



Between Storytelling and Surveillance

American Muslim Youth Negotiate Culture, Politics and Participation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report offers a study of civically engaged American Muslim youth as they confront the often harsh political climate of Post-9/11 America where moderate Muslim voices have struggled to find a means of entering an increasingly polarized discussion around Islamophobic and extremist perspectives. Through a study of activists and community networks affiliated with the Muslim Youth Group (MYG) at the Islamic Center in Southern California and the Young Leaders Summits program at the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), the report highlights the following themes:

- **Post 9/11 Generation** – The American Muslim youth included in this research all grew up in the decade after 9/11. Not only have they had to grapple with fear-inducing anti-Islamic sentiment and counter terrorism measures, they also grew up with new media as an integral part of their daily lives. For many youth, these combined trends became important to their decision to take action as American Muslims.
- **Circulation, Networks, Organizations** – Through the Lowe’s *All American Muslim* boycott, this section explores the negotiated relationship between more formal and established advocacy organizations and largely youth-driven dispersed American Muslim networks.
- **Storytelling** – For many American Muslim youth, storytelling emerges as a crucial practice that has both cultural and political relevance. Contested efforts to narrate American Muslim experiences pit representations in news media and “Hollywood” entertainment against more grassroots, efforts to tell “real” American Muslim stories, often circulated through social media.
- **Privacy and Surveillance** – Whether they worry about top down or peer-based surveillance, American Muslim youth struggle to balance the risks and benefits in what they share through their social media networks. A few youth sacrifice privacy for social justice activism, as they collapse all their networks to maximize connectivity. Some others engage in a process of stringent self-censorship and share very little through their social media networks. Most American Muslim youth engage in an ongoing messy negotiation in which they segment, filter and otherwise try to control on how information posted by and about them circulates through their, and other, networks.

The report finds a growing number of American Muslim youth aspire to produce and share media. For many of them, this aspiration connects to ongoing politicized struggles around how Muslims and Islam are viewed in Post 9/11 America. As the youth tap new media resources to reshape the communication environment and create new images of what it means to be Muslim in America, they simultaneously confront the chilling effects of various forms of surveillance, which encourage self-censorship. The silencing power of these concerns becomes particularly potent in the context of networks that support expression of diverse narratives, free discussion of issues and the formation of loosely defined communities that bypass more controlled organizational structures. When privacy concerns disrupt informational flows, they threaten the value of these American Muslim networked practices.

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On December 11, 2012, Noor Tagouri, a 19 year old American Muslim woman, posted a video on Youtube. In the video, Noor speaks directly into the camera: “I have a cool story to share with you.”¹ Noor recounts how she posted a photograph of herself sitting at an ABC news desk on Facebook. Initially, the picture got about 300 likes in a month, but then the numbers started to increase dramatically. Noor recalls, “the three-hundred went up to a thousand. Within a week, she received twenty-two thousand likes.” Tracing her dream of being a news anchor back to when she was eight years old, Noor asks specific media celebrities including Oprah Winfrey, Lisa Ling, and Anderson Cooper to let her shadow or intern with them. She concludes, “It is the people from every corner of the globe who have liked and shared my photo and sent me thousands of letters and messages of their support, who gave me the confidence to ask...[for] this.” Her video caption explains:

My dream is to become the first Muslim (hijabi) woman news anchor or talk show host on American television! I am asking YOU to help share my dream with others and to help amplify my voice in order to make this a reality! :)
#LetNoorShine.

As the video ends, Noor lists her social media handles (@NTagouri, #LetNoorShine).

¹ The campaign name translates as “Let light shine.” My Dream: First American Hijabi Anchorwoman #LetNoorShine Youtube video. Accessed December 20, 2012.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaThDiXoVSQ>



Source: #LetNoorShine

Via social media, Noor Tagouri's story soon spread beyond her personal friendship and community networks. Through this process, the #LetNoorShine campaign raised awareness about her aspirations and also created strategic connections that may help her achieve her dreams. Noor's story raises important questions: What led Noor Tagouri to aspire to be a *hijabi* (headcover wearing) anchorwoman? How did her campaign and story inspire people to spread her message? How does it fit within the larger American Muslim context? And, what can Noor teach us about youth and new media?

Like Noor, a growing number of American Muslim youth aspire to produce and share media. For many of them, this aspiration connects to ongoing struggles around how

Muslims and Islam are viewed in Post 9/11 America. New media offers a means of advocating for causes that are largely overlooked by mainstream media. The youth tap new media resources to reshape the communication environment and create new images of what it means to be Muslim in America.

My research on American Muslim youth extends the Media, Activism and Participatory Politics (MAPP) Project's interest in the intersection between participatory cultures and participatory politics.² Based at the University of Southern California and led by Henry Jenkins, MAPP is one project under the umbrella of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's multi-year, multi-project Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics (YPP). Over the past three years, the MAPP team has developed four case studies documenting youth-driven networks that bridge participatory cultures and political action.³

Drawing on Henry Jenkins' et. al. past work, MAPP initially defined participatory cultures as having "relatively low barriers" to entry, strong support to create and share content, and informal mentorship structures. In a participatory culture, members "believe their contributions matter" and feel a "social connection" with each other as those with more experience mentor others.¹ As we highlight the participatory potential of such cultural contexts, we also remain cognizant of their 'real world' negotiations and constraints. As Henry Jenkins suggests in his dialogue with Nico Carpentier, this

² Henry Jenkins et. al., "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century" White Paper (2006); Joseph Kahne, Ellen Middaugh and Danielle Allen, "Youth, New Media, and the Rise of Participatory Politics," *Youth, New Media and Citizenship*. Edited by Danielle Allen and Jennifer Light (Cambridge: MIT Press, forthcoming).

³ Other MAPP research projects focused on Nerdfighters, the Harry Potter Alliance, Students for Liberty and the networks of youth-driven coalitions for the passing of DREAM act in 2011. For more on the MAPP project and the different case studies, see <http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/content/mapp-media-activism-participatory-politics>

³ Jenkins et. al., *Confronting*, 3.

definition of participatory culture may, in fact, “be a utopian goal, meaningful in the ways that it motivates our struggles to achieve it and provides yardsticks to measure what we’ve achieved.”⁴ Our continuing work at MAPP seeks to more clearly define these “yardsticks” as they relate to participatory politics. In particular, we are interested in how organizations and networks encourage youth to more meaningfully participate in civic and political life. As Peter Dahlgren aptly observes “One has to feel invited, committed and/or empowered to enter into a participatory process.”⁵ At MAPP, we highlight practices that support sociality, or a sense of social connection that mediates ties formed through what Mizuko Ito et. al. identify as friendship-driven and interest driven activities.⁶ We also identify “mechanisms of translation”⁷ that move youth toward extended engagement in cultural and political realms.

Joseph Kahne, Ellen Middaugh and Danielle Allen, build on previous YPP work to define participatory politics as:

Interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern. We propose that participatory politics are rooted in historical struggles for greater citizen influence over issues of public concern; and enabled by new media it is becoming an increasingly important form of political participation.⁸

Kahne et. al. stress that their “notion of political extends beyond the electoral focus” to include a “broad array of efforts” that range from “electoral” and civic activities to “life style politics.” They also propose the following activity types as characteristic of

⁴ Nico Carpentier and Henry Jenkins, “Theorizing Participatory Intensities: A Conversation About Participation and Politics.” *Convergence*. 19(3) (August 2013): 265-286.

⁵ Peter Dahlgren, “Parameters of Online participation: Conceptualising Civic Contingencies.” *Communication Management Quarterly* (6)21 (2011): 87–110

⁶ Mizuko Ito et al., *Hanging out, Messing Around and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

⁷ Neta Kligler Vilenchik, *Decreasing Worldsuck: Fan Communities, Mechanisms of Translation, and Participatory Politics* (2013). Accessed August 1, 2013. <http://dmlhub.net/publications/decreasing-worldsuck-fan-communities-mechanisms-translation-and-participatory-politics>

⁸ Kahne et al, *Youth*, 2.

participatory politics:

Circulation. In participatory politics, the flow of information is shaped by many in the broader community rather than by a small group of elites....

Dialogue and feedback. There is a high degree of dialogue among community members, as well as a practice of weighing in on issues of public concern and on the decisions of civic and political leaders....

Production. Members not only circulate information but also create original content (such as a blog or video that has political intent or impact) that allows them to advance their perspectives....

Mobilization. Members of a community rally others to help accomplish civic or political goals.

Investigation. Members of a community actively pursue information about issues of public concern....⁹

Largely peer-to-peer focused, participatory politics has a complex relationship with more institutionalized forms of politics. YPP Network member, Cathy Cohen explains:

Participatory politics is never meant to displace a focus on institutional politics. We might think of it as a supplemental domain where young people can take part in a dialogue about the issues that matter, think about strategies of mobilization, and do some of that mobilizing collectively online.¹⁰

While the personal and the cultural always have political dimensions, many of the American Muslim youth I interviewed felt their religious identities were even more politicized through the projection of beliefs onto them by political leaders, journalists, and others given the intensified Islamophobia¹¹ that characterizes the current moment. Building on Cohen's concept of participatory politics as a "supplemental" domain, my

⁹ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰ Cathy Cohen in interview with DMLCentral "Youth and Participatory Politics in a Digital Age: A Few Moments with Joseph Kahne and Cathy Cohen." Accessed May 10, 2013. <http://dmlcentral.net/newsletter/06/2012/youth-and-participatory-politics-digital-age-few-moments-joseph-kahne-and-cathy>

¹¹ In their report, "Fear Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America," Wajahat Ali and his colleagues define Islamophobia as: "an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility towards Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from America's social, political, and civic life." See: Wajahat Ali et. al. "Fear Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America." Center for American Progress Report, August 2011: 9.

research situates American Muslim youth at the center of a particularly complex intersection between culture and politics.

My research on American Muslim youth also highlights the importance of religion for U.S. culture and politics. In his research on Christian community groups, sociologist Paul Lichterman notes that scholars often overlook the fact that “religious groups have been considered a major bulwark of democracy” and figured in “Tocqueville’s arguments about the virtues of civic life” as a force to balance motivation toward “individual gain.”¹² Richard Flory and Donald Miller make a similar observation in *Finding Faith: A Spiritual Quest of the Post-Boomer Generation*, pointing to a “a lack of understanding about the importance of religion and a lack of knowledge about the particular beliefs of different religious groups, and how these may motivate their actions in culture and society.”¹³ In fact, the 2008 Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project found that 70% of Americans affiliate themselves with a specific religion. In addition, 41% of Americans who are unaffiliated with a religious institution still see “religion is at least somewhat important in their lives.”¹⁴ The study also found that most Americans see their and other people’s religious beliefs as “non-dogmatic, diverse and politically relevant.”¹⁵

This significant and long-standing relationship between religion, culture and politics in the United States is sometimes alluded to, but less often discussed in current debates on youth and politics. When it does merit mention, religion is sometimes viewed

¹² Paul Lichterman, *Elusive Togetherness: Church Groups Trying to Bridge America’s Divisions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 31.

¹³ Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller, *Finding Faith: The Spiritual Quest of the Post Boomer Generation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008): 2.

¹⁴ PewResearch Religion and Public Life Project, “Summary of Key Findings,” Pew Research Center, 2007. Accessed June 12, 2012. <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports#>

¹⁵ Ibid.

as a negative force. The frenzied debate about Invisible Children (IC), the San Diego based non-profit organization behind the *Kony2012* (2012) film, is a case in point.¹⁶ Once news broke about IC's possible financial ties to conservative Christian groups and the personal religious beliefs of the organization's founder Jason Russell, attention turned to determining *whether* IC is, in fact, a "stealth" Christian organization, implicitly implying that IC lied about its "true mission."¹⁷ While IC's leadership beliefs and funding structures merit scrutiny, the incredible "spreadability"¹⁸ of Kony2012 could have also served as an entry point into a more nuanced examination of how the organization's overwhelmingly young supporters experience faith in relation to their civic and political engagement, and how IC supports them to take action.

There are, of course, scholars (including Stephen Prothero, Diane Winston, Gal Beckerman, Stephen Hart, Mark R. Warren, Theda Skocpol, Ronald Thiemann, Robert Bellah and the already mentioned Paul Lichterman, Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller) working to expand our understanding of how religion intersects with civic and political action.¹⁹ In the words of Flory and Miller, religion "continues to be one of the most

¹⁶ For MAPP's previous research on Invisible Children see: Neta Kligler Vilenchik and Sangita Shresthova, "Learning through Practice: Participatory Culture Civics," Youth and Participatory Politics Research Network, Macarthur Foundation (2012). Accessed, December 2102.

http://ypp.dmlcentral.net/sites/all/files/publications/Learning%20Through%20Practice_Kligler-Shresthova_Oct-2-2012.pdf

¹⁷ Bill Berkowitz, "Invisible Children A Trojan Horse for the Religious Right," *Talk to Action*, April 19, 2012. Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://www.talk2action.org/story/2012/4/19/73954/2781>

¹⁸ In *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, Henry Jenkins et. al. define "spreadability" as "the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community's motivation for sharing material, the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes." See: Henry Jenkins et. al. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013): 2.

¹⁹ Stephen Prothero, *The American Bible: How Our Words Unite, Divide, and Define a Nation*. (New York: HarperOne, 2012); Diane Winston, *Small Screen, Big Picture: Television and Lived Religion*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009); Gal Beckerman, "Why Don't Journalists Get Religion? A Tenuous Bridge to Believers." *Columbia Journalism Review* (May-June 2004): 26-30; Stephen Hart, *What Does the Lord Require?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Theda Skocpol,

fundamental organizing schemas that individuals and groups have for their lives and their actions in the world.”²⁰

Based on ethnographic research carried out over a period of twelve months, this report reveals complex “organizing schema” of faith, citizenship and new media affecting American Muslim youth growing up in the post 9/11 United States.²¹ According to statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of State--and contrary to popular assumptions that often collapse Muslims with Arabs--American Muslims are very ethnically diverse and include South Asians (34%) Arabs (25%), and African Americans (25%).²² Various estimates suggest 3 to 6 million Muslims lived in America in 2012.²³

During my research, I interviewed 30 American Muslim youth from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.²⁴ All were involved in civically active groups and networks connected to the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) and Muslim Youth Group (MYG) of the Islamic Center of Southern California (ICSC). I also conducted 12 “expert” interviews with American Muslim activists who participated in various civic and political activities, including the Irvine11 campaign and the Lowe’s home improvement store boycott. In addition, I analyzed media and observed events and activities organized by

“Unraveling from Above.” *American Prospect* 25 (March-April 1996): 20-25; Robert Thiemann et al “Risks and Responsibilities for Faith-Based Organizations.” *Who Will Provide? The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare*. Edited by Mary Jo Bane and Brent Coffin. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000); Robert Bellah and F Greenspahn, *Uncivil Religion*. (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

²⁰ Flory and Miller, *Finding Faith*, 3.

²¹ This is not a study about the tenets of Islam as a religion. Rather, I focus on particular experiences of American Muslim youth connected through the networks and communities included in the research.

²² United States Department of State, “Being Muslim in America” Bureau of International Information Programs, 2009. 11. Accessed June 20, 2012. www.america.gov/publications/books/being-muslim-in-america.html

²³ Carola Suárez-Orozco “Designated ‘Others’: Young Muslim, and American,” *Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities through Multiple Methods*. Edited Selcuk R. Sirin and Michelle Fine (New York: New York University, 2008): xiii.

²⁴ With the exception of experts who specifically asked to be identified with their full name, all the youth and youth experts I interviewed are referred to through anonymized pseudonyms.

MPAC, MYG and their affiliated networks. All the media and news events I engage in this report surfaced through these networks.

Founded in 1986, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) is an advocacy organization, which strives for the “integration of Islam into American pluralism, and for a positive, constructive relationship between American Muslims and their representatives.”²⁵ MPAC attributes its ideological underpinnings to Dr. Meher Hathout, a retired physician of Egyptian descent. In addition to serving on the Board of Directors of the Interfaith Alliance and the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California, Dr. Hathout also runs the *Straight Talk* podcast wherein he and his guests engage Islam and American Muslim related topics.²⁶ Dr. Hathout also strongly asserts that American Muslims need to accept being American as much as they claim their religious beliefs. In his words, “Home is not where my grandparents are buried; It is where my grandchildren will live.”

An informal space for high-school aged youth to gather, the Muslim Youth Group (MYG) resides within the Islamic Center of Southern California (ICSC) in Los Angeles. Unlike many mosques that are segmented by ethnicity and sect, the Center does not formally align with any particular ethnic or sectarian group.²⁷ Founded in the 1970s, ICSC explicitly strives to engage diverse Muslim communities and promotes a “socially responsible Muslim-American identity.”²⁸ This commitment to situating Islam as compatible with life in the United States informs the ideologies of the Center. For example, the Center clearly articulates that “While advocating the codes and ethics of

²⁵ MPAC website. Accessed March 13, 2013. <http://www.mpac.org/about.php#UhuRwrzEgo4>

²⁶ Straight Talk Podcast. Accessed June 10, 2013. <http://www.straighttalkpodcast.com/>

²⁷ The founders of ICSC were, however, mostly members of the Egyptian American community.

²⁸ ICSC website. Accessed January 10, 2012. <http://www.icsconline.org/aboutus/mission>

Islamic behavior, we believe that there is no compulsion in religion.” ICSC also does not believe in “segregation of the sexes” (a common practice in many mosques).²⁹ Shahed Amanullah contends that ICSC is “one of the most gender-inclusive major mosques in the United States.”³⁰ Many connections exist between MPAC and MYG. For one, both MPAC and MYG were founded through the ICSC. Close ties exist between MPAC staff and MYG programs. MYG youth also volunteer for and help out with MPAC events.

The report is divided into the following sections:

Post 9/11 Generation - The American Muslim youth included in this research all grew up in the decade following the horrific events of September 11, 2001. Not only have they had to grapple with fear-inducing anti-Islamic sentiment and counter terrorism measures, they also grew up with new media as an integral part of their daily lives. Diverse in their focus and ideology, all those interviewed actively negotiate what it means to be young, civically active, Muslim, and American in a post 9/11 era.

Circulation, Networks, Organizations – This section discusses the negotiated relationship between more formal and established advocacy organizations and largely youth-driven dispersed American Muslim networks. These youth use such networks to connect with each other, share current events, and debate issues. At times, these networks also become sites for mobilization around issues that require quick grassroots responses.

²⁹ ICSC website. Accessed January 10, 2012. <http://www.icsconline.org/aboutus>

³⁰ Shahed Amanullah. Pushing the Envelope Without Breaking It” in *The Mosque in Morgantown* (2009). Accessed June 10, 2013. <http://www.themosqueinmorgantown.com/forum/tag/islamic-center-of-southern-california/>

In those instances, new media practices also allow the youth to bypass the slower, often more hierarchical processes associated with established advocacy organizations.

Storytelling - This section documents contested efforts to narrate American Muslim experiences, one which pits representations in news media and “Hollywood” entertainment against more grassroots, efforts to tell “real” American Muslim stories, often circulated through social media. The American Muslim youth interviewed stress that the ability to tell their own stories is a crucial expression of their identity.

Privacy and Surveillance – Ongoing in-person and online government surveillance is a reality confronting some young American Muslim activists, particularly those involved in contentious social justice campaigns. The youth interviewed often connect such surveillance to broader concerns around new media and privacy that resonate with experiences articulated by youth in the other MAPP case study groups. American Muslims youth interviewed see moral surveillance from *within* their own community as another key consideration for self-censorship on social media. They also worry about the repercussions of someone they don’t personally know following them on Twitter. Though valuable in their own right, the American Muslim youth’s experiences of cultural and political participation in new media spaces presented here also have much to teach us about the challenges and opportunities of participatory politics.

In the **Concluding Section**, I reflect on how the themes identified in this report help us move toward a more integrated understanding of participatory politics.

A POST 9/11 GENERATION

“I didn’t realize it was so big,” Walidah, a young American Muslim woman from the Midwest, almost whispers as we circle the noisy construction site at Ground Zero during MPAC’s June 2012 Young Leaders’ Media Summit in New York City.³¹ She takes several pictures with her cell phone, barely glancing at the screen, her expression distraught and pensive. All the Summit participants and several MPAC staff gather at the memorial wall listing the names of the 343 first responders who died trying to save people during the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. The young American Muslims read the names on the list, wipe away tears, and gaze at the space left behind by the destroyed towers. As they gather for a short prayer at the fire station across the way, I become very aware of the curious, almost suspicious, looks they receive from other visitors.

Standing in the atrium of a building newly constructed next to Ground Zero, the MPAC youth discuss how 9/11 had changed American Muslims’ lives, what it meant in 2001 and what it means more than ten years later. Keeping his voice lowered, MPAC’s President, Salaam Al Marayati, observes that when he speaks to non-Muslims, he often stresses that “We are all American and this hurts ‘us’ as much as ‘you.’” He believes every American Muslim should visit Ground Zero to grasp the reality of the attacks. Like Walidah, several MPAC summit participants had not visited Ground Zero before. Their vivid memories of 9/11 were shaped by mediated images and their parents, friends and teachers’ frightened reactions. Despite clear differences in their individual recollections, the youth all agreed that 9/11 aftershocks had a lasting impact on their lives.

³¹ Research notes. June 10-14, 2012.

This section of the report explores how the youth's memories of 9/11 contribute to a collectively articulated American Muslim identity and how this articulation in turn facilitates their participation in culture and politics.

9/11 Memories

After visiting Ground Zero, the MPAC New York Summit youth delegates head to New York University to visit Imam Khalid Latif. Currently based at NYU's Islamic Center, Latif was also named a chaplain of the New York City Police Department in 2005 when he was 24 years old. As the meeting begins, Imam Latif shares his 9/11 story, a story he previously shared on NPR:

I was on my way to my morning Arabic class. And when I went into the classroom there was a lot of commotion. People were talking to each other and the professor wasn't teaching, and a few minutes into it, a security guard walked in and asked us to evacuate because a plane had flown into the World Trade Center. . . . My first concern was just to make sure that people who I knew who were Muslim were kind of in a place where they weren't going home on their own. I saw amongst a lot of my friends and individuals who were Muslims that I looked up to many years, just a very substantiated fear of how people might engage them. And so you saw a lot of young men kind of trim their beards. If they wore skull caps they removed them. They were trying to blend in a little bit more.³²

Like Imam Latif, all of the American Muslim youth I interviewed had a 9/11 memory story. Many of these are what scholars call flashbulb memories (or FBMs). FBMs are “distinctly vivid, precise, concrete, and long-lasting memories of a personal circumstance surrounding a person's discovery of shocking events.”³³ While individually narrated, these FBMs together contribute to collective memories--as Barbie Zelizer observes,

³² Imam Latif Khalid in interview with NPR. Accessed June 20, 2013.

<http://www.npr.org/2011/09/05/140140284/young-americans-reflect-on-9-11>

³³ Lucas Bietti, “Flashbulb Memories, Positive Events and the Best Goal in Football History.” Collective Memory Blog, September 25, 2010. Accessed June 1, 2013.

<http://www.collectivememory.net/2010/09/flashbulb-memories-positive-events-and.html>

“recollections of the past that are determined and shaped by the group.”³⁴ Accepting fluidity between “history and memory,”³⁵ such memories situate the narrator in ways that may connect him or her to memories of others. This fluid conception of collective memory and FBMs helps us to understand the youth’s 9/11 and post 9/11 narratives. Now in her late twenties, Arzu narrates her experiences after 9/11 when she recalls that, “All of the sudden, I felt people were looking at me differently.... The FBI came to our house, my parent's house.”³⁶ She remembers that her mother told her the FBI wanted to see her cousin’s birth certificate but believes the authorities used this excuse to “check on our Muslim house.” Arzu’s 9/11 memory crystallized her realization that her own family could be seen as a security threat and would be subject to surveillance with any pretext.

Tanisha, a young Pakistani-American college student, was 12 years old in 2001.³⁷ She remembers that her teacher hosted a conversation about the attacks a few weeks later. She felt vulnerable when one of her classmates exclaimed, “Muslims want to kill all the Jews and Christians.” Sadia, a Pakistani American college student, still cringes as she recalls that the day after 9/11 her best friend told her, “I’m not allowed to play with you anymore.”³⁸ As Soha Yassine, the coordinator of the Muslim Youth Group at ICSC and also in her late twenties, observes, “For us there is a before 9/11 and after 9/11” life.³⁹

In contrast, younger American Muslims (in their teens) had less politically inflected, but not less potent, memories of 9/11. On 9/11, Farah, a young Pakistani-

³⁴ Barbie Zelizer “Reading Against the Grain: the Shape of Memory Studies” Review and Criticism (June 1995): 214.

³⁵ Ibid, 216.

³⁶ Interview with Arzu on April 19, 2012.

³⁷ Interview with Tanisha on April 29, 2012.

³⁸ Interview with Sadia on July 3, 2012.

³⁹ Interview with Soha Yassine on August 24, 2012.

American, was in 4th grade at a private Muslim school in Wisconsin in 2001.⁴⁰ All classes were canceled as soon as news of the terrorist attacks broke. When her father picked her up, she was still in her school uniform - which included a *hijab* (head scarf). Her father told her to “Just to be safe just take it [the head scarf] off.” She recalls her confusion as her mother explained that “the plane hit that building” somewhere in New York. Over the next few days, Farah’s female family members stopped wearing their headscarves after having garbage thrown at them on the street.

Both the younger and older youth see a connection between these personal, yet shared, memories of 9/11 and the rise in anti-Muslim sentiments in the United States in the days, weeks, and months following the attacks. In her book on South Asian Muslim American youth, Sunaina Marr Maira explains that:

After 9/11, there was a violent backlash in the United States against Muslims, or those thought to be Muslims, with 700 hate crimes against South Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans in the three weeks following the Twin Tower attacks. There were four homicides....At least 200 hate crimes were reported against Sikh Americans alone.....The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) documented 960 incidents of racial profiling just in the five weeks after September 11, 2001.... Under the guise of the War on Terror, there were mass detentions and deportations of Muslim and Arab Americans, mainly immigrant men rounded up on public suspicion or for immigration violations.⁴¹

Though actual numbers are difficult to determine, several studies and government reports confirm that many American Muslim’s lives were adversely affected in the post 9/11

⁴⁰ Interview with Farah on July 3, 2012.

⁴¹ Sunaina Marr Maira, *Missing: Youth, Citizenship, and Empire after 9/11* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009): 12.

era.⁴² Religion and Humanities scholar Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri argues that “surveillance and the threat of terrorism became a much more routine part of American lives.”⁴³

While fear and discrimination clearly guided (and continues to guide) extensive profiling of American Muslim communities around issues of security and terrorism, it is important to also highlight several (probably insufficient) calming statements made about American Muslims immediately after 9/11. Edward E. Curtis details a public statement made by President George W. Bush on September 17, 2001 when he beseeched Americans to not lash out against their Muslim neighbors:

Those who feel like they can intimidate our fellow citizens to take out their anger don’t represent the best of America. They represent the worst of humankind, and they should be ashamed of that kind of behavior.⁴⁴

Though the curtailing of civil rights that characterized the War on Terror and the Patriot Act undermined any assurances President Bush made, his appeal did, nonetheless, provide some anchor point for American Muslims. Standing at Ground Zero, Salam Al Mayarati referenced President Bush’s speech as he spoke to the Summit’s young participants. Another MPAC staff member then shared that interning American Muslims, along the lines of Japanese-American World War II internment camps, became a very real concern during the weeks that followed 9/11. The fact that interning Muslims in America had been a realistic concern triggered many emotions, including relief, among the youth at Ground Zero that day.

⁴² For further information on these post 9/11 measures, see: Office of the Inspector General, “The September 11 Detainees: A Review of the Treatment of Aliens Held on Immigration Charges in Connection with the Investigation of the September 11 Attacks.” (June 2003). Accessed June 1, 2013. <http://www.justice.gov/oig/special/0306/>

⁴³ Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 328.

⁴⁴ President Bush quoted in Edward E. Curtis IV, *Muslims in America: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 99.

More than a Decade Later

Many of the American Muslim youth I met shared experiences of anti-Muslim prejudice growing up in America. A survey of American Muslim youth conducted by Selcuk R. Sirin and Michelle Fine found that “88 percent of the participants reported having been subjected to at least one act of discrimination *because they were Muslim.*”⁴⁵ Reflecting on these realities, Sadia, a young Pakistani-American, sighs and observes, “It’s been 11 years since 9/11.”⁴⁶ Sometimes she feels like, “We really moved past that and we made a lot of progress.” Other times, she is not so sure. She recounts an incident that happened to her in New York City:

I was in New York with two other girls. We were walking and there was kind of a crowd and they wanted people to move or whatever and someone called out to us, ‘You terrorists!’ because one of the girls was wearing a headscarf. And I was just like, ‘Wow. Really? You would stoop that low?’ I come from a conservative Texas town so if something like that happens there or in another conservative town, I wouldn’t have been as surprised. But seeing as it was New York, I was like, ‘Really?’ Apparently, there are still real problems there and they are really hard to overcome. It’s very frustrating when like something like 9/11 happens and there’s a few radicals who say ‘Yeah, we’re Muslims that’s why we are doing this’ and everyone believe them. Whereas, the guy who flew the plane into a building in Austin because he was mad at the IRS and no one’s like, ‘Wow, Christians are horrible because of that.’

A recent MPAC report reviews data from various sources (including the FBI) to report that hate crimes against Muslims in the United States have remained high, and even spiked in 2010 and 2011.⁴⁷ Supporting these findings, a recent survey by the Pew Research Center also found that 55% percent of the American Muslims surveyed felt that

⁴⁵ Selcuk R. Sirin and Michelle Fine, *Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities through Multiple Methods*. (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 87.

⁴⁶ Interview with Sadia on July 3, 2012.

⁴⁷ For accounts of crimes against Muslims in America see: Mark Potok, “FBI: Anti Muslim Hate Crimes Still Up in Salon.com (December 10, 2012). Accessed March 10, 2013 http://www.salon.com/2012/12/10/fbi_anti_muslim_hate_crimes_still_up/

living as a American Muslim has become “more difficult” since 9/11. Twenty-five percent of the American Muslims surveyed also reported that their local mosque has been the “target of controversy or outright hostility.”⁴⁸ The same study found “no indication of increased alienation or anger” among American Muslims towards the United States. Many analysts attribute these high levels of animosity to sustained anti-Muslim campaigns by groups affiliated with people like Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer⁴⁹ who argue: “The U. S. Constitution is under attack from Fundamentalist Islam and Shariah, Islamic Religious Law. Fundamentalist Islam wants Shariah to replace the U. S. Constitution and fundamentally transform America.”⁵⁰

The potency of such anti-Muslim rhetoric became clear on December 27, 2012 when Sunando Sen, a man of Indian origin, died after being pushed onto the tracks of an oncoming New York City subway train. After the police charged her with the crime, Erica Menendez, who is reported to have suffered from mental illness, explained, “I pushed a Muslim onto the train tracks because I hate Hindus and Muslims. Ever since 2001 when they put down the twin towers I’ve been beating them up.”⁵¹ News of the

⁴⁸ PewResearch Center for the People and the Press. “Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism” Pew Research Center, August 2011. Accessed August 12, 2013. <http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/muslim-americans-no-signs-of-growth-in-alienation-or-support-for-extremism/>

Robert Wuthnow’s three year study similarly found that 47% of Americans held negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims. See: Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005): 210-213.

⁴⁹ The Anti Defamation League details how Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer’s Stop Islamization of America “rouse[s] public fears about a vast Islamic conspiracy to destroy American values.” See: Anti Defamation League. Accessed May 10, 2013. <http://www.adl.org/civil-rights/discrimination/c/stop-islamization-of-america.html>

⁵⁰ For more of Pamela Geller’s views, see her blog Atlas Shrugs. Accessed April 10, 2013. http://atlasshrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas_shrugs/2013/03/pamela-geller-to-speak-at-liberty-councils-awakening-2013.html

⁵¹ Erika Menendez was quoted in a New York Times article: Marc Santora, “Woman Is Charged With Murder as a Hate Crime in a Fatal Subway Push” New York Times (December 29, 2012). Accessed January 10, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/30/nyregion/woman-is-held-in-death-of-man-pushed-onto-subway-tracks-in-queens.html?_r=1&. In an article tellingly titled “Death by Brown Skin”, Wajahat Ali argued this

murder spread through American Muslim youth networks and followed on the heels of the debates surrounding the “Stop Jihad” ads in subways and on buses that were paid for by Pamela Geller’s American Freedom Defense Initiative. Both stories garnered many comments online. Discussions of Sen’s death were often linked to other hate crimes like the Sikh temple shooting in Wisconsin and nine defaced mosques that occurred during Ramadan in 2012.⁵² The youth often shared news stories, warning their peers to “be careful” and “be safe.”⁵³

Aliyah, a young activist, observes:

A lot of Muslims, in general, live in a state of fear.... Then other people are like, "What are you afraid of?" It just leads to more uncomfortableness and people not being able to relate to each other.

Rubiyah concurs with Aliyah. She notes she lives in “fear” as she and those close to her experience direct signs of hostility (two men had recently pointed their fingers at him pretending to shoot him as he walked out of Sam’s Club), and news stories of hate crimes in Arizona (where she lives) weigh heavily on her every day. Reflecting on this climate of fear, Muin, a high school sophomore, ponders the term “terrorist” during our interview.⁵⁴ He pauses for a few minutes as he considers where the term originated and how it came to be linked with American Muslims. In his experience, the term “terrorist” has become inextricably tied to 9/11. Before we move on to another topic, Muin sighs

incident in New York City’s subway should not be dismissed as an isolated event. Rather it needs to be understood as part of U.S.’s current “oversaturated Islamophobic environment.” See: Wajahat Ali, “Death By Brown Skin” in Salon.com (December 12, 2012). Accessed January 20, 2013.

http://www.salon.com/2012/12/31/death_by_brown_skin/

⁵² For an account of these attacks see: Uzma Kolsy, “Eight Attacks, 11 Days” in Salon.com (August 14, 2012). Accessed September 15, 2013. http://www.salon.com/2012/08/14/eight_attacks_11_days/

⁵³ Research notes. December 2012.

⁵⁴ Interview with Muin on April 29, 2012. For a more in-depth exploration of how term “terrorism” gets connected to Islam see Mustafa Umar, “When Did Islam Trademark Terrorism?” in Suhaibwebb.com (May 10, 2011). Accessed June 1, 2012. <http://www.suhaibwebb.com/society/domestic-affairs/when-did-islam-trademark-terrorism/>

and looks down at the table. After a long pause, he observes that terrorism is now “associated with any Muslim.” “It shouldn't be that way,” he concludes.

Defining the American Muslim Identity

These American Muslim youth belong to what they (and others) informally call a “post 9/11 generation.” Whether they choose to engage actively in civic and political issues around their identity or not, these youth’s experiences are, in some way, affected by the events of September 11, 2001. As Sunaina Marr Maira observes, “9/11 led many youth from Muslim American families to engage with their Muslim identities with a new intensity, with varying trajectories emerging.”⁵⁵ In one of these trajectories, documented in Nazli Kibria’s study of Bangladeshi youth and Nadine Naber’s research on young Arab American⁵⁶, youth move towards privileging a hyphenated Muslim identity over their ethnic background, leading to what Maira describes as “self-conscious production of and engagement with “Muslim” identity.” In their analysis, Ewing and Hoyler find that the foundations of this practice have:

been developing for decades and can be seen, for example, in the teachings of the Muslim Students Association, many young Muslims link the emergence of their own intentional identity as a Muslim to the aftermath of 9/11 and the war on terror.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Sunaina Maira, “Youth Culture and Youth Movements: United States of America,” *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*. Edited by Joseph Suad and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Boston: Brill, 2003). Accessed June 10, 2013. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.libproxy.usc.edu/entries/encyclopedia-of-women-and-islamic-cultures/youth-culture-and-youth-movements-united-states-of-america-COM_0709?s.num=1&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopedia-of-women-and-islamic-cultures&s.q=Maira

⁵⁶ Nazli Kibria and Nadine Naber’s studies are both cited in Sunaina Maira’s “Youth Culture and Youth Movements” article. Nazli Kibria, “The ‘New Islam’ and Bangladeshi youth in Britain and the U.S” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31(2) (2007): 243-266; Nadine Naber “Muslim First, Arab Second: A Strategic Politics of Race and Gender” *The Muslim World* 95 (2005): 479-495.

⁵⁷ Katherine Pratt Ewing and Marguerite Hoyler, “Being Muslim and American: South Asian Muslim Youth and The War on Terror” *Being and Belonging: Muslims in the United States Since 9/11*, Edited by Katherin Pratt Ewing (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008): 82.

The youth included in my study identify strongly as both American AND Muslim.⁵⁸ In a post 9/11 climate where being American and Muslim could be seen as being in conflict with each other, the youth I met prioritized an integrated American Muslim identity.⁵⁹

Through their study of American Muslim youth, Selcuk R. Sirin and Michelle Fine argue that American Muslims experience “hyphenated” identities that are “at once individual and collective, conscious and unconscious, filled with pride and shame, politically shared, and wildly personal.”⁶⁰ The youth I met generally preferred “American Muslim,” which they feel makes a strong claim for a distinctly American practice of Islam. For example, when I asked Yaida, a politically active young woman, about how she thinks about being American, Syrian and Muslim, she says, “That’s really a great question because that’s something I ask myself everyday.”⁶¹ Though she participates in some cultural practices through her family, she doesn’t “have much to connect with in terms of [her] culture as Syrian-American.” Though she still feels very connected and invested in what happens in Syria, she also recognizes that her ties to her parents’ homeland are becoming more tenuous as she continues to mature:

Yes, all my family is Syrian, and I love them...[But] I’m living here in America. I’m growing up within the American culture.

When Yaida visits Syria, the people there identify her as American even if she makes efforts to fit in by dressing and acting appropriately. Like Yaida, Matt situates himself as an American since he has spent his whole life here:

⁵⁸ For a detailed and personal account of how identity politics informs American Muslim identity formation, see: Eboo Patel, , *Acts of Faith: the Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007): 37-58.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of reconciling American Muslim identities see: GhaneaBassiri, *Islam in America*, 379-381.

⁶⁰ Sirin and Fine, *Muslim American Youth*, 194-195.

⁶¹ Interview with Yaida on August 14, 2012.

I'm American first and then Muslim. I mean I love them both. At the same time, if there's conflicting ideas, usually I side...[with the] American side unless it's really against Islam like eating pork or something like that. But most of the time I'm American.

Abu, a young man who had decided to pursue politics as a career after being involved with local community groups, also negotiates between his American, Somali and Muslim identity.⁶² For him, his decision to “go into the area of politics” is motivated by his desire to “help [his] Muslim people.” When I ask him whom he includes in this community, he explains:

I think of my people in my original country. I think of the people in America who are being bothered for being different.... When Keith Ellison became Congressman, he changed so much. He turned down the radical bigots who wanted him to swear on the Bible and he said, "Well, how about I swear on Thomas Jefferson's Qu'ran?"... Just by being in office, he pushed down all the hatred against Muslims [as he showed that] the government accepts these kinds of people.

Referring to Keith Ellison, the first openly Muslim Congressman, Abu situates his own identity as distinctly American and Muslim. Through such discussions of their American identity, the youth signal what Maira has called a “dissenting citizenship” or “an engagement with the nation-state that is based on a critique of its politics, and not automatically or always in compliance with state policies.”⁶³ For the youth I met, the right to critique American policies hinged on their claim that they are, indeed, American.

To reconcile their American Muslim identity, the youth argue that anti-Islam rhetoric systematically overlooks the long-standing (and constructive) role that Islam and Muslims have played in American history. The opening passage of *Muslims and the Making America*, a report released by MPAC, notes that “Muslims are viewed as having little impact on the shaping of early America, but history reveals that they engaged and

⁶² Interview with Abu on May 16, 2012.

⁶³ Maira, *Missing*. 190-257.

influenced its shapers and also contributed, both directly and indirectly, to the making of America.”⁶⁴ The report then chronicles the various historical contributions Muslims made to U.S. civic, democratic and religious life. Opening with the story of Job Ben Solomon, an “enslaved African imam” who is believed to have influenced the “anti-slavery sentiments of James Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia,”⁶⁵ the report cites prominent figures in American history like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams who had productive dialogues with Islamic principles that proved helpful in formulating American democratic ideals. Though not an exhaustive study, the MPAC report makes a clear point: there is a long history of Muslims in America.

Situating Islam within this longer historical context is an important dimension of the American Muslim identity. Echoing MPAC’s report, scholars like Edward E. Curtis and Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri trace the contributions that Muslims and Islam have made to American culture and political thought across several centuries. As Curtis notes, at least some of the slaves from Africa were “bound to be Muslim.”⁶⁶ In his analysis of the post World War II era, Kambiz Ghaneabassiri notes that a shift away from particular “religious traditions” toward a broader “adherence to America’s democratic values” triggered a polarized response. On one end of the spectrum were the Muslim immigrants who sought to integrate Islam into America’s “melting pot of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism.” At the other end were the “prophetic black nationalist voices who rejected” this “civil” approach by “pointing to the structural inequities of race and class”

⁶⁴ Precious Rasheeda Muhammad, “Muslims and the Making of America” Los Angeles: Muslim Public Affairs Council (2012). Accessed March 10, 2013. <http://www.mpac.org/publications/policy-papers/muslims-and-the-making-of-america.php>

⁶⁵ Ibid, 7.

⁶⁶ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 4.

in America.⁶⁷ Curtis notes the last three decades have also brought an increased commitment among American Muslims to finding and articulating American Muslim religious voices and perspectives. Despite at times tense differences on Islam's religious tenets, Curtis observes that what these religious scholars share is:

...a real commitment to discovering the true meaning of their sacred scriptures and then applying those understandings to their daily lives. Whether they were socially conservative or liberal, an unprecedented number of Muslim Americans during this period came to believe that they must read the scriptures for themselves.⁶⁸

Curtis acknowledges that the "internet" also became "a forum in which American Muslims of various racial backgrounds debated the meaning of their sacred scriptures."⁶⁹

My research supports Curtis' observation that new and social media provide new opportunities for young (and not so young) American Muslims to articulate and connect around their faith. As a young American Muslim, Bob values being able to access balanced information about Islam online, particularly as his parents and community elders often hesitate to answer his questions.⁷⁰ He explains that he and his American Muslim friends would "go on the internet" particularly to a "site called 'IslamiCity'" where "different scholars" posted responses to questions like "What does Islam say about terrorism?". Sophie, a blogger and new media professional, explains:

I interact mostly with Muslims in North America because I don't speak other languages. As an American and a Western Muslim Community, I think we are in the process of really defining ourselves as a community and as individuals. It's kind of a Wild West environment. I feel like you can run into people from every kind of backgrounds, from every kind of socio-economic status, every level of education, every sex, every philosophy.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ghaneabassiri, *A History of Islam*, 238.

⁶⁸ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 73.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 80.

⁷⁰ Interview with Bob on September 13, 2012.

⁷¹ Interview with Sophie on April 12, 2012.

Malik underscores Curtis's assertion that "participating in various on-line dialogues, American Muslims logged on by the thousands and became part of a global English language cyber-community of Muslims."⁷²

Post 9/11 American Muslim Youth Take Action?

American Muslim youth grow up with a keen awareness of the ways anti-Islamic sentiments are buttressed by the silencing power of post 9/11 security measures. For many youth, these combined trends became important to their decision to take action as American Muslims. In some cases, claiming their American Muslim identity leads to explicit activism. In others, it becomes an entry point into cultural participation within American Muslim communities. In her exploration of civic engagement among American Muslim youth after 9/11, Maira proposes that this engagement may take several forms including "greater involvement in electoral politics," "progressive activism and grassroots politics," and "outreach to non-Muslim communities."⁷³ My research suggests that American Muslims take "action" through an even broader range of activities, many of which are rooted in the practices of what the Youth and Participatory Politics Network YPP has called participatory politics.

Sara Jawhari is a civically active young American Muslim woman who is, among other things, also involved with Invisible Children. In an op-ed she wrote for her college newspaper, she reflects on her experiences. "My family is the embodiment of the 'American Dream,'" she asserts as she describes how her family moved to the United States in the 1990s. Her father worked hard to earn a living. Sara attended a U.S. high school and was given an award for being an "exemplary young citizen" in her senior

⁷² Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 80.

⁷³ Maira, "Youth Culture and Youth Movements", online.

year. She then recounts several instances (bomb threats to her Muslim school and the Peter King Domestic Radicalization congressional hearings) where she, her family and other members of her American Muslim community felt unwelcome. “Being American and a Muslim are not in conflict with each other,” she declares vehemently. She goes on to state, “I will not apologize for the events that occurred on 9/11 as apologizing implies guilt, and Muslims, real Muslims, are not guilty of the horrific acts of terrorism on that day.” She concludes with a wish:

Though I am tired of constantly being on the defensive, I realize something needs to be done. I fear where we will be another ten years from now. I only wish for the day when I could hold up a sign that states ‘United We Stand’ and truly believe it.⁷⁴

Jawhari’s statement echoes the sentiments of Mona Eltahawy, a columnist and public speaker on Arab and Muslim American issues. In the hours after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, Eltahawy tweeted to express her frustration:



Given the extremely diverse communities included under the American Muslim umbrella, Selina, a young activist I interviewed, explains that she “sometimes wonders what that term means.”⁷⁵ She worries that many of the meanings associated with American Muslims are, in fact, external labels that do not grow out of the shared experiences of American Muslims. While Selina’s observation raises a valid concern, my

⁷⁴ Jawhari, Sara, “I am American: On Being Muslim in a Post 9/11 Era.” *The University Daily Kansan* (September 12, 2011): 5.

⁷⁵ Interview with Selina on April 23, 2012.

conversations with youth suggest that the shared experience of 9/11 did support the formation of shared politicized young American Muslim identities.

As one of my interviewees observed, 9/11 pushed young American Muslims into situations where they were asked to explain and often painfully answer for the 14 men who hijacked three airplanes that killed several thousand people (some of whom were Muslim). Like Sara Jawhari and Mona Eltahawy, many of the American Muslim youth I met wanted to move past “apologizing” and towards “integrating” their Muslim beliefs into their identification as Americans. For many, this desire has become a call to action around American Muslim issues. For some, this action is almost unavoidable, as they are often put on the spot to explain what being Muslim means. “Whether it’s wearing *hijab*, having a Muslim name, or having your friends know you are Muslim,” Hasina feels that she and other American Muslims are “a walking advertisement for Islam.”⁷⁶

Many of the young American Muslim women I spoke to felt the *hijab*, in particular, has become a prominent, debated, personal and visible representation of Islam in the United States. While *hijab* literally means “cover” or “modesty” in Arabic, the ways in which it is adopted and interpreted varies depending on religious affinities and ethnicity.⁷⁷ The youth I met most often use the term *hijab* to refer to a headscarf that covers the hair of devout Muslim women. The young women who choose to wear the *hijab* see it as integrally connected to their faith and their identity as American Muslims. Soraya, now in her late 20s, recalls that she started wearing the *hijab* shortly before 9/11.⁷⁸ Seeing her fellow Muslims bear the brunt of anti-Islamic rhetoric in the months that followed renewed her commitment to “keep wearing it.” Soraya’s experience echoes

⁷⁶ Interview with Hasina on April 22, 2012.

⁷⁷ Sirin and Fine, *Muslim American Youth*, 46.

⁷⁸ Interview with Soraya on August 24, 2012.

the results of research conducted by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad who finds that “the *hijab*, for those who have chosen to put one on after 9/11, has become the symbol of authenticity and pride.”⁷⁹ Haddad also observes that the *hijab* has “become an iconic symbol of the refusal to be defined by the Western media and war propaganda since 9/11, and of affirming authentic Muslim and American identity.”⁸⁰ Noor Tagouri explicitly connects her aspiration to become an anchorwoman to such symbolism when she explains that she “started wearing the *hijab* a few years ago,” which was also when she “decided to be the first *hijabi* anchorwoman.”⁸¹ To Noor, wearing the *hijab* allows her to embrace her American Muslim identity and channel this expression toward civic and political goals.

Reflecting on the past 11 years, Aliyah suggests that the security measures, public perceptions, and reactionary attitudes towards Islam actually “galvanized a really large part of the [American] Muslim population; the Muslim youth who were in college then provided mentoring to be people that were in high school.”⁸² When 9/11 happened, Aliyah was a sophomore in high school; she argues that every young American Muslim, whether they were school or college aged, was affected:

So, you're kind of still seeing that generation and the generations following it like pursuing the code of activism and civic engagement.... There were definitely people that were active before that but as a whole, the community was very insular. I'm in a great community trying to like get its feet on the ground, getting money, all that stuff, stability... [After 9/11] I feel like that's when our community realized like, "Hold on. We need to get active. We need to do things because if not, we're screwed.”

⁷⁹ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon.” *Sociology of Religion* 68(3) (2007): 254.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Noor Tagouri in My Dream Youtube video. Accessed March 10, 2013.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaThDiXoVVSQ>

⁸² Interview with Aliyah on April 29, 2012.

Hasina, a high school senior, feels Muslims are the “new civil rights activism topic.”⁸³ Building on this, Rubiya, a college student, connects present day American Muslims to the civil rights movements in the 1960s.⁸⁴ While inequality still exists, she feels that the discussions around the release of *The Help* become moments of realization for how much things have changed. She applies this same logic to the advice she gives to American Muslims in their teens:

I would tell the next generation, . . . when you see the hatred that these people are spewing, it's temporary. It's just in the moment. When they look back they're going to feel really bad about it. In the meantime, you need to be brave. The change will happen. But, it won't happen by itself. You have to be creative. Go out, Have voter registrations and vote. Voice your opinion and go to town hall meetings.

For Rubiya, “finding a way” to support such change motivated her to start her own blog, which she defines as “more church, less political.” She used her blog as a starting point to fulfill her own longing “for a greater community,” especially “with all the people around,” including her parents, who live in constant fear. Like Rubiyah, Sadia is active in her community.⁸⁵ She participates in her college Muslim Student Association (MSA), contributes to blogs and actively shares American Muslim themed content through her social media networks. She sees herself as a “good example of what a real Muslim is,” which - in her own words - is her way of showing other Americans: “Hey, we're pretty much just like you.”

⁸³ Interview with Hasina on April 22, 2012.

⁸⁴ Interview with Rubiyah on May 12, 2012.

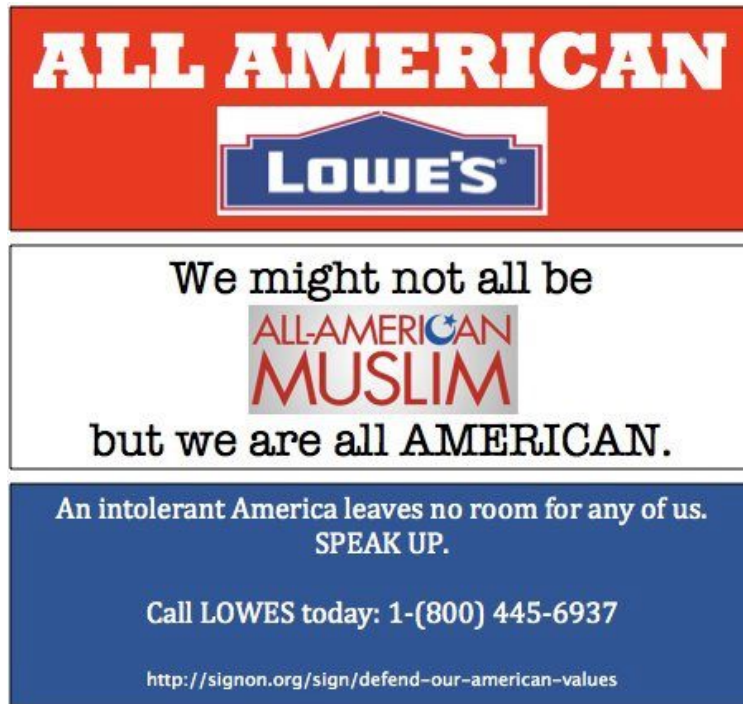
⁸⁵ Interview with Sadia on July 3, 2012.

CIRCULATION, ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS

On December 10, 2011, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) issued an “Action Alert” that landed in my inbox. The alert urged “all concerned citizen [sic] to make their voices heard and contact Lowe’s and three dozen other major advertisers to reconsider their apparent decision to pull their advertisements from the new TLC reality television show *All-American Muslim*.”⁸⁶ The advertisers’ decision responded to pressure mounted by the Florida Family Association (FFA), a conservative group dedicated to defending “traditional American biblical values.” In its publicity, the FFA argued that *All American Muslim* dangerously “misrepresented” American Muslims by focusing on the everyday and largely mundane lives of Muslim Arab-Americans in the suburbs of Dearborn, Michigan. According to the FFA, this focus on the ordinariness of American Muslim lives would ‘lull’ Americans into thinking that Islam posed no threat to the American ‘way of life’.

About the same time I was emailed the MPAC action alert, a “Boycott Lowe’s” post appeared multiple times in my Facebook feed. Clicking on the link led me to the “Boycott Lowe’s Home Improvement” Facebook page, provocatively titled “How Lowe Can you Go?” Over the next days, #LOWEsboycott spread through my Twitter feed. A link to a protest petition also moved through my Facebook feed.

⁸⁶ See MPAC Action Alert: “Stop Bigots from Pressuring Advertisers for TLC’s ‘All American Muslim’.” December 10, 2011. Accessed December 11, 2011. <http://www.mpac.org/issues/islamophobia/action-alert-stop-bigots-from-pressuring-advertisers-for-tlcs-all-american-muslim.php#.UQWcMuhF3RY>



Source: Defend Our American Values Sign On Petition

As these efforts progressed, I continued to learn about other Lowe's boycott-related actions, including the Lowe's Hijabi Flashmob, organized by the Bay Area Solidarity Summer and Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (ASATA) in partnership with South Asian for Justice Bay Area Chapter. The Hijabi Flashmob Youtube video description explains:

Lowe's Home Improvement pulled advertising from the reality show "All-American Muslim".... In response we occupied the San Francisco Lowe's with a Hijabi Flash Mob. No, there was no dancing, but there was guerilla theatre-ing.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Hijabi Flashmob Youtube video. Accessed December 24, 2011.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OokDnbvBD_I



Source: "Hijabi Flashmob" Youtube video

In the video, several female activists approach a Lowe's store. Once they enter Lowe's, one activist reads aloud from her smart phone and asks "for everyone's attention." She explains that Lowe's "has an issue with depicting Muslims as normal people." She urges other shoppers to "boycott this location and all other Lowe's until they reverse their decision." She encourages onlookers to take "one of the green flyers. Go online. Sign the petition. And call the Lowe's CEO." The camera shows activists walking through the aisles, approaching customers and sales staff, handing out flyers and sharing information. Eventually, a perplexed Lowe's employee asks them to leave the store because "it is illegal to do this in here."

The Hijabi Flashmob video and the other circulated media was part of a loosely coordinated, yet coherent, American Muslim response to a situation that required fast mobilization. While I return to the narrative significance of *All American Muslim* in the storytelling section, I focus here on the Lowe's boycott as an event that highlighted

circulation of popular culture and news stories as an activity that sustains, nourishes and deepens connections within American Muslim networks. My focus on circulation echoes Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green who describe “the public not as simply consumers of pre-constructed images but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways that might not have been previously imagined.”⁸⁸ Jenkins and his collaborators also stress “larger communities and networks” that “spread content well beyond their immediate geographic proximity.”⁸⁹

Responding to acts of grassroots circulation, news channels like CNN, the New York Times, and the Huffington Post picked up on the Lowe’s boycott story within a day of my receiving information about *All American Muslim* through my social networks. By December 14, the controversy made its way to *The Daily Show* (a comedy news program) where Jon Stewart, the show’s host, voiced his dismay “that some group in Florida complain[ed] that the Muslims on *All American Muslim* [were] too normal.” Speaking from a LOWEs parking lot, “Senior Muslim Correspondent” Aasif Mandvi reports, he is “disappointed” because he thinks Lowe’s should be shut down completely: “If we are serious about fighting terror, we have to shut down their supply chain, i.e. Lowe’s, aka the one stop jihadi-superstore.” Completing the cycle, links to the Lowe’s *Daily Show* episode soon spread through American Muslim networks. As Nura Maznavi and Aisha Mattu quip in a Huffington Post article, “Half of our Muslim girlfriends on Facebook

88 Jenkins et. al., *Spreadable Media*, 2.

89 Ibid.

posted the link with comments such as, "<3 Jon!!!," "Stewart 2012," "loooooove," and "I <3 Jon Stewart... and my husband is ok with that!"⁹⁰

The Lowe's boycott also highlights connections between the dispersed networks that led the activism and established advocacy organizations that expressed their support once the campaign was underway. As Manuel Castells observes, networks, defined as "complex structures for communication," have crucial advantages over more formal organizations when it comes to political mobilization because of their flexibility, scalability, and survivability.⁹¹ In the American Muslim case, networks, sustained through ongoing, not necessarily explicitly political, media circulation, deployed what Ethan Zuckerman calls their "latent" capacity for political action.⁹² Importantly, "latent" in this case does not imply that networks sustained through circulation are, in any way, dormant. On the contrary, networked American Muslims were able to mobilize around the Lowe's boycott precisely *because* they were already actively engaged in largely cultural domains.⁹³ Yet, networks normally sustained through the exchange of funny stories, music videos, and cute cat pictures, Zuckerman suggests, can quickly move into political conversations when required. My research also reveals that more established advocacy groups also play an important role in supporting networked American Muslim action. Not only can organizations throw their weight behind campaigns (much like MPAC did for the Lowe's boycott), they also continue to be important spaces where young American Muslims can connect with each other and learn about civic options and

90 Ayesha Mattu and Nura Maznavi. "Muslim Women for Jon Stewart 2012." Huffington Post. March 20, 2012. Accessed February 2, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ayesha-mattu-and-nura-maznavi/muslim-women-jon-stewart_b_1179481.html

⁹¹ Manuel Castells, *Communication Power*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 23.

⁹² Ethan Zuckerman, "Cute Cats to the Rescue? Participatory Media and Political Expression." in *Youth, New Media, and Political Participation*, Danielle Allen and Jennifer Light eds. Cambridge: MIT Press, Forthcoming): 2. Accessed July 10, 2013. <http://ethanzuckerman.com/papers/cutecats2013.pdf>

⁹³ Ibid.

strategies. In other words, youth-driven American Muslim networks do not replace organizational structures, rather they co-exist in complex relationship that reveals both their weaknesses and strengths in supporting American Muslim participation in cultural and political realms.

American Muslim Advocacy Organizations

Several large (and well established) organizations advocate for American Muslim issues, including the Muslim American Society (MAS), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Council for American and Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Muslim Public Affair Council (MPAC) and Muslim Student Association (MSA) National. Most of these organizations operate on a national level with variously dispersed regional and local branches. With the exception of MSA National, which is completely youth oriented, these national organizations usually focus on youth through programs that are fairly conventionally structured, as the central organizations assume most of the responsibility for organizing and guiding all events and activities. Reflecting on this situation, Reyah, a youth activist, sees a disconnect between what young American Muslims want and the programs these organizations offer.⁹⁴ She wishes that leaders in these large organizations would more often “sit down and have conversations with young people and ask them what it is that interests to them” rather than assume that they know what young American Muslims need. She perceives a need for more programs that are created *by* young people, not just for them. She notes, “Imams and heads of organizations say, “We need to get our youth to vote, to become informed voters and do all these things” even as “no youth” have a seat at the “table” where this

⁹⁴ Interview with Reyah on April 26, 2012.

discussion is taking place. Several of these organizations, including CAIR and MAS, are responding to concerns about how well they are serving young American Muslims who are now more articulate, more connected, and more engaged with the political realm.

My case study focuses on the intersection between MPAC, the Muslim Youth Group at the Islamic Center of Southern California, and young American Muslims connected to this network. My analysis explores the ways in which MPAC handles media and how they connect to other youth-driven American Muslim networks. While, MPAC is not a youth-driven organization, its strong focus on youth through its Young Leaders Summits (run by young staff), their media-centric approaches to American Muslim advocacy, and their connections to other youth-driven networks provides an important entry point for this research.

MPAC was founded with a commitment to American ideals and democracy, stressed through MPAC's refusal to accept any foreign funding. MPAC also expressly defines itself as "American institution which informs and shapes public opinion and policy by serving as a trusted resource to decision makers in government, media and policy institutions."⁹⁵ As such, MPAC staff advocate for an American Muslim voice in Washington D.C. They also engage with American Muslim communities by organizing workshops and other events around American Muslim issues like portrayals of Islam in U.S. mainstream media, taboo topics within the American Muslim community, and Islamophobia. While their agenda often aligns closely with other American Muslim advocacy organizations, MPAC is distinguished by its ongoing focus on public opinion and media. Yaida, who participated in MPAC's Young Leaders Summit program,

⁹⁵MPAC website. Accessed March 14, 2013. <http://www.mpac.org/about/vision-and-mission.php#UhuflLzEgo4>

explains that MPAC is “a really press-oriented organization,” which “reacts quite quickly to what's going on through social media.”⁹⁶ She also stresses that MPAC encourages “getting yourself out to media,” which she identifies as a “more progressive, more forward-thinking kind of approach.”

MPAC’s most prominent youth programs are the annual Young Leaders Summits, which gather young American Muslims around key theme areas -- at the time of my research, journalism, entertainment and civic engagement. The in-person portion of the summits takes place in the summer in Los Angeles (entertainment), New York (media/journalism) and Washington D.C. (civic engagement). While each summit is thematically specific, they all focus on strengthening the participants’ abilities to communicate and network effectively. During one networking session, the youth discussed how to best maintain contacts using social media (what frequency of contact is appropriate) and when to leverage such contacts toward personal (career) and community goals. In another internal session, the youth focused on how to “frame” issues to affect change. In addition to foregrounding audience as a key consideration for messaging, the hands-on training also stressed the importance of emotional appeal (get people to care) and storytelling (stories make that emotional connection). Tapping MPAC’s connections, the youth also visit companies and government offices in each city to meet with experts in the respective fields, ranging from established veterans (Department of Homeland Security staff, primetime television producers, newspaper journalists) to young professionals (independent film-makers, bloggers, activists). Yasmin Hussein, summit coordinator, stresses the gatherings are not only about a “career path” but also about

⁹⁶ Interview with Yaida on August 14, 2012.

fostering an atmosphere that allows the young participants “to talk” about issues that matter to them.⁹⁷

Summit participants also connect with each other to explore the similarities and differences of their American Muslim experiences. Of the youth who participated in the 2012 summits, some were very religious, others less so. They came from a range of ethnic and geographic backgrounds, which included: Somalia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. They also lived in different parts of the United States. Often, connections and conversations happen in between meetings, informally over lunch and continue through social media (Twitter and Facebook). During these encounters the youth compare notes on how Muslims are perceived on their college campuses. They also explore how their ethnic differences inform their practice of Islam. They often also connect through a shared knowledge of popular culture as they discuss TV shows, popular religious sites (like suhaibwebb.com) and content created by other American Muslims and shared through social networks, including Omar Offendum’s latest music video, different ways to tie the hijab shared by YaztheSpaz through her YouTube channel, and the latest comedy video posted on GoatFace Comedy (a youth run online comedy channel).

After the summits end, the participants stay in touch through an MPAC supported Facebook group, webinars, email list and annual in-person “reunions.” To Asma, the Young Leader alumni network allows the summit participants to share what they “are going through” and support each other’s “endeavors.”⁹⁸ She recalls how a young woman in the summit community wanted to run to serve on the board of her local mosque. Since

⁹⁷ Interview with Yasmin Hussein on August 24, 2012.

⁹⁸ Interview with Asma on May 11, 2012.

a woman had never held this position, she turned to the Young Leader community for support and advice on whether and how she could approach the elders in the community. Asma recalls that the summit community “motivated her to do something about it” when “she went home.” She kept the network members “updated on Facebook.” The alumni network shared her excitement when she succeeded in winning the election.

Through existing programmatic and personal ties, the Muslim Youth Group (MYG) at ICSC is in, many ways, MPAC’s younger sibling. MYG runs weekly mixed-gender meetings that provide high-school youth with social opportunities alongside their spiritual education. MYG activities include “charity, social, arts, and educational events” that fit within its five goals:

1. Provide a positive peer group
2. Cultivate a strong American Muslim identity
3. Develop strong foundations in essential Islamic knowledge
4. Instill a commitment to community service (within and outside the Muslim community)
5. Develop young leaders⁹⁹

As a part of the Islamic Center, the group was founded as a place where young people could continue to learn about their faith, even as they reconcile and own the hyphenated identity as American Muslims (or Muslim Americans). In fact, MYG’s early alums went on to found MPAC.

Though MYG changed over the years, it was, in 2012, an informal space where youth gathered, socialized, explored religious topics, engaged in charity projects and shared current issues relevant to American Muslims. Fazilla, a MYG youth leader, explains how the group works:

We have so many different people and everyone has their own schedules.... Basically, you’re here because you want to be. We don’t

⁹⁹Muslim Youth Group website. Accessed January 15, 2013. <http://muslimyouthgroup.org/876-2/>

want to force people to come.... If you want to be a member, it's your choice.¹⁰⁰

During the six months that I attended, we covered various topics (including justice and modesty) in the Qu'ran. We engaged in various forms of community service (i.e. planting trees), often with other non-Muslim community groups. We engaged in inter-faith exchanges through meetings with other faith-based groups in the Los Angeles area. Sometimes, we engaged in a formal process where the youth took turns introducing basic tenets of their religion. Other times, we convened more informally around joint activities, outdoor games, pizza, and a casual exchange of ideas. We also listened to many speakers, including Hajj Malcolm, MalcomX's grandson, who visited MYG.

During some sessions, MYG youth use their mobile devices to access relevant content, including sites like Islamicity.com (a site dedicated to religious scholarship on Islam) and thereligionofpeace.com (an anti-Islam site). They also watch various YouTube videos including John Green's "Know Your News! Understanding the Syrian Revolution in Under 4 Minutes" and the "The Holy Land Foundation: 10 Years Later" videos which related to the topics being discussed that day.

Though weekly in-person meetings are important to MYG, the group also runs an increasingly robust Facebook page. Hasina, an active 17 years old youth leader, explains:

It [social media] is like the heart of youth group I think. What is the heart of every teenager's life? Our youth group does cater to teenagers. So, we have a Facebook page.... Some of them [the youth] do not come to youth group anymore, but there are some that can still be in touch with this youth group or there are just kids who have necessarily lived farther away, but they can still know what is going on in the community.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Faazila on April 15, 2012.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Hasina o April 22, 2012.

MYG discussions also often actively engage media, as the youth discuss news, watch online videos, engage with anti-Muslim perspectives and access religious websites during the session. Matt, a keen user and contributor to Reddit, explains:

We bring up the media a lot...If there are any current events or anything we can relate to, we discuss and we share about how we feel about it.¹⁰²

MYG youth also discuss how to determine whether information they find online is reliable. Faazila, a high-school leader in the group, explains the youth need to be aware of how to “deal with” hateful information online.¹⁰³ She notes, “This is what people see everyday. This is what people are exposed to, this one side of Islam.” She believes American Muslim youth need to “have the information” to counter misinformation about Islam. Tanisha, another youth member at MYG, discusses how she connected what she learned about Islamophobia at MYG to deal with an Islamophobic site she encountered:

I was searching for something online and one of the sites that came up on Yahoo Search was this anti-Islam website. We were just talking about that at youth group a few weeks ago. We had someone's laptop and she was reading... these things off these anti-Islam websites.¹⁰⁴

Under the guidance of the Soha Yassine, the group coordinator, MYG also launched a Breakfast at Night online grassroots photo and storytelling project that tapped youth networks with the objective of showcasing diverse American Muslim experiences of fasting, celebrating and otherwise experiencing the month of Ramadan in the United States. I return to the storytelling dimensions of the Breakfast at Night project later in the report.

¹⁰² Interview with Matt on May 6, 2012.

¹⁰³ Interview with Faazila on April 15, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Tanisha on April 29, 2012.

Networks and Circulation

Through their activities, MPAC and MYG help to forge a vibrant and dispersed youth network that relies on various social media to share updates, events, creative media, and stage important and substantive debates about what it means to be Muslim and American. Khuram Zaman, digital media consultant, explains that such new media spaces represent a “a great alternative to the sort of institutional structure that exists within the Muslim community today.”¹⁰⁵ He also notes that online spaces often become the space where “great intellectual conversations” happen among young American Muslims:

Anonymity [online] helps because you can have a more open conversation that you would have if you knew this was a person who was part of an institution.... In that sense, you can have those uncomfortable conversations that you can't have within an MSA or a mosque, where it may cause reactions and people may get offended and leave.

For some interviewees, this “free for all” atmosphere online distinguished it from more institutionalized American Muslim settings where opportunities for debating controversial topics (including homosexuality, sexuality and religion) are limited.

Bob, a young filmmaker who regularly visits MYG, explains that he uses social media to keep up with trending topics:

I use Twitter and Facebook too often. One of the first things I do in the morning is to get out of bed, I look at Twitter....I looked at the people that I follow and a lot of it it's also news. A lot of it is artist as well, their new stuff. I want to see the new pictures. I want to hear new music. I want to see what's happening. I want to know the pulse. I want to know the news and to see how people are interacting.... There are few people in the Muslim media, the Muslim new media or social media space, but it's just very funny when it comes to just events that happen.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Khuram Zaman on April 18, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Bob on September 13, 2012.

Not only does he want to know about issues that impact his American Muslim identity; Bob also uses Twitter and other social media to connect to a network of other (mostly young) American Muslims.

The sharing of media content, with or without a political dimension, is also crucial to maintaining these networks. The content shared includes current events (like Michelle Bachman's accusations against Huma Abedeen and other Muslims in government that surfaced in July 2012), religious content (motivational quotes from the Qu'ran), faith-based life-style content (photos of food during Ramadan) and popular culture debates (the controversy surrounding *Zero Dark 30*).¹⁰⁷ Abu notes his uses of social media skyrocketed during the "Arab Spring" when he was on Twitter for "almost 15 hours of the day."¹⁰⁸ Leyla, a leader in MYG, explains that she often asks people to follow what she posts by saying something like: "Hey, guys, read this article. Check this out!"¹⁰⁹ She also often tries to "spark a debate" by posting content with a question like: "Hey, what you guys think about this?" Bob similarly observes lengthy and substantive discussions in the comment section of his Facebook:

Somebody can put out there, "how do you feel about the National Defense Authorization Act?" Then, somebody will post something that's very critical of the U.S. Government.... Somebody else will post something that's very supportive of the executive branch, recognizing that the president [may]... have knowledge that we might not have.... That's one of the biggest uses for Facebook outside remembering when people's birthday are...

Like other American Muslim youth, Bob follows Twitter and Facebook feeds of several members of his American Muslim network, including Wajahat Ali (activist and

¹⁰⁷ See: Yasmin Hussein, "Why I won't be Watching 'Zero Dark Thirty.'" Huffington Post (January 11, 2013). Accessed February 6, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/yasmin-hussein/why-i-wont-be-watching-ze_b_2458999.html

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Abu on May 16, 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Leyla on April 22, 2012.

playwright), Reza Aslan (scholar), Linda Sarsour (community activist), Lena Khan (filmmaker), Asif Ali (comedian) and others who are key nodes in spreading and commenting on current events. Bob sees his social media network as his “personal *Daily Show*” that’s “wrapped up” in a Twitter feed. As Bob’s *Daily Show* analogy suggests, humor plays an important role in shaping the material that circulates through young American Muslim networks. Bob chuckles as he explains how this humor works: “Let’s say ... some ridiculous Islamophobic event happens where Mitt Romney said something goofy about Muslims.... It’s like the jokes and how we’re reacting to it. I find those kinds of communication really interesting.”

The use of humor that Bob describes echoes Mucahit Bilici’s, assertion that there has been “an upsurge in ethnic comedy by Muslims in America” in the decade following 9/11.¹¹⁰ Comedians like Maz Jobrani, Ahmed Ahmed, and Aman Ali humorously highlight, subvert and “criticize both the majority and their own minority communities.”¹¹¹ Reflecting on the rise of American Muslim comedy, Ahmed Ahmed, member of the Axis of Evil comedy tour, observes: “I think the general perception of Islam is so serious that we have a hard time laughing at ourselves or with ourselves. And, if we can’t laugh at ourselves or with ourselves, the rest of the world won’t.”¹¹²

American Muslim humor has also become more grassroots and participatory. One year after the LOWEs controversy, *Newsweek* published an article about violence

¹¹⁰ Mucahit Bilici, “Muslim Ethnic Comedy: Inversions of Islamophobia in *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend*. Andrew Shryock ed. 195-208 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010): 196.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 201.

¹¹² Ahmed Ahmed in interview in *Stand Up: Muslim American Comics Come of Age.*, directed by Glenn Baker and Omar Naim (PBS, 2009). Accessed June 13, 2013. http://www.pbs.org/weta/crossroads/about/show_standup_producers.html

and Islam entitled, “Muslim Rage.” In the article, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali-Dutch and openly atheist activist and Islam skeptic, reflects on the violence in Libya that had culminated in the killing of the ambassador and three other staff members at the American embassy. Ali argues against sympathy for post-Qaddafi Libyans because they made a “choice to reject freedom as the West understands it.”¹¹³



Source: Newsweek.com

The article’s content inspired a heated debate. The perhaps most visible (and unexpectedly humorous) reaction played out on Twitter when *Newsweek* invited readers to discuss the article under the #MuslimRage hashtag. Soon, Twitter buzzed with humorous #MuslimRage parody tweets that both questioned Ali’s argument and poked fun at the hashtag. For example, Hend (in the Tweet below) commented on the fact that no one notices her hair, because she wears a headscarf, while Hijabi Girl playfully muses on the multiple meanings of Jihad.

¹¹³ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, “Muslim Rage & The Last Gasp of Islamic Hate,” in *Newsweek* (Sept 7, 2012). Accessed February 13, 2103. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/09/16/ayaan-hirsi-ali-on-the-islamists-final-stand.html#sthash.CVohBvet.dpuf>



Many of the #MuslimRage tweets explicitly challenged existing stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, and through this pointed to the creative and civic potential of such networked responses.

Towards Mobilization

As an activist, Aliyah explains that she is “very invested” in social-media “platforms” that help her to “garner support”, “mobilize people” and “raise awareness” around issues like humanitarian concerns in Syria.¹¹⁴ To Aliyah, social media networks are an effective mobilization tool because she has a “relationship with people” who are “used to checking in” with her regularly: “[When] something important is going on, you need to get their attention or you need to mobilize people.” Aliyah refers to suhaiwebb.com (the virtual mosque) that “seeks to bridge orthodox and contemporary Islamic knowledge, bringing to light issues of cultural, social and political relevance to Muslims in the West”¹¹⁵ as an example of an online space where “you’re educating, you’re informing, you’re allowing diverse opinions to be shared, the same time if mobilization happened, this is a unique forum in which we can do that.” In her description of [Suhaiwebb](http://suhaiwebb.com), Aliyah connects two complimentary models of engagement: Ethan Zuckerman’s “latent” capacities introduced earlier in this section and Roger Hurwitz’s “monitorial” citizenship. Hurwitz argues that in a world where the ideals of

¹¹⁴ Interview with Aliyah on May 1, 2012.

¹¹⁵ [Suhaiwebb.com](http://www.suhaiwebb.com). Accessed June 20, 2013. <http://www.suhaiwebb.com/aboutus/>

the “informed citizen” are increasingly challenged due to the complexity of issues and the proliferation of news sources, the public depends on each other to alert them to topics that require more urgent attention.¹¹⁶ Young American Muslims’ ongoing use of new and social media as a way to connect, share and debate topics that may not be explicitly political helps to build a “latent” capacity to mobilize towards political goals should such a crisis arise. Such circulation *prepares the ground* for those “monitorial” moments when, as Hurwitz explains, “politics comes to life” because of “great dissatisfaction with a current state of affairs and finds expression in ad hoc protest movements.”¹¹⁷ While often organizationally “ephemeral,” Hurwitz’s monitorial citizenship relies on “volunteers who foresee some national or crisis.”¹¹⁸ Functioning as crucial nodes, these volunteers not only “monitor” situations, they are also connected to networks that allow them to mobilize quickly. The circulation of media becomes the life force of these networks.

Jennifer Earl and her team’s work on internet activism provides important insights about how the organizational versus networked dynamics I observed during the Lowe’s boycott may facilitate such “monitorial” and circulation based modes of action. Building on the work of Kirsten Foot and Steven Schneider (2002), Earl et. al. differentiate between scale change and model change paradigms.¹¹⁹ In the scale change paradigm, the internet “accentuates” or “accelerates” activism, but does not actually fundamentally change core logic and methods of organizing. The model change approach posits that

¹¹⁶ Roger Hurwitz, “Who Needs Politics? Who Needs people? The Ironies of Democracy in Cyberspace” *Democracy and New Media*. Edited by Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (Cambridge: MIT Press): 104.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 108.

¹¹⁹ Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport. *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011): 13.

“some uses of the Internet may actually change the dynamics of activism in important ways.”¹²⁰ The American Muslim responses to Lowe’s signals important “model” changing dynamics: new media allow activists to bypass hierarchical processes that may slow down (or block) mobilization. In other words, networked communication allows American Muslim youth to bypass complex and historically fragmented organizational structures in moments that call for quick and efficient action around current issues. Such “flash” mobilization is enabled through pre-existing, but previously politically “latent” networks. As young networked activists rally behind a cause, they tap their existing peer-based networks, which already serve as spaces for the sharing information and creating content and are, therefore, ready to act collectively. Khuram Zaman offers this perspective on this “model change”:

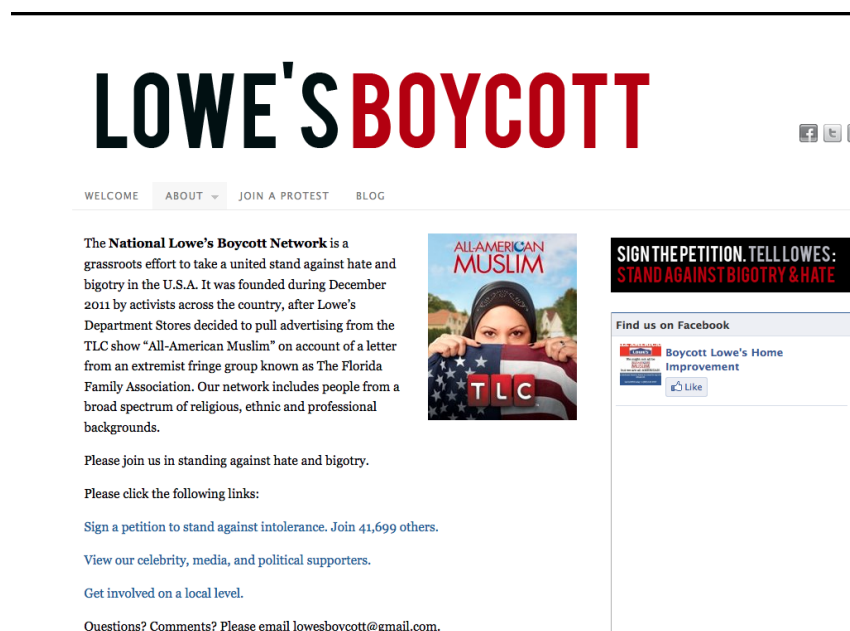
The institutions... (the mosque and the MSA and the national organizations...) have a lot of baggage (cultural, sectarian and ideological). The [American Muslim] community is very fragmented as a result of it. For people who want to get work done, going through institutions is very problematic on certain issues....[For a] very quick response and grassroots organizing, I find it very tempting to resort to new media.¹²¹

Khuram Zaman recalls how he helped organize the Lowe’s Boycott on Facebook by posting: “Listen, I want to organize a call and discuss this issue of how are we going to respond to it.” His and other initial Facebook posts led to a series of conference calls to discuss the next steps. More than 40 activists participated in one of those calls, including some from outside his immediate network. They started a Google group for the “steering

¹²⁰ Jennifer Earl, Katrina Kimport, Greg Prieto, Carly Rush and Kimberly Reynoso, “Changing the World on Webpage at a Time: Conceptualizing and Explaining Internet Activism” in *Mobilization: An International Journal* 15(4): 426-427.

¹²¹ Interview with Khuram Zaman on April 18, 2012.

committee.” They put up a website. They created a petition on signon.org.¹²² They then volunteered to organize protests in specific locations including Virginia, New York, New Jersey, Michigan and California. Zaman recalls the networked activists were “from all over the place,” the “listerv was on fire,” and emails were going out “pretty much every other minute.” Related conversations were happening through a broader, more dispersed network on Facebook, suggesting ways concerned people could take action.



Source: Lowe’s Boycott Website

The Lowe’s protest was ultimately not successful in getting the company to reverse its decision; *All American Muslim* was canceled after one season due low ratings. But, the networked activists and aligned Muslim American organizations were able to galvanize significant public awareness, as other Muslim and non-Muslim institutions, celebrities and public figures voiced their support.¹²³ Loosely networked activists like the

¹²² As of February 27, 2013, the petition collected more than 43 thousand signatures.

¹²³ For more information about the campaign see: <http://www.change.org/petitions/lowes-hardware-reverse-your-decision-to-pull-ads-from-tlcs-the-all-american-muslim-show>, <http://signon.org/sign/defend-our->

ones responsible for the #LOWEsHijabiFlashmob encouraged many different forms of participation, suggesting that interconnected organizations, groups and networks have an important role to play in future mobilizations.

STORYTELLING

In 2009, Bassam Tariq and Aman Ali, two young American Muslims with a shared faith and curiosity, embarked on an adventure they tentatively called the “30 Mosques Project.” They visited a different mosque in New York City during each night of Ramadan and blogged their experiences. Their journey took them to various parts of the city -- from the Masjid Khalifah established by MalcolmX and other Nation of Islam members in the 1950s to the recently opened Harlem Islamic Center. Their narratives ranged from the everyday, as they documented what food they ate, to the poignant, as they stood outside a mosque that had burned down due to electrical wiring. As the Ramadan stories accumulated, a more diverse picture emerged of Muslim experience in New York City. Their blog readership skyrocketed, with the most popular posts receiving more than 9,000 comments. Before Ramadan ended, they had been featured on NPR twice and received other media attention.

30Mosques is a prominent example of the many American Muslim storytelling efforts I encountered during my research. These storytelling projects, defined here as a “collective activity in which individuals and groups contribute to the telling, retelling, and remixing of stories [or narratives] through various media platforms,”¹²⁴ made use of various media including theater, photography, blogs, books and videos. Discussing the importance of storytelling on his blog, Wajahat Ali, a playwright and outspoken young American Muslim activist, observes:

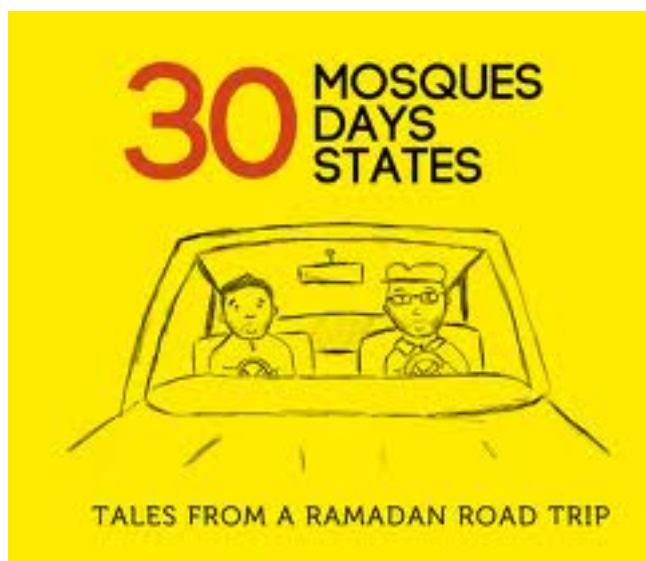
The future of Islam in America has to be written by Muslim Americans who boldly grab hold of the conch and become heroes of our own

¹²⁴ Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova, “Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation.” *Transformative Works and Cultures* (10): 2012. Accessed October 2012. <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/303/265>

narratives. We can no longer exist in culturally isolated cocoons or bury our heads under the sand waiting for the tide to subside on its own. We must follow the traditions and values of Islam and America by being generous and inviting with our narratives. We must tell stories that are “by us, for everyone,” thus accurately reflecting the spectrum of shared common values that exist simultaneously within the Muslim and American spirit.¹²⁵

While varying in scope and style, these storytelling projects all stressed the importance of giving voice to American Muslims, allowing them to speak for themselves, rather than having someone else speak on their behalf.

Some of the youth I interviewed actively contributed American Muslim stories by creating, appropriating, and remixing content. Others were aware of such efforts and had re-circulated American Muslim stories through their news and social media networks. Whether they told their own stories or shared stories told by others, these expressive practices have much to teach us about the ways storytelling bridges between cultural experiences and political concerns.



Source: 30Mosques.com

¹²⁵ Wajahat Ali, “The Power of Storytelling: Creating a New Future for American Muslims,” Goatmilk Blog (August 19, 2010). Accessed December 12, 2012. <http://goatmilkblog.com/2010/08/19/the-power-of-storytelling-creating-a-new-future-for-american-muslims/>

As Francesca Poletta observes: “Activists, like prophets, politicians, and advertising executives, have long recognized the power of a good story to move people to action.”¹²⁶ Despite its persistence and prevalence, storytelling remains under-explored in social movement literature. When addressed, storytelling is often subsumed within discussions of “framing,” or belief processes that “assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists.”¹²⁷ While frames focus on the delivery of “clear, concise, and coherent” messages, the power of stories, as Poletta observes, comes “from their allusiveness, indeed, their ambiguity.”¹²⁸ Poletta also highlights two analytical tasks relating to understanding storytelling in political contexts: “One is to identify the features of narrative that allow it to achieve certain rhetorical effects. The other is to identify the social conditions in which those rhetorical effects are likely to be politically consequential.”¹²⁹

American Muslim storytelling does not map directly onto easily identifiable political objectives. For one, not all the American Muslim storytelling efforts see themselves as explicitly (or even implicitly) political. Bassam Tariq explains, “People tend to get political ideas from the [30Mosques] blog” even though the stories steer clear of political commentary. As Tariq sadly notes, “things tend to get political” when

¹²⁶ Francesca Poletta, “Storytelling in Social Movements,” *Social Movements and Culture*. Edited Hank Johnston (New York: Routledge, 2009): 33.

¹²⁷ Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 614.

¹²⁸ Poletta, “Storytelling in Social Movements”, 33.

¹²⁹ Francesca Poletta, *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 166-167.

“Muslims come into the conversation in America.”¹³⁰ Whether they see themselves as political or not, the young American Muslims I spoke to were often asked to “represent,” speak on behalf of, and even defend Islam as a religious practice whose tenets are compatible with the values and ideologies of the United States (see the Post 9/11 Generation section in this report).

In this climate where the compatibilities and conflicts of an American AND Muslim identity are actively debated, storytelling assumes two important functions. Firstly, stories articulate diverse American Muslim experiences rather than falling back on the same limited and limiting set of stereotypes. Secondly, the creation, appropriation, circulation and discussion of stories, supports and nurtures loosely connected, heterogeneous, yet in some ways cohesive, American Muslim networks and communities that may at times mobilize towards civic or political action. Poletta observes that stories may affirm the status quo, but that they can also disrupt dominant meta-narratives. Storytelling does important political work precisely because it evades (or in the case of 30Mosques intentionally rejects) easy insertion into dominant narratives and existing political frameworks.

In this section, I explore storytelling among American Muslim youth. I first focus on how these youth engage with existing mainstream media portrayals of Muslims and Islam and how these portrayals inform storytelling imperatives. I then shift my attention to how participation, often enabled and amplified through new media, informs young American Muslims’ storytelling practices. As I explore American Muslim narratives, I revisit the *All American Muslim* reality show introduced in the Circulation, Organizations

¹³⁰ Bassam Tariq on “From Participatory Culture to Political Participation” Panel at Futures of Entertainment Conference (Boston, MA, November 9, 2012). <http://www.convergenceculture.org/>

and Networks section. Delving deeper into *All American Muslim* and 30Mosques I explore what participation means for top-down (broadcast) stories and for more horizontal (grassroots) storytelling projects.

Muslim Stereotypes and “Telling Our Own” Stories

A young man walks into the frame. Standing alone in front of what appears to be a stage curtain, he looks into the camera and waves tentatively, “Hi.” These are the first few seconds of the New Jersey Chapter Muslim American Society (MAS) “I am a Muslim” Youtube video.¹³¹ The video, which engages prevalent Muslim stereotypes, has been viewed 4.7 million times since it was uploaded on September 28, 2007. “I am not a terrorist or a date merchant,” he tells us as he pushes away a superimposed cartoon bomb.



Source: “I am a Muslim” Youtube video

¹³¹ I am a Muslim Youtube video. Accessed December 12, 2012.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&list=RD02sbcmPe0z3Sc&v=JQXh20OuhIc>

He rejects a list of stereotypes telling us that these do not describe him:

I don't live in a tent or keep my wife zipped up in it all day....
I have more than just white robes and sandals in my closet
I never actually rode a camel before. Ever.
Falafel actually is not my favorite type of food.
I don't know how to even tie a turban.

Later, Muhammad addresses the audience and observes, "And I don't think you are the infidel, either." Through this process, the MAS video critiques a long history of "Orientalist tropes of Arabs" which, as Evelyn Alsultany notes, often conflate Muslims and Arabs "as rich oil sheiks, sultry belly dancers, harem girls, veiled oppressed women, and most notably, terrorists."¹³²

Muslim stereotypes were also a focal point at the 2012 MPAC Young Leaders Hollywood Summit in Los Angeles. The summit brought together seven young American Muslims interested in getting involved in the entertainment field. As the participants introduced themselves on the first day, they cited existing media representations of Muslims as one of the reasons they wanted to explore careers in the entertainment industry. For example, worried that the portrayals of Muslims can be "very one-sided," Razia decided to attend the MPAC Hollywood Summit to explore how these portrayals are created and how they could be changed.¹³³

Like Razia, other participants believe entertainment media are both enjoyable (many of the informal discussions we had between sessions revolved around television shows and popular culture) and influential (as they inform popular perceptions of American Muslims). Sadia, a 19 year-old Pakistani-American describes her love-hate relationship with *24*, a show whose counter-terrorism plot incorporates Islamic

¹³² Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media Race and Representation After 9/11* (New York: New York University Press, 2012): 7.

¹³³ Interview with Razia on June 7, 2012.

extremism.¹³⁴ On one hand, she enjoys the creative, complex and suspenseful narrative. On the other hand, she is “very conscious” of how Islam is portrayed within the show. In particular, she objects to the frequent scenes where “people were praying and then there’s the terrorist [who is] very religious.” She worries that such juxtapositions encourage audiences to connect Muslims praying with terrorism.

Building on similar tropes related to Asian American media portrayals, Lori Kido Lopez argues that analyses of stereotyping should “consider the complicated and nuanced ways in which viewers might read and interact with any kind of imagery, as well as how specific images are being deployed.”¹³⁵ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, among others, argue that reducing stereotype analysis to positive and negative portrayals may not address the underlying complexities that drive these representations:

The focus on “good” and “bad” characters in image analysis confronts racist discourse on that discourses favored ground. It easily elides into moralism, and thus into fruitless debates about the relative virtues of fictive characters.... and the correctness of their fictional actions.¹³⁶

Researchers at the Norman Lear Center reviewed prime time dramas, which included “War on Terror” themes and found that “sixty-seven percent of terror suspects in these shows were white” and only “fourteen percent were identified as Middle Eastern, Arab or Muslim.”¹³⁷ Digging deeper into such prime time drama narratives in her book, Evelyn Alsultany finds that producers often attempt to balance negative (i.e. terrorist) portrayals of Muslim characters with more positive representations of Muslims aligned with

¹³⁴ Interview with Sadia on July 3, 2012.

¹³⁵ Lori Kido Lopez, “Asian American Media Activism: Past, Present and Digital Futures.” Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Southern California, 2012): 56.

¹³⁶ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentricism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. (New York: Routledge, 2007): 200-201.

¹³⁷ Johanna Blakley and Sheena Nahm, “Primetime War on Drugs and Terror: Analysis of Depictions of the War on Terror and the War on Drugs in Popular Primetime Television Programs.” Norman Lear Center (September 2011): 8.

American ideals and beliefs, even as the plots still pivot around terrorism.¹³⁸ Alsultany concludes that these attempts to balance good and evil mainstream media Muslim representation are a crucial “aspect of the War on Terror” and “deflect attention from the persistence of racist policies post 9/11.”¹³⁹

Many of the storytelling efforts I observed aimed to move away from the “good” versus “bad” Muslim binary to express more complex, diverse, and morally ambiguous (yet still non-threatening) American Muslim experiences. Bob, who relies on online circulation for his films, explains how he approaches storytelling:

I think it’s time to tell the story of Muslim-Americans... You should be confident enough in your Muslim identity [that]...it should be like, "I'm a filmmaker. I love politics and I'm a Muslim as well... I think that type of integration needs to start happening within the stories that we tell."¹⁴⁰

Laila, another young filmmaker whose first short film grappled with NYPD spying on Muslim Student Associations, argues that young American Muslims “lack a voice.” Though she admits that its hard to face expectations and, at times fear of repercussions, she sees her work as “trying to be that voice” that shifts from others speaking on behalf of American Muslims to American Muslim youth speaking for themselves. Like Bob, Laila concludes that young American Muslims need to be “making it out in the media.”¹⁴¹

Bisma, a recent college graduate, reminisces that she was “really shaped by storytelling” by reading fiction, particularly the Harry Potter book series.¹⁴² She laughs as she recalls that somebody told her that she was using stories to “escape from reality”

¹³⁸ Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims*, 18-47.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Bob on September 13, 2012.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Laila on July 6, 2012.

¹⁴² Interview with Bisma on July 7, 2012.

and admits that some of her favorite books were “an escape from a negative reality into a more positive reality.” But she also stresses that these apparently ‘escapist’ books and stories also help “shape the actual world.” Speaking about Harry Potter, she recalls, “There were a lot of messages in the whole series, a lot of political messages and even religious messages” that she felt were “relevant to the real world” – for example, the book’s treatment of the rights of house elves paralleled real world issues impacting minority populations.

Many of these storytelling projects emerged as small groups of young American Muslims took initiative invited broader community participation with the goal of surfacing diverse and heterogeneous American Muslim narratives. The stories were largely non-fictional and focused on participants’ lived experiences. For example, Ridwan Adhami’s “What Does a Muslim Look Like?” centered on a photo booth placed at the Islamic Society of Northern America (ISNA) annual conference. Adhami took photos of passersby who could decide “how their image would be seen by the world.”¹⁴³ He then compiled these photos into a collage on Facebook. Adhami encouraged his audiences to “enjoy this gallery, share the images, use them as your own profile photos, tag people you know and that I don’t...” Many commentators recognized people they knew in the face collage. In fact, many of the photographs were tagged with people’s full names and linked to their Facebook accounts, thereby facilitating such recognition.

Nura Maznavi and Ayesha Mattu collected stories by Muslim American women on the topic of love for their edited volume, *Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women*. At a 2012 reading in West Los Angeles, the book’s young

¹⁴³What does a Muslim Look Like? Facebook Project. Accessed January 20, 2013, <http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151015304030703.417500.115324815702&type=1>

editors, stressed that *Love, InshAllah* includes heterogeneous narratives that sometimes feature new and social media. In “Punk-Drunk Love,” Tanzila Ahmed confesses that she has always “been a sucker for a man with a mohawk” and describes how her “deep online friendship that consisted of sharing lyrics and MP3s and having GChat conversations about life” spilled into a short-lived love affair with a Muslim punk rocker.¹⁴⁴ Tolu Adiba’s story grapples with being gay and Muslim in the face of “Islam’s seemingly stern textual prohibition on homosexuality.”¹⁴⁵ “I suppose I have always known I am gay,” she observes before acknowledging her acceptance that she would “eventually get married to a good man.”¹⁴⁶ In another story, Lena Hassan recalls how the “Internet” became “magic” to her as a “shy and burdened” teenager with a “crippling self-consciousness who gained little experience with the opposite sex through her gender segregated mosque:

...I didn’t have to hide on the Internet. Online, I forgot that I had a thing so unruly and potentially embarrassing as a tongue and body....Paradoxically, in this world divided by barriers and buffers, I opened myself to people and they opened themselves to me. To my family’s eyes, I was hard at work in front of my computer, writing code for my school assignments. In reality, I was crossing swords with Asian men while playing the role of magician in Multi-User Dungeon.¹⁴⁷

Eventually, Lena met Adnan, her future husband, through a usenet forum on Arabic culture. When he proposed to her over chat, Lena responded: “* blush *”. *Love, InshAllah* shares “voices and perspectives within the community” without passing

¹⁴⁴ Tanzila Ahmed, “Punk-Drunk Love.” in *Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women*. Edited by Ayesha Mattu and Nura Maznavi. (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2012): 58.

¹⁴⁵ Tolu Adiba, , “A Prayer Answered,” *Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women*. Edited by Ayesha Mattu and Nura Maznavi. (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2012): 18.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Lena Hassan, “Cyberlove” in *Love InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women*. Edited by Ayesha Mattu and Nura Maznavi (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2012): 234-236.

judgment on the experiences shared by the individual women.¹⁴⁸ The book sold out on Amazon before it was even released. Building on its success, the editors also established the *Love InshAllah* blog and called for submissions for a *Love, InshAllah* for men in early 2013.

Love, InshAllah built on the *Hijabi Monologues*, an earlier collective storytelling project inspired by the well-known theatre project, *Vagina Monologues*. Similar in structure, the *Hijabi Monologues* were generally local events where participants shared personal stories. In 2011, the project's organizers embraced new media when they announced the Hijabi Monologues National Story Contest and invited women to submit their stories through YouTube: "*The Hijabi Monologues* is about the power of storytelling....Through sharing stories, strangers touch and connect. Through stories, we are challenged. Through stories, we are humanized."¹⁴⁹

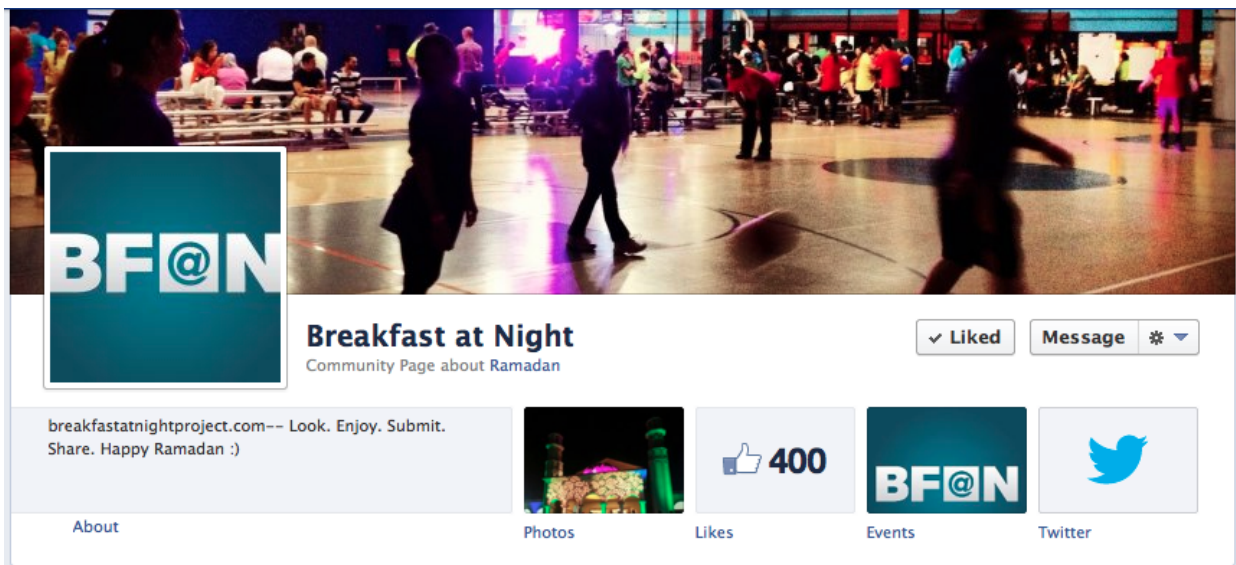
30Mosques Project and Participatory Storytelling

Diversifying, 'humanizing, and multiplying representations of American Muslims is a key goal for projects like *Love, InshAllah*, *Hijabi Monologues* and "What Does a Muslim Look Like." Similarly, the 30Mosques project took a grassroots-based approach to American Muslim storytelling. In its first year, Bassam Tariq and Aman Ali collected the stories they discovered as they visited different New York City mosques. They also invited participation through the comment section of their blog. The following year, Tariq and Ali took their project nationwide but had to scramble to raise money because of a funding glitch. Leveraging their grassroots support, they were able to raise \$12,000 using

¹⁴⁸ Ayesha Mattu and Nura Maznavi, "Introduction" in *Love InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women I*. Edited by Ayesha Mattu and Nura Maznavi. (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2012): x.

¹⁴⁹ Hijabi Monologues Facebook page. Accessed on January 15, 2012.
<http://www.facebook.com/hijabi.monologues.3?ref=ts&fref=ts>

Through its various stages, 30Mosques inspired and influenced other similar storytelling projects in the United States and abroad – for example, the BF@N - Breakfast at Night Project. Organized by Soha Yassine, the coordinator of the Muslim Youth Group (MYG) and supported by other youth group members, BF@N also went through several iterations. In 2011, the Breakfast at Night project was mostly run over Facebook, as the organizers sent out a call for photographs documenting people’s experience of Ramadan through their social media networks. When I spoke to Yassine in late 2012, she recalled being overwhelmed by submissions that first year. Based on this success, they decided to repeat the project the following year.



Source: Ramadan Photo Project Facebook Page

For their second year, the BF@N organizers took a different approach. They built a separate website rather than using Facebook. The breakfastatnight.com homepage welcomed visitors to “the one and only Ramadan photo project powered by YOU.”¹⁵¹ The team expanded the call for submissions to include other media content. They also

¹⁵¹ 2012 Break_Fast At Night Project. Accessed on January 25, 2013. <http://breakfastatnightproject.com/>

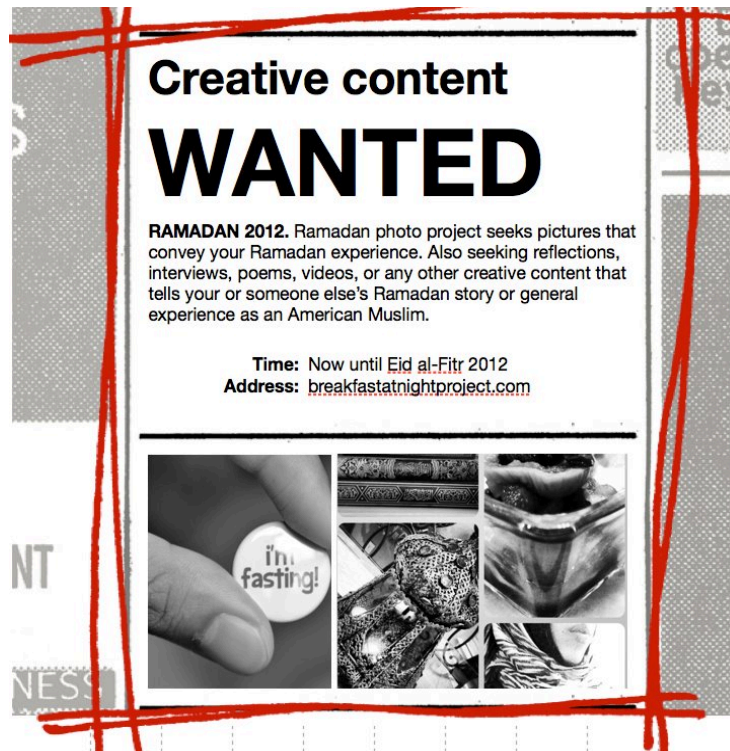
launched the BF@N blog where a team of bloggers, including youth from MYG, shared their Ramadan thoughts and experiences. In “Oh great, she’s Jewish” Amara Ghani (a guest blogger) described sharing Ramadan with a close Jewish friend. She recounts how the friendship started:

I was a transfer student at University of North Carolina at Asheville, enrolled in my first journalism course I ended up having that one partner that drops the class and doesn’t inform anyone, [My professor] gave me [the name of another student]. Maayan Schechter. I read her name and thought, oh great, she’s Jewish. Being the stalker than I am, I wanted to confirm my revelation. There it was, under the religion category on Facebook it said, “Jew 4 life.”...

We met at the library; two hours later we were still in the library and did not discuss one thing about our project. Ever since that day, as corny as this sounds, we have collaborated our minds using our ethnic backgrounds to bring awareness on our campus. From putting together a vigil for the Egyptian people during their revolution to hosting an interfaith Shabbat dinner to bringing social awareness of racial issues.¹⁵²

While diverse in their geographical scope, the other projects inspired by 30Mosques shared similar goals and methods. Namely, all these projects used new media to collect and exchange stories of Muslims during the month of Ramadan. Cumulatively, all these Ramadan storytelling projects endeavor for a more positive, human and peaceful image of contemporary Islam.

¹⁵² Amarra Ghani, “Oh great, she’s Jewish,” Break_Fast At Night Blog (July 23, 2012). Accessed January 30, 2013. <http://breakfastatnightproject.com/2012/07/23/oh-great-shes-jewish/>



Source: Ramadan Photo Project

Despite these similarities, these projects also suggest the diversity of such grassroots and participatory efforts. For one, the various participants chose how to define the scope of their stories. The 30moskeen project in the Netherlands only features photographs of mosques visited, with almost no other commentary. 30Nights in Chicago provides first person accounts of visiting different mosques, with less focus on the communities encountered along the way. In Toronto, Himy Syed's 30Masjids transitioned into a personal faith blog. With the exception of BF@N, all the projects ended after one year (mostly 2011), which may have been their intended duration.

Aman Ali admits that without new media, "we just don't even have a project." The same could be said of the 30mosque-inspired and other grassroots storytelling projects described here. Certainly, some of the projects, like the Hijabi Monologues and *Love, InshAllah* did not rely on new media to exist. They did, however, benefit from new

media in increasing their scope and reach as the editors and directors turned to Facebook and other social media to recruit contributors and circulate what they created.

TLC's All American Muslim: Storytelling and Circulation

As Bassam Tariq and Aman Ali prepared to expand 30Mosques in 2011, the *All American Muslim* reality television series launched on the TLC channel. While clearly different on many levels, the show's premiere and short-lived controversial existence galvanized American Muslim storytelling efforts in ways that demonstrate how efforts that do not initially seem political may lead toward more direct political action.

Based in Dearborn, Michigan, the show followed five Lebanese-American Shia Muslim families. Quoted on ArabAmericanNews.com, TLC's General Manager Amy Winter explained that *All American Muslim* demonstrated that "there was diversity even within the Muslim community."¹⁵³ While Winter subsequently identified non-Muslim audiences as the show's primary target, American Muslims made up a significant percentage of the 1.7 million viewers who watched the first episode on November 13, 2011. In many ways, the discussion in new media spaces was more interesting than the program content. Maryam Sullivan, a "twenty something Muslim woman" blogger, writer and playwright, recounts the mounting excitement about its premiere:

The show's trailer had been circulating on television and the net for weeks and it evoked strong emotions in the blogosphere even before the show aired. Many Muslims hoped, some might have even prayed for a good, balanced outcome because every Muslim knows, whether they admit or

¹⁵³ Amy Winter quoted in "TLC filming new reality show "All American Muslim" in Dearborn" The Arab American News (July 29, 2011). Accessed March 10, 2013. <http://www.arabamericannews.com/news/index.php?mod=article&cat=Artamp;Culture&article=4546>

not, that American Muslims need some positive media working in our favor.¹⁵⁴

Initially, American Muslims debated the show's focus on one Lebanese community in Dearborn. Aman Ali (one of the founders of the 30Mosque project) critiqued the show: "These [*All American Muslim*] stories bear little resemblance to the narratives of my own or the ones I've stumbled across in my community."¹⁵⁵ Countering this view, Nura Maznavi and Ayesha Mattu praised its creators for including a "cast of characters as a breath of fresh air on television and a much-needed provocation for debate and conversation within and between communities."¹⁵⁶

A case in point, the "American Muslims" meme, which circulated through Facebook, makes use of the characters from *All American Muslim*.



source: <http://frabz.com/1ha4>

¹⁵⁴ Maryam Sullivan, "The "All American Muslim" Let Down" Red Room: Where the Writers Are Blog (November 14, 2011). Accessed December 24, 2012. <http://redroom.com/member/maryam-sullivan/blog/the-all-american-muslim-let-down>

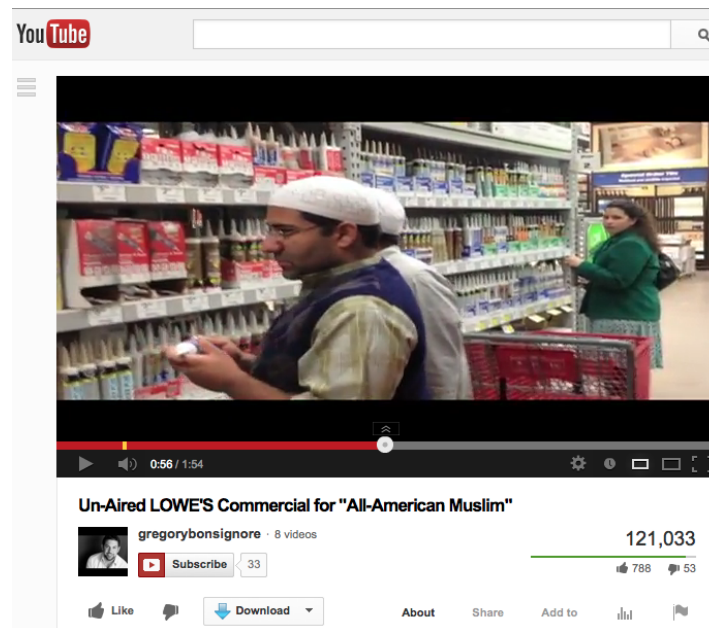
¹⁵⁵ Aman Ali, "My Take: 'All American Muslim' Doesn't Speak for this Muslim. *CNN Belief Blog* (November 15, 2011). Accessed February 25, 2013.

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/11/15/my-take-all-american-muslim-doesnt-speak-for-this-muslim/>

¹⁵⁶ Ayesha Mattu and Nura Maznavi, "Sisters are Doing it for Themselves," *Altmuslimah.com* (November 23, 2011). Accessed December 15, 2011. <http://www.altmuslimah.com/b/reva/4532>

The visuals and text work through various “how they see us” options, which include violence, anti-American sentiments, American patriotism, and deep religiousness, before concluding with a very-ordinary photo of a couple from *All American Muslim* jogging, captioned “How they really are,” pointing to how they are really not that different from their non-Muslim neighbors. When interviewed, Asma, a young Pakistani-American, observes that, though the show aired only for one season, it “still showed the average American that Muslims are not the terrorists they hear about on Fox news.”¹⁵⁷

Discussion of *All American Muslim* in American Muslim communities intensified when Lowe’s withdrew its advertising during the program, triggering the already discussed protest petition and boycott. American Muslims and groups supported the boycott by creating content that critiqued Lowe’s’ decision. The “Unaired Lowe’s commercial for *All-American Muslim*” created by Gregory Bonsignore, Parvesh Cheena, and Rizwan Manji is a more professionally produced example of this response.



¹⁵⁷ Interview with Asma on May 14, 2012.

The commercial opens on a group of men, clearly identified as Muslims, who go to shop at LOWEs. We see them walking around the store, picking up supplies that suggest they might be building a bomb, an impression intensified by the suspicious looks of other customers. As the tension mounts, we see them assembling something. In the final seconds, they prepare to flick the switch.... to the elaborate Christmas lights they have just installed on their house. Suddenly, the men's demeanor changes and they smile proudly. The superimposed text wishes us: "Happy Holidays from everyone at Lowe's".

The Un-Aired Lowe's Commercial quickly spread through American Muslim social media networks.



One comment on YouTube enthusiastically exclaimed: "OMG I cannot stop laughing....I see these as two men as human beings....GREAT VIDEO!!" For others, the Un-Aired Lowe's commercial parody signaled more serious concerns. In his comment "rjreeder64" explains:

lol, I love the humor...but what I really hate is when muslims get such dirty looks when in public...I have received similar looks when I wear my koufi in public and people seem to pay me no mind when i go into the same exact store with a fitted cap on.¹⁵⁸

The Arab American Association's "Boycott Bigotry" YouTube video became another, albeit less humorous, response.¹⁵⁹ Set to music with no spoken words, the video features several young people who first hold up signs introducing themselves by name. We learn

¹⁵⁸ Comments section of "Unaired Lowe's commercial for *All-American Muslim*" on Youtube. Accessed February 21, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQhls5PEmeQ>

¹⁵⁹ Boycott Bigotry Youtube video. Accessed December 15, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quRCeN5WbcY>

what they do (i.e. design clothes, play video games). A young woman holds up a sign that states: “We are all American Muslims.” The video then continues to cut between them as they hold up signs that tell us “But this is not about the Muslim Community.” “This is about OUR values as Americans.”



Source: “Boycott Bigotry” Youtube video

The video ends with a young man holding up a sign telling us to “Boycott Bigotry.” Like the “Un-Aired Lowe’s Commercial,” the “Boycott Bigotry” video spread through social media. These dispersed online efforts--and in person protests at a few locations--garnered support for the boycott.

Reflecting on the Lowe’s controversy, Dilshad Ali, a prominent American Muslim journalist, observes that the decision to withdraw advertising “unwittingly inspired a sudden grassroots coalition...dedicated to defending American values and fighting back against hate.”¹⁶⁰ She also notes that the protest helped unite American Muslims “in a coordinated campaign to effectively and intelligently respond to fear-mongering.” Dilshad recalls how American Muslims first debated “whether or not to

¹⁶⁰ Dilshad Ali, “Lowes Boycott of TLC’s ‘All-American Muslim’ Has United Muslims, Americans,” Pantheos.com (December 14, 2011). Accessed February 12, 2012.
<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/allamericanmuslim/2011/12/lowes-boycott-of-tlcs-all-american-muslim-has-united-muslims-americans/>

support the show” but that the Florida Family Association’s (FFA) anti-*All American Muslim* campaign had the unintended effect of encouraging an expanded “notion of ‘big tent American Islam’ where diverse Muslim American communities and organizations are uniting to defend the show and its characters.”¹⁶¹ Ali makes two important observations that are crucial to understanding how storytelling supported this process. First, the actions of the FFA and Lowe’s mobilized a dispersed American Muslim community. Second, a vast majority of the debates and controversy surrounding *All American Muslim* focused on control over narrative and characters. American Muslims expressed their desire to see, circulate and debate stories that break from the good vs. bad Muslim binary.

When examined together, *All American Muslim*, 30Mosques, and the other projects suggest a continuum in how American Muslim storytelling invites participation and how this participation deploys new and social media. On one end of the continuum, *All American Muslim* was created for broadcast television but inspired an increasingly politicized response, as American Muslims rallied to first debate and later defend the show’s narrative and characters. On the other end, 30Mosques became a grassroots storytelling project that defined participation through new media at its core and encouraged imitation and replication by other communities.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

PRIVACY AND SURVEILLANCE

“Being a Muslim in America is not easy at all. There are a lot of uncertainties about our role in American narratives because of 9/11 ...I think this is a issue for people, for Muslims in our community, whose civil liberties are being completely pillaged. You know there are people held without...whatever, I don’t want to get into that too much.”¹⁶²

Selina, a young American Muslim woman and an environmental activist, cuts herself off when our interview conversation turns to concerns about civil liberties and privacy. She worries that post 9/11 security measures, such as the Patriot Act, have “pillaged” American Muslim civil liberties. She also hesitates to speak about how surveillance of American Muslim communities had affected her behavior, but explains that she is not very active online even though she recognizes that utilizing platforms like Twitter and Facebook would help spread the word for her environmental cause. Selina’s concerns echo those expressed by other youth I met during my research. On several occasions, youth ask me to turn off the recorder to speak ‘off the record’ when our conversation turn to privacy. Muin a civically active teenager, explains that talking too much about how he worries about who watches him online could later be interpreted as implying that he has something to hide. When they do speak to me about this topic, youth express concern that what they share online could be accessed, watched, reviewed and used against them.

Related, and yet distinct, privacy and surveillance are both fraught concepts often positioned within a dichotomy of private versus public premised on “the sanctity of certain spaces, or more abstractly, places.”¹⁶³ While the specifics of the private/public dichotomy certainly merit attention, the American Muslim youth I spoke to often

¹⁶² Interview with Selina on April 23, 2012.

¹⁶³ Nissenbaum, Helen, “Privacy as Contextual Integrity” in *Washington Law Review* 79 (2004): 102.

articulated privacy in ways that echoed danah boyd and Alice Marwick's definition of privacy as hinging on "a sense of control over how and when information flows."¹⁶⁴ Specifically, American Muslim youth negotiate between two distinct nodes on the control spectrum. On one end, they worry about surveillance, or systematized monitoring systems put in place by companies and authorities. David Lyon notes that such surveillance is enabled by hierarchical structures that allow such entities to "keep the records, hold the tapes, maintain the databases, have the software to do the mining and the capacity to classify and categorize subjects."¹⁶⁵ Such surveillance has, indeed, become a reality for some young American-Muslim activists, particularly those involved in contentious social justice campaigns. Even youth who may be less involved in activist campaigns often practice "self-censorship" within what Evgeny Morozov describes as a "pervasive climate of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear."¹⁶⁶

On the other, and more frequently occurring end of privacy/publicity spectrum, American Muslim youth worry about what Alice Marwick calls "social surveillance" or "ongoing eavesdropping, investigation, gossip and inquiry that constitutes information gathering by people about their peers."¹⁶⁷ For the youth, such social surveillance can come from both inside and outside the Muslim community. Muslim peers and elders may dismiss and critique material young American Muslims share online. Hateful anti-Muslim comments posted in the comments sections of blogs or YouTube videos can hurt youth as they struggle to express and connect with each other. Whether from within or

¹⁶⁴ danah boyd. "How Youth Find Privacy in Interstitial Places." Apophenia Blog, March 9, 2008.

Accessed June 2, 2013. "http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2008/03/09/how_youth_find.html

¹⁶⁵ David Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2007): 23.

¹⁶⁶ Evgeny Morozov, "Why the KGB Wants You to Join Facebook" *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012).

¹⁶⁷ Alice Marwick, "The Public Domain: Social Surveillance in Everyday Life," in *Surveillance and Society* 9(4): 379.

without Muslim communities, destructive comments have a chilling effect, reminding youth how hard it is to control the ways media travels online. This sense of being watched, in turn, affects how young American Muslims negotiate their political and civic participation in these spaces. Speaking about how privacy affects young American Muslims, Khuram Zaman observes:

The problem is that the technology is developing at a faster pace than the legal system can manage.... From a civil liberties perspective and regardless of the question of Islamophobia, this is a really big concern that all Americans and citizens should have. Their information is being constantly tracked online and it's being used for companies for marketing purposes at best and then being used in surveillance at worst.... Do you have a constitutional right to control that information? I don't know what the answer is.¹⁶⁸

In his statement, Zaman explicitly connects American Muslim surveillance concerns to American civil liberties and the Constitution, suggesting that American Muslims are just one of many communities that may be affected. Zaman further confirms that American Muslims, like other young people, need to think about what they post:

It's different online. You can do something stupid. There is a big difference between under-age drinking and under-age drinking with Facebook pictures and Twitter. That stuff is online forever.¹⁶⁹

After making this almost generic point about online privacy, Zaman identifies an issue of particular importance for American Muslims -- young people should be especially concerned about how their "political ideas" can "affect them later" in unanticipated ways.

These American Muslim youth privacy concerns resonate with the other MAPP case study groups.¹⁷⁰ For example, Arely Zimmerman's study of the DREAM movement

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Khuram Zaman on April 18, 2012.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ danah boyd and Alice Marwick, "Social Privacy in Networked Publics: Teen's Attitudes, Practices, and Strategies. Privacy Law Scholars Conference (June 2, 2011): 1-29. Accessed June 12, 2013. <http://www.danah.org/papers/2011/SocialPrivacyPLSC-Draft.pdf>

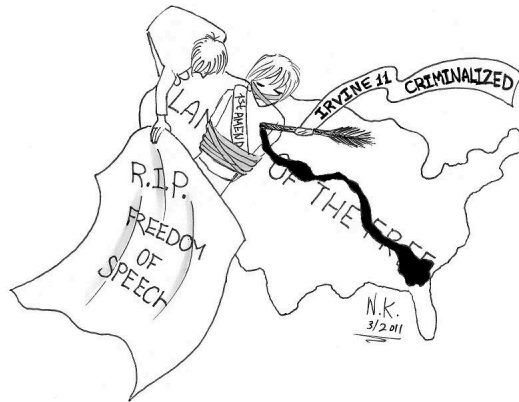
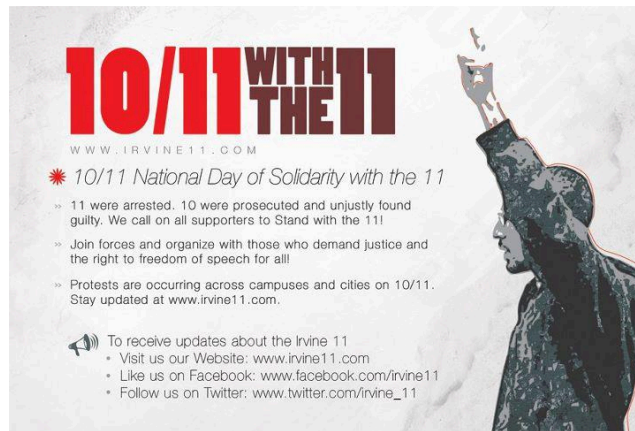
revealed how “coming out” as undocumented online made young activists vulnerable to trolls eager to report them to immigration authorities.¹⁷¹ These similarities notwithstanding, the silencing power of these concerns becomes particularly potent in the context of my earlier discussion of news networks and storytelling as crucial spaces for American Muslim youth as they support creative expression of diverse narratives, free discussion of issues and the formation of networked communities that bypass more top down and controlled organizational structures. When privacy concerns disrupt informational flows, they threaten the value of these networked practices.

Activism and Surveillance

The most urgently articulated concerns about surveillance surfaced around two events: the Irvine11 case and campaign, and news of NYPD surveillance of the American Muslim community and student groups in the tri-state area. The Irvine11 story began on February 8, 2010 when a group of students, most of them members of the University of California Irvine (UCI) Muslim Students Union (MSU), shouted pro-Palestinian slogans that disrupted Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren’s speech on campus. The students’ statements did not contain threats or profanity; they did, however, make it impossible for Oren to continue until the protest ended. When the protesting students attempted to leave the room, they were either arrested or cited. Unlike other campuses that might simply escort such protestors out of the room, UCI administration suspended the Muslim Student Union for a quarter, and Irvine’s District Attorney prosecuted the 11 students. The youth-led “Stand with the 11” campaign sought to raise awareness for the case and galvanize community support for the accused students. The organizers combined traditional tactics

¹⁷¹ Arely Zimmerman, “Documenting Dreams: New Media, Undocumented Youth and the Immigrant Rights Movement” (2012). Accessed January 12, 2013. <http://dmlcentral.net/resources/5061>

(like open open-mic rallies and in-person protest) with social media affordances (carefully constructed hashtags and photographs selected for their visual appeal and spreadability).



Source: Stand with the 11 Homepage

Aliyah, an Irvine 11 activist, explains how the campaign began:

We were like, “We need to support them [the Irvine11] somehow.” So we decided to put together a campaign.... We put together a website. We coined the term...Stand with the Eleven.... And then we put together Facebook groups. I think we had over 6,000 followers... We had to keep creating new Facebook pages....¹⁷²

¹⁷² Interview with Aliyah on May 1, 2012.

A “Stand with the 11” YouTube video asked supporters to start a discussion on “Facebook, Twitter, on the radio, on your campus, in churches, synagogues, and mosques.”¹⁷³



As the case progressed, surveillance and monitoring became a key issue in the Irvine11 case as prosecutors used emails and online posts as evidence that the MSU members had planned their disruption of Ambassador Oren’s speech well in advance. Tanya, another Irvine11 activist, recalls sitting in the courtroom during the trial and realizing how easily online exchanges could be used as evidence:

They had every email from the MSU, every single email that anyone had sent out. I would look at the screen and they were dacting [sic] all of these statements and they were translating certain parts of it because they were in Arabic. They were going through these emails. I was there every single day of trial, and I was so flabbergasted about how the judge, the district attorney and these attorneys were taking the time to figure out what Insh’Allah means.¹⁷⁴

Recalling her own previous involvement with social justice organizations, non-profits and labor unions, Tanya stresses that these groups were “never really active on the

¹⁷³ Stand with the Irvine 11 Youtube video. Accessed June 10, 2013.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9o3DqLyxV-w>

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Tanya on May 11, 2012.

internet.” She recalls, “None of our communication would be online. None of it.” Tanya admits that she sometimes felt that the groups’ avoidance of the internet bordered on paranoia because, “Who really cares about us, right? Who is really watching a bunch of misfit kids doing activism during college?” To her, the Irvine11 case drove home that: “They really are!” Someone “is really watching us!”

Though the Irvine11 activists were quite successful in rallying community support, the Irvine court’s guilty verdict sent a chilling message to American Muslim youth about the repercussions and degree of surveillance that they may confront if they choose to take civic action around contentious issues. One of the Irvine11 defense lawyers drove this message home when she visited the Muslim Youth Group at the ICSC in March 2012. She played one of the Irvine11 YouTube videos to introduce the case. After the video ended, the youth sat very quietly. After pausing for a moment to let the video content sink in, the lawyer warned MYG members that their email or anything else they post online could be used against them. A pin-drop silence fell upon the room. No youth reached for their phones. No one left. It was almost as if the youth had literally adopted one of the iconic Irvine11 “mouth taped shut” images.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Standing in Solidarity with the Irvine 11 Flickr. Accessed April 10, 2012. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/albayanmag/8561000587/>



Source: Standing in Solidarity with Irvine 11 Flickr

The Irvine11 case is, in fact, just one particularly youth-oriented example of a series of highly publicized cases of surveillance directed against American Muslims over the past several years. The Associated Press released a Pulitzer Prize winning report revealing that the New York Police Department authorized and executed widespread surveillance of American Muslim communities and organizations (including campus-based Muslim student associations) in the tri-state area. According to the report, NYPD used “informants” to monitor¹⁷⁶ at least 250 mosques, 12 Islamic schools, 31 Muslim student organizations, 10 non-profit organizations and 256 ethnic hotspots.¹⁷⁷

Significantly, NYPD’s training manual acquired by AP defined the internet as a “driver and enabler for the process of radicalization” which provides access to “extremist ideology” and “serves as an anonymous virtual meeting place” where the “jihadi-Salafi

¹⁷⁶ Matt Apuzzo and Adam Goldman, “With CIA Help, NYPD moves Covertly in Muslim Areas” Associated Press (August 23, 2011). Accessed June 20, 2012. <http://www.ap.org/Content/AP-In-The-News/2011/With-CIA-help-NYPD-moves-covertly-in-Muslim-areas>

¹⁷⁷ MPAC Press Release dated July 19, 2013. Accessed July 20, 2013. <http://www.mpac.org/programs/government-relations/dc-news-and-views/nypd-commissioner-ray-kelly-not-the-man-to-head-dhs1.php#.Uh0ZJ7zEgo4>

message” can be shared.¹⁷⁸ Reflecting on the NYPD surveillance case, Khuram Zaman observes:

In terms of NYPD surveillance, they really just went out of their reach in terms of what was appropriate for a city law enforcement agency. They were surveiling people as far out as New Jersey, Buffalo and Yale University in Connecticut. What they were doing was essentially mapping the entire Muslim community. It was religious profiling of people based purely on their faith.

When the NYPD story broke, surveillance became a key topic of discussion across American Muslim spaces. For example, surveillance made an appearance at the “Finding Soul Through Sound” concert I attended at the Barnsdall Gallery Theater in Los Angeles on March 3, 2012. Organized by MPAC, the concert line-up featured popular Muslim-American musicians like Beraka Blue, DJ Anas Canon (from Remarkable Current) and Omar Offendum. More than 200, mostly young, American Muslims attended the concert. They were clearly familiar with musicians and their songs as they sang and clapped along with their performances. As he welcomed the attendees to the event, Salam Al Mayarati (the president of MPAC) observed that American Muslims needed to celebrate despite knowing that institutions like NYPD were covertly spying on them. Al Marayati’s comments were, one again, received with silence – a silence that suggested their collective realization that this event, too, may be watched.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt. “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat” NYPD Intelligence Division (2007): 8. Accessed March 10, 2013.

http://www.nypdshield.org/public/SiteFiles/documents/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf

¹⁷⁹ References to surveillance at MPAC’s Finding Soul through Sound concert reminded me of a scene in Jennifer Maytorena’s *New Muslim Cool* (2009) PBS documentary. In this film, hip hop artist Hamza Perez opens his performance with “FTG – flag the government. This is for the real cats. We don’t care about no Patriot Act. We don’t care about surveillance. We don’t care about the FBI agents in the crowd. This is for you all.”

Despite the public outcry and lawsuit eventually brought by the civic rights organizations against the NYPD,¹⁸⁰ the reality that the police covertly monitored and infiltrated American Muslim civic associations shocked even the most seasoned activists. Laila, a young Arab American aspiring filmmaker who participated in MPAC's Young Leaders Summits in New York, created a short documentary film commenting on the NYPD spying case. The 11-minute film opens with a series of street shots of NYPD vans moving through the city streets. Shot from afar, their interiors are almost completely obscured by the glare on the windshield and windows. The film then cuts between interviews with a civil rights attorney (Alan Levine), the President of the Japanese American Citizens' League-NY (Aileen Yamaguchi), and the Executive Director of the Arab-American Association NY (Linda Sarsour) to connect the NYPD's targeting of American Muslim groups to the treatment suffered by Japanese-Americans during World War II. In the last few minutes, the documentary explores the breakdown of trust that such measures cause in the affected communities. Reflecting on the NYPD case, Alan Levine observes in the film: "When there are people in the community who one considers to be informers, it makes one suspicious and distrustful, worried about sharing information with anybody, because one does not really know who is a friend and who is a police informant." Reflecting surveillance concerns, Laila chooses to store her film under an unlisted url on YouTube, personally sharing it with her immediate networks.

For some youth, their parents' own experiences with oppressive governments in their countries of origin reinforce fears of surveillance. Thinking back on his initial forays into American Muslim activism in high school, Bob recalls that the adults in his

¹⁸⁰ See <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/06/18/nypd-muslim-spying/2435493/>; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/18/nypd-muslim-surveillance-spying-lawsuit-_n_3460079.html

community “didn’t want to talk about” contentious issues because “they were literally afraid” that “the FBI was going to get you.”¹⁸¹ He explains that the adults had “gone through this before” in their countries of origin. Upon their arrival, some of them had even “gotten the FBI call.”

Scrutiny also affects Muslim student associations and youth groups. A member of a college Muslim Student Association in California explains:

We’re definitely aware of what happened [with NYPD] ... We are aware and we know that kind of stuff goes on. We have a director on campus who we go to sometimes for advice. When we put on events, we try to make it so that our intention aren’t misconstrued...they’ll find anything that they can pin on you.¹⁸²

Providing further evidence to the silencing power of surveillance, “Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and its Impact on American Muslims,” a study conducted by a coalition of civil rights and American Muslim community organizations,¹⁸³ found that the NYPD surveillance focused on “speech and expressive activities,” and thereby effectively sent a self-censoring message, particularly around the debate of contentious issues. The report found that “the ever-present surveillance chills – or completely silences – their speeches whether engaging in political debate, commenting on current events, encouraging mobilization or joking around with friends.”¹⁸⁴

Between Public and Private

For the youth I interviewed, privacy concerns changes depending on how politically and civically active they were. Activists involved in campaigns like Irvine11

¹⁸¹ Interview with Bob on September 13, 2012.

¹⁸² Interview with Amir on May 22, 2012.

¹⁸³ This coalition included: The Muslim American Civil Liberties Coalition (MACLC), The Creating Law Enforcement Accountability and Responsibility (CLEAR) Project, and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF).

¹⁸⁴ Diala Shamas and Nermeen Arastu, “Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and Its Impact on American Muslims” The Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility (CLEAR) Project (March 11, 2013): 22.

use new media with the tacit knowledge that their posts and actions may be subject to systematic monitoring. In contrast, young people who consider themselves to be civically active in their communities, but did not define themselves as activists, worry that public, but not necessarily intentionally publicized, media they create and share increases their vulnerability to scrutiny and attack.¹⁸⁵ Many of these civically active youth worry more about hostile “peer” audiences, and “social surveillance” than about government surveillance. Youth who produce public facing Muslim themed media, like blogs and YouTube channels, worry about destructive criticism from trolls eager to post hateful comments about Islam and Muslims. They also fear harsh comments from other Muslims critical of what they post online. These concerns often focused on what danah boyd and Alice Marwick call “context collapse” where “the imagined audience might be entirely different from the actual readers of a profile, blog post, or tweet.”¹⁸⁶

In December 2012, MPAC decided to build on its long-term inter-faith efforts and held its annual convention at the All Saints Church in Pasadena. The decision to hold the convention at this location drew news media attention when several anti-Muslim groups pressured the church to withdraw its hospitality. When All Saints refused, they staged a vocal protest outside the church. Arriving convention participants had to walk past anti-Islam placards. Wardah Khalid, a young American Muslim blogger, reflected on this experience in her post-convention blog post:

I wasn't quite sure what to expect as I headed to the church that morning, but I guessed I might run into a few protesters there. Sure enough, they

¹⁸⁵ danah boyd and Alice Marwick note that. “just because teens are socializing in a public setting doesn't mean that they want to be public figures nor does it mean that they want to be the object of just anyone's gaze.” (boyd and Marwick, “Social Privacy in Networked Publics,” 6.)

¹⁸⁶ Alice Marwick and danah boyd, “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience,” *New Media Society* (July 7, 2010): 2. Accessed on July 15, 2013. <http://nms.sagepub.com/content/early/2010/06/22/1461444810365313>

were there to greet me when I arrived. Just outside the front doors stood several men holding signs that insulted the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They had planted themselves there several hours prior to the start of the convention and were making it quite clear that they were vehemently opposed to Islam and any Christians who associated with its followers.¹⁸⁷

Khalid's blog inspired much commentary. Most of the responses were positive; a few however, reinforced the protestors' antagonistic stance thereby transporting that same confrontation to the internet. "Vallie," a particularly insistent commenter, got involved in sharp exchanges: "You guys can call me a bigot and hater all day long, it doesn't bother me one bit, nor am I ashamed. I do in fact hate Islam. It is a death cult."¹⁸⁸

As the Storytelling section of this report revealed, new and social media provide important opportunities for young American Muslims like Wardah to express themselves. But, the content they create and share confronts what Lissa Soep has called a "digital afterlife" in which "the original intentions of media producers are reinterpreted, remixed and sometimes distorted by users and emerge into a recontextualized form."¹⁸⁹ The youth who had their own public facing blogs were aware that there were critics ready to jump on what they posted. Tanisha observes that "Because Muslims are criticized so much in America, a lot of students just don't want to show that they're even Muslim."¹⁹⁰ For some youth, possible negative responses become a deterrent to being public about their religious affiliation.

¹⁸⁷ Wardah Khalid, "A Muslim Convention in a Church? You Better Believe It" in Huffington Post Religion Blog. December 19, 2012. Accessed on January 14, 2013.

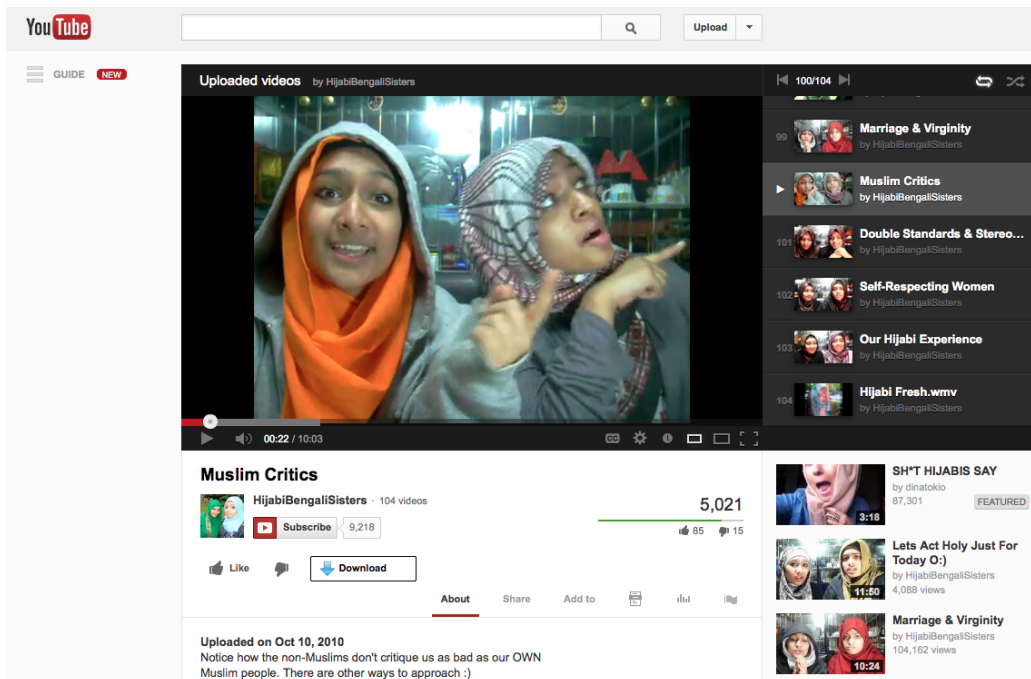
<http://blog.chron.com/youngamericanmuslim/2012/12/a-muslim-convention-in-a-church-you-better-believe-it/#comments>

¹⁸⁸ Comments section of Wardah Khalid's "A Muslim Convention in a Church?" Accessed on January 14, 2013. <http://blog.chron.com/youngamericanmuslim/2012/12/a-muslim-convention-in-a-church-you-better-believe-it/#comments>

¹⁸⁹ Lissa Soep, "The Digital Afterlife of Youth-Made Media: Implications for Media Literacy Education," *Comunicar Scientific Journal of Media Education* (38)XIX (2012): 94.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Tanisha on April 29, 2012.

Others are concerned about the ways their work may be criticized by more conservative community members for its content, language or even for using media as a form of public expression. Some of these critiques may come from elders concerned about young people’s safety. Others stem from very stringent notions of what behavior is acceptable in Islam. The criticism faced by the HijabiBengaliSisters is a case in point. Mo and Nash are sisters who create and post videos on the HijabiBengaliSisters YouTube channel. Most of their videos playfully address faith-related topics (religious perspectives on dating, fasting during Ramadan) that are relevant for American Muslim youth. Several of the videos address what they call other Muslim “critiquers” of their channels.



Source: “Muslim Critics” Youtube video

In the “Muslim Critics” video caption, the sisters point out that “Non-Muslims don't critique us as bad as our OWN Muslim people.”¹⁹¹ They elaborate on the criticism they have faced in the video through a bantering exchange:

So this kind of leads to the next topic, the topic we are going to do the video on is how our own Muslims are own biggest critics-critiquers.

Critiquers? Is that word?

Whatever....

To those who are a little extreme and say this is haram, this is haram. They make Islam look a little crazy. So to those who don't know much about Islam, this is what we look like to them.

In another HijabiBengaliSisters YouTube video, Nash addresses these Muslim critics more personally, and less lightheartedly, when she speaks about video making:

If somebody sends you a message on Youtube attacking you, saying you are the worst representation of Islam like you are a poor excuse for a hijabi. What do you know about that, really? I don't see you having the courage to get up on Youtube and talk about Islam because that is a huge thing in itself. Especially being our age, that we are, in our teenage pre-adultish years, you won't see many people on Youtube starting that early.... I can see why some people would leave Islam because they are so afraid of the Muslims, of the Muslim critics in this community. So just chill out a little bit.¹⁹²

Criticism of the HijabiBengaliSisters escalated in April 2013, when someone using the alias Nashiha Monika created “The Truth about Hijabibengalisisters” Facebook page dedicated to defaming and questioning their online presence.¹⁹³ The page featured photographs that the sisters had posted on their own Facebook page and comments like, “The sisters would have you believe their fame is knowledge. But having over ten thousand followers or a million followers dose [sic] not mean you are knowledgeable. FAME IS NOT KNOWLEDGE.” Within an hour, the sisters responded on their own

¹⁹¹ “Muslim Critics” Youtube video. December 10, 2011.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDmUPNzoOKk>

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ The Truth about Hijabibengalisisters Facebook page. Accessed April 3, 2013.

Facebook page. Expressing their “shock at how much time people have on their hands,” they asked their followers to “report this page” to Facebook admins. The sisters and their supporters also posted comments to the “Truth” page as well, reminding the admin that “we are all one ummah” and defending the sisters. Some of commentators on the hate page even doubted whether the “admin is a Muslim.”

As the situation escalated, the sisters posted a reconciliatory status update thanking everyone for their support and reminding everyone that the mission of their Youtube and Facebook pages is to “help, educate, and grow ourselves as human beings and Muslims.” Soon after this, the sisters brought closure to the situation when they posted another update asking their followers to “report” the page and then “move-on.” The criticism that the sisters face and the escalation around the “Truth about the HijabiBengaliSisters” page highlight the burden of representation that American Muslim youth bear as they become more publicly visible and express themselves online. Those like the HijabiBengaliSisters and Noor Tagouri share a desire to positively “represent” Islam and Muslims through their public presence. Not all youth share this desire to “represent” Muslims, particularly given harsh criticism from both within and outside American Muslim communities. Selina explains that though her “faith is a big part” of her environmental activism, this is not something she wants to “tell the outside world.”¹⁹⁴

Coping with Surveillance

Whether they worry about top down or peer-based surveillance, the youth I spoke to struggle to balance the risks and benefits in what they share through their social media networks. A few youth courageously sacrifice privacy for activism, as they collapse all

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Selina on April 23, 2012.

their networks to maximize connectivity. Some others engage in a process of stringent self-censorship and share very little through their social media networks, choosing to mostly passively receive information others shared with them. Most of the American Muslim youth engage in an ongoing messy negotiation in which they segment, filter and otherwise try to control on how information posted by and about them circulates through their, and other, networks. As such, the youth engage in a range of tactics that variously combine the “blending,” “fragmenting” and bracketing” strategies identified by Howard Gardner’s Good Work Project in their study of civically engaged American youth.¹⁹⁵ In her blog post about the study, Emily Weinstein explains the Good Work Project’s:

...emerging findings indicate three major patterns of civic identity expression. Fully 50% of the participants we interviewed describe a “blended” pattern of expression: their offline participation and passions are integrated in their online lives. In contrast, approximately 20% of the participants describe a “fragmented” pattern of expression: they are civically engaged and active in their offline lives, but they do not share their civic views or participation on social media platforms. Another group – also about 20% of our sample – is “bracketed” and describes distinct patterns of expression across different platforms. For example, they may be “blended” on Twitter but “fragmented” on Facebook. Others describe generally low media use or shifts in their expression patterns.

The youth I met made similar decisions. Aliyah explains how deciding what to share online requires a complex analysis of boundaries and a balancing of risks and benefits:

It’s difficult to understand those boundaries. That’s the thing that I’ve always kind of tried to figure out, and it’s hard. I try not to post too much personal information... I’m sure there are people that don’t agree with my viewpoint that are friends with me on Facebook.... So, you don’t want to post too much personal information because you don’t know who’s got your personal information....¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Emily Weinstein, “Beyond Kim Kardashian on the Middle East: Patterns of Social Engagement among Civically Active Youth” The Good Project Blog (February 25, 2013). Accessed April 15, 2013. <http://www.thegoodproject.org/beyond-kim-kardashian-on-the-middle-east-patterns-of-social-engagement-among-civically-oriented-youth/>

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Aliyah on May 1, 2012.

Aliyah carefully “limits things” she posts on Facebook and other social media networks. She also tiers her friends to have more control over who saw her posts in a way that allowed her to maintain some privacy but still facilitated her activist use of social media:

So with my personal friends, they can see my status updates and stuff. With people that I don't know or I know them but it's more from an activist perspective, they'll be on a separate kind of group. ... This is something that I want to share with everyone. This is something that I just want to share with my close friends. This is something I want to share with my family.

Tanya, a fellow activist, takes a different approach as she chooses to “put it all out there.”¹⁹⁷ She recalls how she used Facebook to get people to donate to a half marathon she ran for Syria:

I just made a Facebook event like, "Hey, I'm running in this Hollywood Half Marathon, can you donate money to me, because I'll donate it to Syria then." It was just a gimmick to get people to give me money for Syria, and it worked.

Tanya explains that she does actually consider when and how to share material online. But, unlike Aliyah who worries about her safety, Tanya explains she is “super calculated” about how she uses her 3,000 friends on Facebook because she realizes that people’s attention span is limited. She wants to make sure she directs people’s attention to the important issues. Still, she steers clear of using social media, or even email, when planning activist campaigns around issues like Israeli Divestment.

Nadia, a Pakistani-American blogger, maintains a friendly and public facing attitude but also worries about the possible dangers involved:

Sangita: So in general, are the people on your Facebook people you know in person?

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Tanya on May 11, 2012.

Nadia: No. People that I haven't seen -- isn't that bad? That's like dangerous....I get like the creepy messages and stuff sometimes, but I just ignore them, and I just don't add people that are creeping me out through messages, but I'm pretty open with my life. My blog is public, my Twitter is public, my Facebook is private, but I add people that go to [my college].¹⁹⁸

Like other American Muslim youth bloggers I interviewed, Nadia also doesn't personally know most of the 130 people who follow her blog. Since she mostly posts about "girl-related" issues and also follows some of her followers' blogs, she assumes her readers are mostly "Muslim girls around the world."

Some of the youth were less open about their new media use than Aliyah, Tanya and Nadia. Tanisha, a high-school senior, notes "different people" in her social networks "hide different stuff."¹⁹⁹ She elaborates on the various strategies: "Some people hide their friend's list, some people hide their pictures, some people hide their profile pictures like you can't even open it." Tanisha says she chooses to make all her Facebook posts and photos public as she doesn't "think it's wrong for people to see" what she posts, as she doesn't post anything that would be controversial in terms of religion and politics.

Yaida, a young American Muslim activist from the Chicago area, chooses to post about issues she cares about even if some people in her network may disagree with her:

I do post up a lot of articles that make people aware about issues..., even if it is a controversial issue. It doesn't have to be controversial to me, but may be for others. Like I posted an article about what's the freedom of hijab. Some of my American Republican friends on Facebook might not technically appreciate it.²⁰⁰

Abu makes a similar decision.²⁰¹ Though he only "friends" people he knows in person, he makes no exceptions and includes his peers, religious mentors and family members. With this diverse circle of friends, he is very aware that "anything" he says on social media

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Nadia on June 8, 2012.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Tanisha on April 29, 2012.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Yaida on August 14, 2012.

²⁰¹ Interview with Abu on May 16, 2012.

“will come back to...haunt” him. Though Abu often limits what he posts and shares, he also argues, “There are times in which I breach that and the reason why is because that like I feel like there’s such certain things that are more important than caring about reputations.”

Some, particularly younger, American Muslim youth feel that the various social media platforms had different expectations of privacy, which were often not necessarily reflected in actual privacy settings. Like other interviewed Tumblr users, Sadia feels there were “hidden rules of Tumblr” even though there was no way to make your account private.²⁰² She believes in the tacit agreement that “you don’t share what other people are writing on their Tumblr to people who aren’t on Tumblr.” To her, Facebook is much more “public” since it is linked to her name and photos, while on Tumblr she uses “a different name,” doesn’t have “have any pictures,” and “never refers to” herself directly.

Privacy and surveillance are important topics for American Muslims. The youth encounter evidence of privacy violations--warranted by security concerns--in the news and through their social networks. They are aware that their communities are at the top of national security concern lists. At the same time, these youth worry about privacy more broadly defined. They worry that strangers will stalk them online. They are concerned about more conservative members of the Muslim community judging their online expression. They also worry about being bullied by “haters.” Much like the youth in boyd and Marwick’s study, but with additional burdens of the post 9/11 generation,²⁰³ the American Muslim youth negotiate privacy and surveillance concerns alongside their efforts to engage with others through infrastructures they cannot fully control.

²⁰² Interview with Sadia on July 3, 2012.

²⁰³ boyd and Marwick, “Social Privacy in Networked Publics,” 6-7.

CONCLUSION

“Why don’t you share your rap with us?” MPAC’s Young Leader’s Summit coordinator asks, turning to Amir, a young Pakistani-American. We had all just settled back into our bus seats to return back to the hotel after another long day of visiting institutions in Washington D.C. during MPAC’s Young Leader’s Government Summit in July 2012. The packed schedule included visits to Homeland Security, the Department of State and even the Roosevelt Room in the White House. Amir smiles shyly and shakes his head. “Come on. We want to hear it,” another delegate urges. Other youth echo her encouragement as iconic monuments pass by the bus’s tinted windows. Taking a breath, Amir starts his rap, his voice just barely audible over the engine and air conditioning:

My verses are subversive,
At the end I pull a curtain,
Over the shade that I’m immersed in,
Like a subtweet to a person,
I don’t really mean the facts,
Just like a censored state-run ad,
You’ll catch me in the corner,
With my hood pulled over,
You better shoot me,
I cause disorder,
I’m like the Arab Spring without borders.

All conversation stops as everyone, myself included, strain to hear Amir’s “Free Society Rap.” He continues, growing more confident with every word:

Try to sue me,
I’m like that one case,
Where that Afghan woman was abused and raped,
Palestine,
Where art thou,
Prisoners now on that diet flow,
What about the children in Africa,
Starvation, disease, or malaria,
Don’t forget those child soldiers,

Didn't stop just cause Kony's over.

The city beyond the bus fades into the background as we all lean in even further, sharing in the moment. His voice growing more urgent and less self-conscious, Amir's performance moves into its finale:

We fight oppression with tiny steps,
Grassroots movements and shadowed heads,
And we look past our differences,
And towards the standard we're livin' in,
Cause I wanna be breathing free society,
Where rights and freedom are bare necessities,
So come on and yell with me,
I wanna be breathing - free society,
So come on and yell with me
I wanna be breathing - free society.

As Amir finishes his rap, the bus bursts in applause. He smiles before lapsing back into a shy silence. Turning to gaze out the window, he ends his performance.

As the bus passengers start discussing dinner plans, my thoughts return to the performance I just witnessed. Though Amir's performance did not involve any media, it connected many topics that surfaced during my research on American Muslim youth. For one, the bus - as a both private and public performance site - became a metaphor for the competing and contradictory desires for expression and silence expressed by the American Muslim youth I met. I was also struck by how the community, in this case the young peers, had supported Amir, urging him to express himself and celebrating what he shared. At the same time, MPAC, a formal institution, played a crucial role in bringing these youth together and increasing their sense of efficacy.

A few weeks later, I spoke with Amir about his "Free Society Rap." He explains that he composed the rap to express his frustration "with all the things that are happening

in the world.” As with his other music, Amir chooses not to post his performance online, limiting its audience to people who will understand its content and context.

Though they chose a different course of action, Amir and Noor Tagouri (the aspiring *hijabi* anchorwoman introduced in the opening passages of this report) engage with very similar issues. They both identify with a post 9/11 generation of American Muslims. They both express this identity in ways that connects with other youth and a broader American Muslim community. They both also consider the implications that such expressive action may have in terms of privacy. Yet they choose different paths moving forward. Amir chooses a “subtweet” mode of participation; Noor opts for the “tweet and retweet” approach as she engages circulation and storytelling as practices central to her campaign #LetNoorShine campaign. Through their decisions, Amir and Noor highlight both possibilities and risks at the intersection between participatory culture and participatory politics.

As my research reveals, American Muslim youth identities are always already political and not simply cultural, as young people, like Amir and Noor, seek to define themselves as explicitly both American and Muslim in the context of the post 9/11 world. In order to combat stereotypes projected onto them through mainstream media and popular discourse, they construct and circulate diverse alternative stories through new media platforms. At the same time, their efforts confront the chilling effects of various forms of surveillance, which encourage self-censorship.

The importance of these choices was brought into sharp focus in the days that followed the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2013. As investigators uncovered evidence that the Tsarnayev brothers had used the internet to access materials that

supported their shift towards extremism, the debates around “online radicalization” intensified. Responding to this, MPAC and the New Media Foundation organized a forum titled “Online Radicalization: Myths and Realities” in Washington D.C.. During this session, one of the panelists, New America Foundation fellow Rabia Chaudry identified “narrative” as a key dimension of online radicalization. Delving deeper, Chaudhry noted, in particular, that the “You cannot be a good American and a good Muslim” narrative, ironically propagated both by Muslim extremists and anti-Islam advocates, fostered feelings of alienation among American Muslim youth.²⁰⁴ To counter this, Chaudhry asked “Western Muslim communities to step up and become engaged and become partners in bringing their voices online to counter these narratives.” As I listened to Chaudhry, it struck me that she had, in fact, identified networked circulation and grassroots storytelling as crucial elements of a proactive response to terrorism.

Describing herself as “Just as American as it gets,” Noor hopes her campaign and public presence will inspire other American Muslims. Some of the commenters on her YouTube video agree with her. *The Amooun* wishes her luck and reminds her that she will “represent Muslims in the American media.” *Irlcolumbus* echoes this sentiment and observes that Noor’s “visibility will bring about change and help reshape the American landscape and views on Islam, and Muslims, showing that people are more than stereotypes, that they are good people because of and not despite of their religious beliefs....” These and other comments suggest that the #LetNoorShine is much more than the story of an ambitious young woman pushing to get ahead in life. Rather, Noor’s

²⁰⁴ Rabia Chaudhry in “Online Radicalization: Myths and Realities” Panel at New America Foundation (Washington D.C. March 28, 2013). Accessed March 30, 2013. <http://www.mpac.org/programs/government-relations/mpac-tackles-violent-extremism-and-online-radicalization-at-two-dc-events.php#.UHMQLzEgo4>

goals, efforts and strategies illustrate what it means to take civic action as a young American Muslim post 9/11 United States.

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