions and contradictions within liberalism are illuminated by the words of the young people in this study. In this article I examine how Muslim youth contend with liberal conceptions of citizenship and gender and how they feel these notions not only structure how individuals interact with them, but also limit the ways they feel they x interact with society.

Cultural Citizenship and the Muslim

The figure of the Muslim has served as the essentialized Other against which the West defined itself culturally, politically, religiously and racially (Majid, 2009). Thus, juxtaposing the focus on individual rights with specific bodies deemed unacceptable, the Muslim can be seen as an archetypal marginal body without guaranteed rights. Although the United States legally guarantees full citizenship to those born within its' borders, we must consider the notion of citizenship in a broader perspective.

Young Muslims do not have access to full cultural and social rights of citizenship—the foundation for materializing political rights. Citizenship is not simply levied by maintaining a U.S. passport, but rather through what Rosaldo (1994) has referred to as access to cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship does not exist as simply ones legal relationship with a nation-state, but also through ones feelings of belonging and connectedness to the state, and ones' perceived ability to engage in political action, debate and discourse, as a full citizen. Ong's (1996) contends that cultural citizenship functions dialectically between self-making and being-made, in which citizenship is conferred based upon racial schematics and cultural competence within American liberal democracy. The project of individual citizenship is equally about subject-making, or disciplining a particular narrative of engagement within American society. Similarly, Maira (2004) found that "it is not always possible to cleanly distinguish between the economic, legal, and cultural basis of citizenship" (222). Likewise, Abu El-Haj notes that Arab American youth did not feel they were able to access hegemonic narratives of citizenship taught to them within school spaces. Further, Ali (2013) found that Muslim students felt they were depicted as existing outside of modernity, particularly in relationship to gender rights and the violence ascribed to their bodies. Finally, Cainkar and Maira (2005) contend that the criminalization of Muslim bodies (more acutely since 2001) severely limits access to citizenship among these communities.

In navigating the ideological spaces of university life, young Muslims must constantly consider how "Americans" perceive of their actions, for they do not believe they are not treated as full members of the body politic. This experience is reminiscent of what W.E.B. DuBois referred to over a century ago as double consciousness, or of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (45). This space of in-betweeness, of the insider-who is ever outside, is particularly useful in exploring Muslim youth identities today. Such processes have been seen for non-dominant communities in

the U.S. empirically by examining how ideologies of Otherness become manifest in the ways excluded people make choices in their own lives (Steele, 1997).

Methods

This article is based upon data collected data collected in 2008 and 2009 exploring the experiences of 24 Muslim undergraduates from institutions of higher education in Southern California. Utilizing semi-structured life history interviews and ethnographic observations on four campuses, the larger study explores the racial, gender, and class identities of Muslim students. The youth who inform this study were all undergraduate students who identified with the label of Muslim (however they operationalized the term). Participants for the study were solicited through snowball sampling in which students on each campus were contacted and over time referred others. Potential participants were recruited and given an initial survey and decisions for inclusion were based upon four primary criteria including: national origin, gender, family income and involvement with Muslim serving organizations (on or off campus).

The researcher was a male of South Asian Muslim descent who was actively involved in youth of color and Muslim communities in Southern California. As Muslim communities have been and continue to be surveilled by intelligence agencies, gaining access for intimate conversations about political beliefs, affiliations and concerns was challenging. Through the researcher's direct and indirect networks with Muslim students regionally he was able to develop relationships that allowed for sensitive conversations on pertinent political and identity issues. Although being politically active and visible within multiple community spaces allowed the researcher some forms of access, his gender identity must be recognized as potentially effecting the way both young women and men responded to the conversation.

Data collection: Life history interviews and ethnographic observations

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured life history interviews, and ethnographic observations of Muslim undergraduates at four colleges in Southern California. The life history interviews spanned between three and five hours each and were conducted over multiple meetings with each participant. The interviews were conducted at on- and off- campus locations, including campus eateries, cafes, parks and other public spaces that allow discretion and privacy. The conversations explored issues of identity and participation in public life. Drawing from a critical feminist framework, interviews were conducted not simply to garner data, but rather to allow students the opportunity explore their own experiences, analyze their histories, and develop theories (hooks, 1989). Beyond simply asking questions about specific themes, the conversations unfolded overtime to discuss student's lives, communities, and daily experiences. Focusing closely on the individual and their particular experience, this study relies on a research model starting from lived experiences to illuminate social theory, or a ground-up process (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Hertz 1997). Beginning with young peoples words privileges their experiences in understanding social phenomena, as young peoples lives are often discussed, but less often are their viewpoints and perspectives taken seriously. Beyond a tool for building rapport, such a process of interviewing allows for more nuanced viewpoints from the participants and a more robust set of data for the researcher

(Oakley, 1981). In a study focused on young peoples understandings of and relationship to the their nation, society, community and self, such a model of interviewing provided nuances in data that likely would not have emerged from a more structured interview method.

In addition, ethnographic field notes were taken on each campus. Each campus was visited a minimum of seven times. Student group meetings and events were attended and informal student life was observed, with a focus on the participants social, cultural, political engagements. Ethnographic observations were used in addition to the interviews because they provided context for participant's experiences and a way to examine the social and political geography of campus space.

Data Analysis

The methodological tools utilized were selected to engage participants in developing their perspectives over the course of the interview, and were not designed to focus on missteps. Specific care was taken to ensure the participants were comfortable with their transcripts because of the politically sensitive nature of Muslims discussing state politics. Participants were given a copy of their interview transcripts in order for them to confirm that the interviews appropriately captured their perspectives.

Audio logs of interviews were created in order to more easily recognize themes and access particular points in the data. In addition, analytic memos were utilized to document specific incidents, capture salient reflections, and analyze preliminary data (Strauss, 1987). Data was triangulated using transcripts, audio logs, field notes and analytic memos. Through open coding, salient themes rose to the fore, including participation in political life and narratives of cultural citizenship. Tools of critical discourse analysis were used to explore underlying ideologies in student speech. Language was examined by looking closely at word choices, metaphors, pronouns and other indexical properties of language (Van Dijk 1998), as well as topics chosen, sequences and forms of argument (Martinez-Roldan & Malave, 2004).

Participants and Recruitment

As traditional undergraduates in 2008, the participants in this study were in secondary school in 2001, when the attacks on the World Trade Center occurred. This demographic was chosen because the students were adolescents during a period of acute and increased targeting of Muslim communities in the U.S.

This study focuses on the diversity and congruency of thought among youth who identify as "Muslim" across traditional racial and ethnic alignments. Akin to Spivak's (1995) notion of strategic essentialism, these students actively defined themselves as Muslim in a time when there was hyper-focus on the figure and body of the Muslim. For this reason the racial diversity of the youth within the study makes marking the group along racial and class lines challenging.

Thirteen of the participants were female and eleven were male. Ten identified as South Asian (or named nationalities including Afghani, Bengali, Indian, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan when asked for their racial category). Seven students identified as Middle Eastern (or named nationalities or geographies including, Arab, Egyptian, Iranian, and

Palestinian). Three students identified as African American. The categories of East Asian, and Anglo American both had one participant each and two students identified as mixed heritage (Latino-African American and Anglo American-Iranian). There was tremendous income diversity of the participants as well. Eight came from families with household incomes of over $120,000, four came from homes earning between $70,000 - $120,000, and seven from families making between $40,000-$70,000 annually. Also, five of the students came from families that had incomes less than $40,000 a year. All 24 participants were U.S. citizens, eight of them being naturalized.

Findings

I examine how the students felt their beliefs and actions were limited by the political and cultural landscape of the United States. This process of limiting, or disciplining the Muslim subjectivity, teaches Muslim students what being an "American" means in a very narrow context. To explore this topic, I focus on three themes: (A) suspicion of Muslim bodies; (B) tensions in citizenship; and (C) critical citizenship narratives. Through this data I argue that the construction of Muslim subjectivities created a context where Muslim students have a narrowed space to cultivate citizenship narratives and are disciplined into liberal forms of social and political participation.

Always Watched: Suspicious Masculinities and Voiceless Femininities

The students I worked with all said they felt closely watched by their peers, neighbors, and other members of their communities. All 24 of the students stated that they were keenly aware of the way their words and actions were potentially perceived by the larger communities to which they belong. Although all of the students said they had critiques of U.S. policies and military actions, they said that publically vocalizing their opposition to policies (in relation to militarism and warfare) could likely be seen as falling outside of acceptable political discourse. The students affirmed their opposition to U.S. militarism not only created questions of their citizenship, but also had the potential of being seen as "siding with the enemy" or as displaying "Islamic radicalism." The students I worked with felt that their words and actions were highly scrutinized, but young men and women expressed feeling cultural suspicion differently.

This culture of suspicion creates a context where young Muslim men felt 'on guard' and ever cognizant of their context. Elijah, a third year student who was a social science major noted it "you are conscious of the fact that there is a difference between you and other people; even if you don't remember it, *they always remember it*." Likewise, Hisham, who was a senior on his campus and local DJ asserted, "you have an understanding that people look at you and think you are associated with being a terrorist." Being cognizant that ones actions are constantly scrutinized not only created fear, but also changed the way young Muslims engaged publically. Elijah related that when learned about the invasion of Iraq, as well as U.S. military aggressions globally, he went online to learn more. He stated:

> It made me angry and [I] didn't know where to put my anger. I would go
> on online forums and talk a lot about it. I was not talking about violence,
> but I thought discussing things [international politics] might have been
> read as leaning toward radicalism.

Elijah stated that simply critiquing U.S. foreign policy online might have been seen as potentially seditious activity—activity that could lead to his own surveillance. Elijah, who did not participate in the Muslim student organization on his campus went on to say that acceptable political debate for "white Americans" was not the same for Muslims. Elijah recognized that not all members of a society have equal power to make the same types of speech. Although there may not be laws barring an individual from particular speech, their cultural context may allow certain individuals more freedom to speak without reprisal. Although Elijah does not know if he was surveilled, during the same time this data was collected, Craig Monteilh a self-identified FBI agent provocateur was actively surveilling Muslim youth in Orange County, California, not far from where Elijah was a student[1].

Naqib was a senior engineering major who, unlike Elijah, was actively involved in his campus Muslim student group. He served as the president of the organization during his final year of college. He revealed that he was ever conscious of how he was seen by "Americans." When asked about the types he activities he engaged in, Naqib asserted that he was cognizant that his actions with others Muslims were seen differently than activities with individuals not from Muslim backgrounds. He said he would not engage in violent "play" such as going to a paintball range because of what "Americans" may assume. Naqib said, "American Muslims can't do certain things like paintballing. Muslim American men participating in certain activities raise scrutiny." Naqib's comments reveal that Muslim male citizenship status or birthplace does not automatically allow access to Americaness. Rather, he readily pointed out that a Muslim identity, specifically a male body, precludes an individual from actions that would be seen as benign for others. The students said they are constantly aware of how their actions may be interpreted solely because they are Muslim. It was primarily male Muslim students who noted that they felt the suspicion of violence directed toward them.

Beyond fears of violence, students felt their peers assumed Muslims (including themselves) maintained non-liberal cultural forms and modes of social organization, often mediated by gendered identities. The students stated that Muslim men are seen patriarchal and dismissive of women. Both men and women in this study stated that they felt their peers believed that Muslim women's subjectivities were defined through the men in their lives. Eight of the 11 men said they were vigilant to make sure their actions would not be potentially read as patriarchal, especially in public settings. Additionally, ten of the 13 women said they made efforts to be seen as outspoken or assertive in their college classes, as to not be seen as a "submissive Muslim woman." The women in this study felt the members of the campus and broader communities were constantly observing them for "signs of oppression."

Mina was a pre-med undergraduate at a highly selective college in Southern California. Her mother was a physician. Mina said Muslim women were portrayed as not having control over decisions in their own lives, and that these portrayals had real life ramifications in her life. She commented that her peers assumed Muslim women's lives

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[1] The American Civil Liberties Union and the Council for American Islamic Relation filed a lawsuit in August 2011, *Fazaga vs. FBI*, attempting to find redress for the violation of civil liberties for this surveillance.

exist outside of normative practices of liberal society. "They think [Muslim] women stay at home. We can't work and can't drive. Men have more than one wife and women need to serve them [men]. They are not educated." The reality is that the image of the uneducated and submissive woman is a completely foreign to Mina and to her familial experience. Mina's mother is a well-established professional. Nonetheless, Mina, like four of the six women who wore a hijab in this study, said that her professors and peers questioned her desire for academic and career success because she wore a hijab. Although the women in this study were all undergraduate students, they felt that their peers saw them as less than "free." Taiba, a senior who was a business student, asserted:

> When they see women in hijab or covered they think of oppression. They think they are oppressed. [They ask] why are they wearing it [hijab] in California? There is no reason to. They don't realize it is a personal choice that people make. You can't force people, especially here [in the U.S.] to wear what they don't want to wear. They are choosing it.

Taiba's comments reflect the perspectives of the students with whom I worked—they felt their words, actions, and bodies are sites for the public to critique and contest. This study was conducted with undergraduate students on college campuses, yet both the women and men in this study stated that their peers, faculty and staff on campus viewed Muslim women as oppressed, voiceless and lacking agency. This view of Muslim women, was not isolated to the figure of a distanced "Other" Muslim, but rather was felt directly and palpably by students in their communities, on their campuses, and in their classrooms.

In constructing Muslim women as subjugated beings, the women said they were seen as lacking agency, stripping them the ability to define and engage the world in affirming ways. The most visible form of this negation of Muslim female subjectivity is depicted as the wearing of a hijab, which 6 of the 13 women in my study wore. As Mahmood (2005) argues, conceptions of hijab are often discussed in terms of social empowerment and autonomy. Nonetheless, in exploring the construction of Western secular liberalism as the arbitrator of defining human agency, we further inscribe Western modalities of modernism based upon "the binary model of subordination and subversion" (14). The Muslim women I worked with were caught in a space of in-betweeness—for they utilized Western liberal notions of freedom, liberalism, agency and empowerment to "justify" their wearing of a hijab, yet these same evidentiary tools were used to critique not only their actions, but their very beings—as Muslim women.

Among the lessons from the data above is that the cultural suspicion young Muslims face manifests itself differently along gender identities. Regardless of the beliefs, positions or ideologies any individual held, they felt their actions were highly monitored, with young people stating that no matter what they did personally, it would provide evidence that they were not "truly American."

Tensions in Citizenship

When discussing their relationship with the U.S. as a political entity, students often conflated patriotism with state cheerleading. They felt that the notion of patriotism was defined as an individual's support of national policy or action. The students recognized this context when they described their own political views, and how they believe their peers saw them. All of the students affirmed that the Muslim was

constructed fundamentally in ways that were hurtful to their sense of self and their feeling of connectedness to other members of U.S. society. Students said that the Muslim has been constructed outside the umbrella of who and what counts as an American. Ardavan, a fourth year political science student expressed:

> It kind of hurt. This is how they really think of us. Almost like I came to an understanding that I am not American and will never be American. And when push comes to shove, this is what Americans see me as. From that point on I never saw myself as an American and will never see myself as an American.

These students felt they needed to demonstrate their Americaness in front of their peers, friends, neighbors, co-workers, or other "Americans" they come in contact with. Maryam, a second year psychology student stated, "I feel like I am constantly having to prove myself." She stated that she consciously attempted to make sure "Americans" were comfortable with her because she thought they will be uneasy about engaging with a Muslim. "If there is a white person I don't want to scare them too much. I try to make them more comfortable with me." Feeling as if you are unwelcome in the land in which you were born and have citizenship forced the students to act in ways in which they attempt to "win over" their fellow citizens. Students did not say a specific type of American was more likely to target Muslims, but rather point out specific demographics that are exceptions—groups who do not scorn Muslims in the United States. In this regard, their actions to "make Americans comfortable" further edified their outsider status. A full cultural citizen never considers having to prove themselves to fellow citizens through actions or words, yet they felt they needed to do so. Further, students stated that this concern often constricted their social interactions.

As September 2001 altered many American's notions of patriotism and national identity, the students in my study stated this day also changed their perspective on being an American. Ardavan, who stated earlier that he was no longer able to see himself as an American revealed that the aftermath of 2001 taught him what Americans really think of him. He stated:

> I never felt so alienated. I finally saw the true face of America. Now I realize I will never be American. When push comes to shove we see it. America gives you an umbrella when it is sunny but when it is raining they take it back.

Ardavan noted that although the most overt forms of discrimination subsided, he still believed his position in the U.S. was tenuous. He commented it is not in the good times that you know where you stand, but in the difficult times. Ardavan's metaphor of the umbrella is indicative of an essential question many of the students within my study asked: *Will liberal values of innocence until proven guilt, plurality and democratic engagement, extend to them when times are most challenging, or are these reserved for "true Americans?"* Nearly all of the students agreed if another terrorist attack occurred on American soil Muslims in the U.S. they may likely face internment, as Japanese-Americans did during World War II. As Americans mourned the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in 2001, and some called for the murder of civilians in response, Muslims in the U.S. also were reminded that they are living "on the edge," or as Dina

commented, "if Muslims are responsible for another [terrorist attack on a US based target] one, it's over for all of us." Just as the memory of buildings collapsing in New York, bombs dropping in Afghanistan and or an invading army shooting anything that moves in Karbala does not quickly fade from a nation's collective memory, young Muslims will not forget the moment many of them came to realize that they are living on the edge of being American, or as Ardavan voiced, they the umbrella may be revoked during a downpour.

Critical Citizenship

Students stated that specific policy actions become the important signifiers for the U.S. and served a symbol of their relationship to the state. Students did not feel that they had full rights as citizens—they felt that if they levied public critiques against state actions it could easily be interpreted as testaments to their anti-Americaness, as opposed to democratic practice. These American citizens believed that their political perspectives inherently place them on the edge of American society (as opposed to on a spectrum of political perspectives) because of their Muslim identity.

Mikael, a fourth year political science student stated, "the foundation of the U.S.A. is racism and genocide. These kind of principles have been applied subtly over the past 200 years." Mikael, who defined himself as American of Arab descent, said his the recognition of history did not preclude him from action; rather, it provided him the impetus to work harder. Mikael expressed:

> I live here. I will work to enact change as much as I can within my capacity to make it as positive as possible. But if an American does something wrong I do not feel I have to hold myself responsible—if they bomb in Iraq. I try to do everything I can to stop it.

In this statement Mikael drew upon liberal notions of political engagement. The majority of students discussed how liberal notions of citizenship and democracy were resonant in their lives. Sophia, a fourth year comparative literature and film student commented:

> I don't hail America and salute the flag. I don't have unwavering faith and patriotism in the way the President of the U.S. defined that to be. I think of being American as something real. Being Muslim. Being South Asian. It is something that exists and I need to understand it. How else am I going to do anything unless I come to terms with who I am. I am American. It means recognizing we live in this place with this history of genocide. And we have to navigate in this place as young people.

Sophia characterized her vision of citizenship as an active project of self-definition, community engagement, service and social change. Nonetheless, Sophia believed that popular culture equated "unwavering faith," flag waiving, and nation-hailing with citizenship. Like Sophia, Dina, a third year political science student, was actively engaged in her local community. She saw herself as being responsible to create change in her society. Dina said:

> I have a responsibility toward all of that stuff that happens. I have a hand in what happens whether I sit back and do nothing or do something...I have a civic responsibility. In same way I recognize I grew up here and

need to give back somehow. A lot of people suffered to make things how they are now for us.

Dina, like other students, was developing her own notion of citizenship and what it meant to be an American. Nonetheless, they recognized that their actions had the potential of raising the suspicion of other Americans. Students called upon a vision of citizenship that that was engaged and participatory. Sophia went on to summarize the difficult context for Muslims students who recognized a history of U.S. violence while engaging as participatory citizens. She remarked:

> I have a notion that being American I can never forget where it started from. I can never forget the genocide of Native Americans. I always remember there were people here before. Our notion of being American can't be disconnected from our history. Where we came from can't be forgotten. We have to learn from that. Many people still believe this is a Christian nation founded by the forefathers—the Mayflower and the idealized happy version. That is what patriotism is suppose to be.

Sophia's notions of democracy and citizenship began with recognizing the weight of the past on the present. Sophia stated that the benefits she received as a U.S. citizen also have an imperial legacy that cannot be ignored. She refers to herself as part of the "we" that must learn from, and be accountable for, past actions. Furthermore, Sophia, as Mikael, felt that his notion of democracy and citizenship is, "Dissent. Not sticking to the norm. Not going with the man. Debate. Dissent."

Students defined citizenship in engaged and careful ways. The difficulties and tensions in identifying and making sense of an American identity in the lives of Muslim college students forced them to see themselves both within and outside of Americaness. They believed their citizenship, culturally, was in flux. Through the contemporary political context, the history of U.S. military involvement in the Muslim world, and the historic and contemporary construction of Muslim subjectivities, students felt a profound tension in how they see themselves as citizens.

Discussion: Strategic Constructions of Self and Citizenship

Through this data we see that the students displayed a complex relationship with U.S. forms and logics of liberal citizenship. They felt that their peers, teachers and members of their community (locally and most broadly) did not offer them full membership in liberal democratic society. Students articulated that non-liberal notions of gender were assumed of them, and that they did not have the freedom to engage in political critique and debate. Nonetheless, these students were citizens of the United States. Attempting to define their own identities while on the margins of U.S. society, we find Rosaldo's (1994) conception of cultural citizenship particularly illuminating in exploring the experiences of young Muslims. These young people did not feel that they had access to full citizenship rights within a liberal democracy. These tensions in their own identity and feeling like outsiders within the American empire allowed them a unique and critical view of the state. DuBois' analysis of the double-consciousness, or two-ness of being within African American communities at the turn of the twentieth

century, encapsulates the students' feelings in this study—believing that their peers read their every action in particularly damning ways.

The critiques levied by students, coupled with feeling dislocated from political engagement produced a context for Muslim college students to believe that they need to define a sense of self, autonomous from U.S. nationalism. In this we see a manifestation of strategic essentialism in that the students are drawing from, and rejecting, specific citizenship narratives. Furthermore, this served as a potential way in which social distancing (with Americans) can create a form of social solidarity and identity (among Muslims), and provided a context to take active ownership over citizenship narratives. The students took their positionality as being defined as non-American as an opportunity to forge a unique identity reflecting what it means to be who they are—Muslims in the United States.

The ways the students identify and dis-identify as American not only revealed social practices, but also helped recognize students' affinity and forms of ideological alignment with the state as a political entity. As this study was conducted in 2008-2009, I argue that the prior eight` years, under the Bush administration, was a particularly unique context for early adolescents to find political voice and life. As George Lipsitz (2004) reminds us:

> In the name of fighting a war against terrorism, the leaders of the nation are waging a calculated cultural campaign designed to give a particular and parochial meaning to America. Their America is a country, not a continent, a nation that proves itself through military power, not by keeping its political promises (Lipsitz, 515).

When these students were introduced to civic culture and civil society, the dominant national narrative tied nationalism to political passivity. As Lipsitz states, this created a context for the ways students appropriated or challenged this narrative of Americanism and citizenship. Through such vitriolic language as "you are with or against us" the students were provided a model that equated citizenship with political jingoism.

It is within this context that Muslim students have to navigate a political culture that cites the historic construction of Muslims as existing outside the scope of democratic liberalism. I contend because of the *realpolitik* of being viewed as a Muslim in the United States, the students' perceptions of their citizenship were in a state of constant flux. The students' legal citizenship coupled with the belief that they were not seen as American positioned them in a liminal space in which they were able to call upon narratives of liberal citizenship while also being critics of it.

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