

**THE AMERICAN MUSLIM DILEMMA: CHRISTIAN NORMALITY,
RACIALIZATION, AND ANTI-MUSLIM BACKLASH**

A Thesis

by

OMAR KAMRAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

August 2012

Major Subject: Sociology

The American Muslim Dilemma: Christian Normativity,
Racialization, and Anti-Muslim Backlash
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ABSTRACT

The American Muslim Dilemma: Christian Normativity,
Racialization, and Anti-Muslim Backlash. (August 2012)

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This thesis investigates the continued hostilities and increasing backlash against the American Muslim community in the United States from a critical perspective that centralizes the racialization of Muslims and Muslim looking-people. The increasing anti-Muslim backlash against American Muslims warrants the need for a critical examination and analysis of the roots of this backlash and why, almost 11 years after September 11th, 2001, conditions for Muslims and Muslim looking-people are worsening. The term Islamophobia has been conceptualized and defined differently by various scholars, contributing to an analytical dilemma of how Muslims rationalize and resist anti-Muslim backlash. Therefore, the concept of racialization provides a fuller perspective and understanding as to why Muslim and non-Muslim Arabs, South Asians, and African Americans have been subjected to rising suspicion, surveillance, imprisonment, and violence in a post 9/11/2001 era.

This thesis posits the notion of the white Christian Normative, an inherent Christian bias embedded deep within the racialized social system of the United States. This Christian Normative has its roots in the colonial confrontation between European

colonizers and Indigenous populations in what is now considered the United States and has maintained its significance in impacting the life chances of non-white non-Christian minorities ever since. This thesis argues that it is the Christian normative that drives and sustains the anti-Muslim backlash in the United States. The anti-Muslim backlash that is growing stronger in the United States is also theoretically conceptualized within this thesis.

This thesis utilizes qualitative data collected from 23 in-depth interviews with Arab and South Asian American Muslim college students between the ages of 18 to 35 years from the Midwest as its empirical basis.

DEDICATION

To Jose Lara, Emina Pitts, Azucena Medrano and Tyiesha Edmonds. This is also dedicated to the countless masses of Original People who have fallen victim to the insidious structure of white supremacy and who continue to fight for self determination. May we build a better world, Ameen.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the experiences of American Muslim university students with issues of racial and religious discrimination after the destruction of the World Trade Centers on September 11th, 2001. The thesis explores the questions: What impact did the destruction of the World Trade Centers have on the lives of these American Muslim youth? Have they experienced any type of discrimination because of their skin color or religious affiliation before and since September 11th 2001? How do participant's explain or rationalize the backlash against Islam and Muslims? And finally, how effective are the current sociological frameworks of discrimination in analyzing the backlash against Islam and Muslims and consequently the experiences of American Muslims with racial and religious discrimination?

In order to understand the experiences of these American Muslim university students, I will discuss the current social and political U.S. climate towards Islam and Muslims. The study took place in a large metropolitan Midwest city. For the purposes of this thesis, I will use in-depth interviews with American Muslim men and women university students in order to document their experiences as individuals and the collective experiences of the community they are apart of. I will also use archival research dealing with the nature of domestic terrorism in the U.S. and the current socio-political environment of the larger society. To address my research questions, I analyze

This thesis follows the style of *American Sociological Review*.

the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of these American Muslims that have witnessed and experienced the anti-Muslim backlash that has taken place within the United States. As my participants articulate, the backlash against Islam and Muslims must be contextualized by reading these particular experiences of American Muslims into the larger history of oppression against non-white and non-Christian peoples in the U.S.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Physical Dilemma

On March 10th, 2011, Republican representative Peter King held the first of many proposed congressional hearings dealing with the supposed rise of radicalization amongst Muslims living in the United States. Just one day before these hearings took place, March 9th, 2011, Kevin William Harpham, a former U.S. soldier with ties to a white supremacist organization was arrested for attempting to detonate a weapon of mass destruction at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade in Spokane Washington (Democracy Now 3/10/2011). Despite the timing of the arrest and statistics regarding the issue of terrorism in the U.S., Representative King refused to broaden the conversation about domestic terrorism to include the white terrorists being harbored by the radical right. Instead, the focus of the hearing was concerned with what he has identified to be “the critical issue of the radicalization of Muslim Americans” (CSPAN 3/10/2011). Interestingly however, according to Mark Potok, the director of the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center, “the bulk of domestic terrorism, terrorism that originates in the United States, carried out by Americans, is coming from the radical

right: from white supremacist groups, from so-called anti-government patriot groups” (Democracy Now 3/10/2011). This data leads us to ask why it is that when acts of terrorism are mostly being carried out by whites in the United States, Representative King and the mainstream of America are constructing the threat of domestic terrorism to be purely an American Muslim issue? Intentionally framing terrorism as solely a Muslim phenomenon contributes to the construction of the *myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist* (this myth will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter II).

The title of the thesis refers to a particular dilemma, the American Muslim dilemma. What is this dilemma that I am referring to? I argue that the Muslim community today is suffering from a dilemma that is both material as well as analytical. That is, the material dilemma comprises the physical attacks that have been carried out against Muslims and “Muslim looking people” since September 11th, 2001 (Ahmad 2004), institutional discrimination against Muslims in the workplace (Greenhouse 2010), and the overall attack on the civil liberties of Muslims by the introduction of “mosque crawlers,” agent provocateurs who monitor the daily happenings of Muslim communities and mosques around the country (Democracy Now 8/25/11). Last year’s Park 51 Islamic Community Center controversy, a threatened Qur’an burning in Gainesville, Florida, and the subsequent public burnings of Qur’ans throughout the country, the stabbing of Ahmed Sharif, a New York City cab driver who was stabbed by a white man after affirming his Muslim identity, and the attacks on Islamic institutions across the United States, all represent the breadth of the physical dilemma American Muslims face today. It is important to note that this physical dilemma, the heightened surveillance,

institutional discrimination and racism adversely impacts the psychological well-being and life chances of American Muslims as well (Lauderdale 2006; Ohlsson and Shah 2010).

The Analytical Dilemma

The second component of this dilemma is an analytical dilemma. American Muslims have raised concerns about the rise of Islamophobia in the United States which they argue has led to the delegitimization of the 1,400 year old world religion. American Muslims contest that this anti-Muslim backlash is a result of a growing misunderstanding and fear of Islam amongst the American people and U.S. government. Simultaneously, the Muslim community has framed this anti-Muslim backlash as a form of racism or racial discrimination; in a sense, this backlash represents racism against Islam particularly because the majority of the Muslim population in the U.S. is comprised of racial minorities (African Americans, Arabs, South Asians, etc). The ambiguous and amorphous analysis that is being offered as the reason for the anti-Muslim backlash and the nature of this backlash constitutes the root of the analytical dilemma that I analyze. Does the United States hate Islam and therefore aim to discriminate and endanger the lives of American Muslims due to its Islamophobia? Or does this backlash constitute racial discrimination against a religious minority group that is composed of a very racially and ethnically diverse population? This analytical dilemma, which my thesis aims at identifying and ultimately clarifying, is extremely important to emphasize because if we are to effectively condemn and resist this anti-Muslim backlash (the material dilemma), we must have an analytical framework that

captures the complexities of the experiences of American Muslims and contextualizes this material dilemma within a structural and historical analysis of U.S. oppression and racial violence against non-white non-Christian populations.

Often times, we can assess the effectiveness of a conceptual or analytical framework by the implications of the solutions that are offered. By identifying the fundamental assumptions that a framework is based upon, the solutions that are offered by that framework can be measured and assessed properly. If we analyze the argument that the rise of anti-Muslim backlash in the U.S. is due to Islamophobia, a fear, hatred, or misunderstanding of the Islamic faith and its followers, the fundamental assumption is that those that are Islamophobic are simply ignorant about Islam and do not know what Islam and its followers are really about. Thus, the logical response to this ignorance or lack of knowledge is that the American (read, white) population must be taught and educated about the Islamic faith with the hopes that education or more knowledge can curb the anti-Muslim backlash, as evidenced by the increase in efforts to conduct and take part in interfaith dialogs across the country. In other words, the root of anti-Muslim backlash is ignorance and the only way to address this ignorance is to educate the American population about Islam. This assumption that U.S. society is afraid of Islam because it lacks knowledge about what Islam teaches leads American Muslims to increase their outreach efforts to the larger non-Muslim society, participate in inter-faith dialogues with other religious communities, and position themselves as ambassadors of Islam in order to alleviate the misconceptions and combat the anti-Muslim propaganda.

Since the non-violence based Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, this tactic of appealing to the moral conscience of the oppressor or an oppressive system with the hopes that a sincere appeal can enlighten the oppressor and consequently put an end to the unjust conditions has been the dominant philosophy of resistance amongst subjugated peoples in the United States. However, as Malcolm X argued at the founding rally of the Organization of Afro American Unity, "[t]actics based solely on morality can only succeed when you are dealing with people who are moral or a system that is moral. A man or system which oppresses a man because of his color is not moral" (X 1964). In addressing the flawed logic in appealing to a population or system that has historically never demonstrated a moral conscience towards non-white peoples, Malcolm X effectively describes the shortcomings in the framework of analyzing the backlash against Muslims as a result of Islamophobia. Educating the populace about Islam will not curb anti-Muslim backlash because as I stated before, reading this backlash against Muslims and Muslim "looking people" within the historical context of white violence against non-white peoples enables us to recognize that the material dilemma (violence, racial discrimination, and retrenchment of civil rights) maintains and reinforces white supremacy at home and sustains the imperial interests of the United States abroad. Moreover, the backlash against Muslims and "Muslim-looking people", as I will explicate further in this chapter, contributes to the racialization of Islam and Muslims and the conflation of Islam with terrorism.

I must make clear at this point that I am not arguing that efforts to educate are not important, what I am critiquing is the notion that increasing awareness about Islam

amongst the American (read white) population can curb anti-Muslim backlash because this notion overlooks the possibility that the anti-Muslim backlash in the United States actually works in favor of and appeals to the white supremacist imperial interests of the United States. I will further examine this assertion in the second chapter of my thesis. For now, it is important to assert that there is indeed a correlation between constructing Islam to be solely responsible for terrorism in the world and the imperial interests of white supremacy. I will contextualize this combined physical and psychological attack (material dilemma) on American Muslims within the historical legacy of white Christian supremacist violence against Black, Latino, Asian and Native American peoples. It is important to read these histories in conjunction with each other because I argue that this recent anti-Muslim backlash is nothing more than the latest manifestation of white Christian supremacy protecting and maintaining its cultural communion of whiteness (Meyers 1995).

The Racialization of Islam, Muslims, and Muslim Looking People

As previously mentioned, the backlash against Muslims in the U.S. has resulted in some voices from the Muslim community claiming this backlash constitutes a form of racial discrimination against Muslims in the U.S. This then warrants the question, how can a religion and its followers, especially a religion with followers that are as racially and ethnically diverse as Islam, claim to be victims of racial discrimination? To answer this question, we must understand the concept of racialization which has been defined as the extension of racial meaning to a previously unclassified group of people or social relationship (Omi and Winant 1994). Racialization is indeed an important concept to

engage with especially since many academics studying the Muslim community in the U.S. believe that Islam has become racialized. While it is true that there was a dramatic rise in the number of reported cases of discrimination towards Arab American and South Asians after 9/11/01 (Ahmad 2004), certain scholars have utilized the concept of racialization as an analytical tool for describing the experiences of Muslims in the U.S. and the backlash against the community well before September 11th, 2001 (Joshi 2006; Rana 2007).

According to Rana (2007), “[t]he racialization of Islam emerged from the Old World, was placed on New World indigenous peoples, and subsequently took on a continued significance in relation to Black America and the world of Muslim immigrants” (151). Therefore, “the category of Muslim in the U.S. is simultaneously a religious category and one that encompasses a broad race concept that connects a history of Native America to Black America to immigrant America in the consolidation of anti-Muslim racism” (Rana 2007:151). In an attempt to understand the racialization process of religion within a broader historical level, Joshi argues that “the United States has developed as a society where Christianity and whiteness are intimately linked and where Christianity and whiteness generate social norms against which other religions and races are measured” (2006:212). In the particular case of Islam and Muslims, white Christianity has historically determined that Islam is deficient and worthy of demonization. Therefore, the racialization of nonwhite, non-Christian religions exacerbates the racial oppression of minority groups (Joshi 2006:212). Whereas Islam has been racialized as a nonwhite, non-Christian religion, Christianity itself has also

been racialized as a white European religion that sets the standards for what a “normal” and “rational” religion should be. Thus, “it is the normative power of whiteness and Christianity, separately and in tandem, that makes the racialization of religion an essential problem for non-white non-Christians” (Joshi 2006:212).

Although the concept of racialization has been used to analyze the historical process of “race-ing” Islam and Muslims well before 9/11/01, it is now important to turn to the current moment and discuss how acts of physical violence, the ultimate manifestation of the material dilemma, against the Muslim community contribute heavily to the racialization of Muslims and “Muslim-looking people.” In the weeks following September 11th, 2001, over 1,000 reports of bias incidents towards Arabs, South Asians and Muslims which included 19 deaths, vandalism of homes and mosques, verbal harassment and other forms of physical assault were recorded (Ahmad 2004: 1261). More importantly, as Ahmad argues, the physical violence carried out against Arabs, South Asians, and Muslims has “been accompanied by a legal and political violence toward these communities” (2004:1262). It is important to note at this point that the racialization process of Muslims not only occurs at the ideological level, but more importantly manifests within the political context through domestic and foreign policies as evidenced by the passage of the PATRIOT ACT, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the establishment of the Joint Terrorism Task Force, and the reformulation of the Immigration and Naturalization Service into the National Security Entry Exit Registration System (NSEERS) (Byng 2008). Therefore, “[o]nce formally marked for discrimination through political legislation and policies, social inequality

becomes the experience of Muslim Americans. Rather than religious minority identity being a facilitator of adaptation, it becomes the designator for discrimination” (Byng 2008:668).

Moreover, “through federal programs such as the special registration program, the entire Muslim population becomes further criminalized by relying on old and new essentialist understandings of Islam as being inherently prone to terrorism (Byng 2008:668). This becomes useful in trying to understand not only the backlash in the immediate weeks after 9/11/01, but also the growing hostility and backlash against Muslims and “Muslim-looking people” within the past few years. Thus, as Ahmad argues, “[i]n the first two years after September 11, the United States has developed a corpus of immigration law and law enforcement policy that by design or effect applies almost exclusively to Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians. These laws operate in tandem with the individual acts of physical violence that have been carried out against these same communities, thereby aiding and abetting hate violence” (2004:1262).

I use the term “Muslim-looking people” intentionally in order to elucidate the fact that in the aftermath of 9/11/01, followers of the Islamic faith were not the only people that were targeted by hate crimes and other forms of bigotry and violence. It is precisely this violence that is carried out against Arab Christians, Sikhs, Hindus (non-Muslim Arabs and South Asians) that provides evidence for the racialization of Islam and Muslims. As Ahmad argues, despite the term “Muslim-looking” emphasizing religion, “the “Muslim-looking” construct is neither religion- nor conduct-based. Rather, the profile has considerable, if not predominant, racial content and is preoccupied with

phenotype rather than faith or action” (2004:1278). This construct of “Muslim-looking people” lends to the conflation of brown-skinned Arabs and South Asians, regardless of their faith, with Muslims. Moreover, the implications of the race based violence against Arabs and South Asians reinforces the conflation of all Muslims with those responsible for the destruction of the world trade centers. Thereby, “[t]he end result is to view "Muslim-looking" people as stand-ins for the terrorists themselves” (Ahmad 2004: 1279). Thus, violence carried out against Muslims and “Muslim-looking people” emphasizes the important role physical violence plays in the racialization of Muslims. The conflation of Muslims with terrorists is very important for my analysis and will serve as the basis for the conversation on the *myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist* which I will explicate fully in Chapter II.

Race Scholars, Religion, and Muslims

Recent scholarship on Muslims within the U.S. has attempted in some capacity to understand the impacts of discrimination on this increasingly marginalized community, especially after the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001 (Abdo 2006; Bayoumi 2008). Scholarship on Muslims in America written in the past decade and a half have also dealt minimally with the role of race and racism and its impacts on the Muslim communities in the U.S. (Haddad and Esposito 2000; Smith 1999). Whereas some scholars treat racism aimed towards Muslims or even “Muslim-looking people” as a smaller component of a broader issue of religious intolerance or cultural misunderstandings, the theories of race scholars (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 2003, 2006; Feagin 2010) offer a more structural understanding of racism and white

supremacy in the United States. That is, the works of these scholars provide a structural analysis of racial oppression that allows for a more thorough understanding about the impact of racism on racial minorities in the U.S. Analyzing the backlash against Muslims in the U.S. through the race critical frameworks affords many advantages that will be discussed in the proceeding chapter. However, while both analyses offer unique and important insights into understanding the status of Muslim citizens within the U.S., I argue that these two approaches to framing the conversation about Muslims in America possess critical shortcomings in their analyses that ultimately lead to incomplete solutions on how to address the rise of anti-Muslim discrimination.

However, the consequences of the shortcomings in the two analytical framings are in no way comparable to each other. As my own analysis will demonstrate, the scholarship of authors who emphasize racial oppression as a central lens for analyzing the marginalization of Muslims in the U.S. offer a superior framework of analysis. That is, scholars that fail to define racism within a structural framework of oppression reduce “the study of racism mostly to psychology, which has produced a simplistic schematic view of the way racism operates in society” (Bonilla-Silva 2003:22). Thus, defining racism as a structure of oppression provides an understanding that “the foundation of racism is not the ideas that individuals may have about others, but the social edifice erected over racial inequality” (Bonilla-Silva 2003:22). Despite this crucial advantage of defining racism as a structure of oppression, the current demonization of Islam and Muslims within the United States also exposes a gap in the leading theoretical frameworks of racial oppression and thus warrants the need for a more nuanced

conversation about the impact of religion, particularly Christianity, on the larger racialized social system of the United States.

In this thesis, I will examine the experiences of discrimination of American Muslims living in a post 9/11/2001 society as a manifestation of a white Christian supremacist attack against this burgeoning diverse and eclectic community. I employed an extended case study of the dominant sociological frameworks of racial oppression by Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2003, 2006). Additionally, I conducted archival research that focused on the cases of domestic terrorism in the United States. Moreover, I will identify and conceptualize the notion of a Christian normative embedded within the racialized social system of the United States that intersects with white supremacy and impacts the manner in which racial oppression is carried out against non-white non-Christian populations like American Muslims (Joshi 2006; Rana 2007). As a sociologist, I believe that it is my duty to raise the question, “What can sociologists and social scientists as a whole do to develop a fuller and more holistic theoretical framework to understand this anti-Muslim backlash in our current society?” To answer this question, it is imperative that we critically analyze the effectiveness of the current framework and literature utilized to assess the unprecedented anti-Muslim backlash since 9/11/2001.

Chapter II will consist of the literature review as well as the theoretical/conceptual framework of my analysis. I will review the current interdisciplinary literature on the American Muslim community. I will review the critical frameworks of racial oppression that dominate the current sociological conversations on

race and racism. I aim to read these two bodies of literature in conversation with each other to identify the gaps and interject my conceptual contributions to the conversation about racism against the American Muslim community. Through this conversation I expound on the notion of Christian normativity, an inherent Christian bias embedded within the racialized social system of the United States that upholds the domination of white Christian supremacy. This will then lead to the discussion of the *myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist*. Chapter III engenders the methods section used in this thesis as well as the employment of the extended case study of Bonilla-Silva's racialized social system (1997). Chapter IV discusses the major findings of my data. Chapter V will briefly summarize the results and will include a discussion about the implications of my findings and analyses for the American Muslim dilemma.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The national discourse on race and racism in the post Civil Rights era has traditionally regarded racism as a manifestation of aberrant social behavior (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Consequently, racist behavior is thought to be expressed by individuals who are presumed irrational and deviant because they possess an animus for others based on race. Unfortunately, this micro-level definition of racism not only dominates the national discourse, but for a long time has also dominated the analyses and discourse of the social sciences as well (Bonilla Silva 1997). The problem with this individual level analysis of racism is twofold. First, it fails to acknowledge the rational elements of which racialized systems of oppression were originally constructed. Second, it eliminates the possibility that contemporary manifestations of racism not only have rational but structural foundations as well (Bonilla-Silva 1997:466).

This distinction is important to elucidate because it is what sets apart micro-level analyses of racial discrimination from structural theoretical frameworks of racial oppression. Understanding the structural dynamics of racial hierarchy and oppression is essential to an analysis of anti-Muslim discrimination and the demonization of Muslims and Islam, as well as the connections between this anti-Muslim discrimination and the political and ideological interests of white supremacy. The reason for its importance has been described in the previous chapter, that is, the historical and continued racialization of Muslims and Muslim-looking people after 9/11/01. This structural foundation, or racialized social system, is described as a society “in which economic, political, social,

and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races” (Bonilla-Silva 1997:469). Therefore, the “race placed in the superior position tends to receive greater economic remuneration and access to better occupations and/or prospects in the labor market, occupies a primary position in the political system, is granted higher social estimation (e.g., is viewed as "smarter" or "better looking"), often has the license to draw physical (segregation) as well as social (racial etiquette) boundaries between itself and other races...” (Bonilla-Silva 1997: 470). Thus, in a racialized social system like the United States, a racial hierarchy was created by and for whites to exclusively serve their political, social, economic, and ideological interests and relegate all non-whites to a subhuman status in order to justify their exploitation. It is precisely this reason why Frantz Fanon admonishes that “[t]he habit of considering racism as a mental quirk, as a psychological flaw, must be abandoned” (1964:38).

According to Bonilla-Silva, “the classification of a people in racial terms has been a highly political act associated with practices such as conquest and colonization, enslavement, peonage, indentured servitude, and, more recently, colonial and neocolonial labor immigration” (1997:473). It is this classification of people in racial terms that is of importance for this analysis. The racialization process of groups of people can be defined as the extension of racial meaning to a previously unclassified population or social relationship (Omi and Winant 1994). Moreover, “racialization is an ideological process, an historically specific one” (Omi and Winant 1994:14). The theory of racialization provides a useful analytical tool to understand how a religious

population, i.e. Muslims, have undergone a process in which they are framed and perceived as a racialized religious group.

The analyses of the scholars represented above will serve as a basis for the analysis and discussion of the Christian normative embedded within the racialized social system of the United States. This analysis will introduce a nuanced discussion about the role of Christianity in impacting the manner in which white supremacy constructs the racialized social system. Accordingly, Joshi states that “[d]espite this similarity of processes and often of outcomes, racialization affects each religious group that is targeted differently” (2006:212). Therefore, this deeper analysis of the impact of Christian supremacy on the racialized social system will thereby allow us to fully understand how and why Islam, as well as other non-Christian religions, “gets rendered theologically, morally, and socially illegitimate” (Joshi 2006:212).

This research is critical to the sociological studies of race because it aims at extending the dominant critical theories of racial oppression. Moreover, this research subsequently contributes to the existing interdisciplinary literature regarding the Muslim community within the United States by analyzing the life chances of this growing population within a systemic framework of racial oppression. In their discussions about the racial and ethnic discrimination of Muslims in the United States, previous scholars (Abdo 2006; Bayoumi 2008; McCloud 1995; Haddad and Esposito 2000) have failed to analyze this racial discrimination as a function of a larger system of racial oppression. That is, conversations about racism or discrimination are limited because racism is not defined as a structural form of oppression but as a result of racist individuals that act

upon their prejudices. As scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (1997; 2003; 2006) and Feagin (2010) have argued, defining racism as a product of a “few bad apples” in an overall racially enlightened society completely disregards the role of whites in creating a white supremacist society aimed at exploiting and subjugating non-white populations.

However, the white supremacist structure of the United States not only privileges whites, but also intersects with and maintains the hegemony of the Christian world-view that deems non-Judeo-Christian religions and peoples as deficient and subhuman.

IDENTIFYING THE CHRISTIAN NORMATIVE

Leading scholars of race and racial oppression such as Charles Mills (1999) and Joe Feagin (2010) have developed theoretical frameworks that have dominated the current critical conversation of racism within academia. These theories, Mill’s racial contract and Feagin’s systemic racism respectively offer structural frameworks for understanding how white supremacy has systematically and ideologically determined the life chances of whites and non-whites within the U.S. Moreover, Mills (1999) and Feagin (2010) have offered important insights into the role that religion, particularly European Christianity in the case of the U.S., played in framing the world-view of the English colonizers who interacted with the indigenous populations and ultimately helped rationalize the genocidal actions of these early Christians.

Within Feagin and Mills’ analyses, the role of the Christian world-view gets replaced by the category of race as the dominant tool for differentiation and oppression within the white milieu. Thus, as both scholars argue in different capacities, race replaces the role of religion (read, Christianity) as the dominant framework for

rationalizing genocide and imperialism, thereby diminishing the significance of Christian world-views within the ensuing oppression of whites over non-whites. It is precisely this assumption within the framework of these scholars that I intend to problematize and deconstruct in order to effectively analyze the current demonization of and backlash against Muslims within the United States.

Specifically, Mills (1999) argues that “[t]he growth of the Enlightenment and the rise of secularism did not *challenge* this strategic dichotomization (Christian/infidel) so much as to translate it into other forms...[Thus] ‘Race’ gradually became the formal marker of this differentiated status, replacing the religious divide...” (23). Similarly, Feagin claims that “[i]n the early seventeenth century English American colonists first used terms like “Christians” for themselves and “negroes” for African Americans...In the process of English colonialism and the African slave trade some of the world’s lightest people came into contact with some of the world’s darkest skinned people. Gradually, color and other physical characteristics became central to a dominant racial framing that aggressively rationalized and sustained this intensive exploitation and oppression” (2010:64).

Both scholars claim that race gradually *replaced* religion as the foremost tool for carrying out the oppression of the “other” within this particular historical context of colonial expansion. In contrast, I argue that it is precisely this argument that contributes to the normalization of white European Christianity within the dominant theoretical frameworks of racial oppression. This normalization, or more accurately, premature diminishment of the relevance of Christian hegemony within the logic of the leading

scholars of racial oppression not only declares Christian hegemony inconsequential, but simultaneously keeps the white Christian world-view hidden behind a veil of racial oppression. Rather than interrogate how a white Christian world-view becomes embedded within the emerging framework of racial oppression, scholars have assumed that the concept of religion, particularly European Christianity becomes anachronistic within this new era of race and racial oppression of non-whites. However, as Rana (2007) argues:

In terms of the race concept, it is in the seventeenth century that religious difference is biologized into a scientific racism that justifies racial difference according to hierarchies of social evolution and the binary of civilization and barbarity (again another term used to describe the regions of Arab Muslims in North Africa). As scientific racism was evacuated of religious meaning toward a racism based in imputed cultural differences of a secular kind, it has become axiomatic that racial difference is not the same as religious difference. Scientific or biological racism was also reinterpreted through the frame of a secularized racism that disarticulated religion away from phenotypic conceptions of difference. But this did not mean that religion was no longer a key component of the race concept and the practice of racism in the modern era.

I now turn back to Bonilla-Silva's theory of the racialized social system (1997:2003) to assess its ability to explain the particular case of Muslims in the United States. Scholars such as Feagin and Mills speak on the manner in which race ultimately gets replaced in level of importance with Christianity as the primary tool of oppression

against those defined as non-whites; however, a conversation about religion and its impact on the racialized social system is absent from Bonilla-Silva's analysis. Although the racialized social system removes the reality of racism from the free-form realm of ideology and grounds it within a structural analysis of power and domination, it lacks engagement with the reality of the conflation of religion, particularly Christianity, with the idea of race. Moreover, in Mills' and Feagin's analysis, and more glaringly in Bonilla-Silva's work do we see a gap that overlooks the Christian normative and its continued role in carrying out racial oppression. Ultimately, due to the privilege of being the normative standard, Christian normativity only becomes apparent when we analyze the status of non-Christian non-white religious traditions such as Islam within a structural analysis of racial oppression.

Backlash

The term "backlash" has been used in this thesis to refer to the multi-level repression towards and attacks on the Arab, South Asian, and Muslim communities after September 11th, 2011. Fortunately, there has been a recent attempt by some scholars to provide a theoretical analysis of the backlash carried out against these communities (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Peek 2010). The work of these scholars demonstrates the need for the term "backlash" to be theorized and contextualized within a framework that captures the nature of the repression after 9/11/01 and the experiences of the targeted communities in its totality.

In Backlash 9/11, Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) define backlash "as an excessive and adverse societal and governmental reaction to a political/ideological crisis

against a group or groups” (14). According to their analysis, during times of political or ideological crisis, the backlash may consist of acts of intimidation, harassment, abuse, vandalism, and physical violence carried out by the majority population against the target population (2009:15). Another form of the backlash occurs at the macro-level in the form of the state’s reaction to threat’s to the country’s national security by singling out the target community through suppressive and repressive acts. The third form of backlash occurs when government initiatives and hate crimes are predicated upon deeply rooted stereotypes and prejudices (16).

Although Bakalian and Bozorgmehr claim to contribute to sociological theory by being the first to conceptualize the term backlash, their analysis contains critical shortcomings and oversights that lend to its limitations for a holistic understanding of the backlash against the Muslim and “Muslim-looking” communities. Particularly, in the outset of their book, the authors state that “as groups, African American Muslims and other converts have not been targets of government initiatives; thus they do not fall within the purview of our study” (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009:8). As the case of the Newburgh Four will elucidate in the following section, the intentional exclusion of African American Muslims from their analysis of anti-Muslim backlash demonstrates the narrow definition of the term and the limited applicability it has to the phenomenon of anti-Muslim backlash in its totality. That is, the backlash against Muslims in the U.S. has manifested in far more complex and egregious forms than what the authors have presented, thereby demonstrating the weakness in their conceptualization of backlash.

Additionally, the second major shortcoming in their theoretical framework of backlash deals with their limited treatment of the backlash carried out against the Sikh community after September 11th, 2001. According to Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009), “our treatment of Sikhs is limited...Nonetheless, Sikhs were not the targets of the post-9/11 government initiatives...Although they are a newly prominent religious group in the United States fighting discrimination, there is no political agenda against them. Therefore, Sikhs are included in this volume only in relation to hate crimes and their visible presence in civil rights coalitions” (8). Although the authors recognize the Sikh community experienced a great deal of backlash in the form of verbal harassment, physical violence, and even death, their conceptualization of the term backlash is devoid of any substantial conversation about the role of the racialization of Muslims and Muslim-looking people on the backlash that was carried out against these targeted communities. In fact, in their limited discussion of the theory of racialization in regards to Arab Americans, Bakalian and Bozorgmehr state “these racialization arguments in and by themselves have become claims for the inclusion of Arab Americans within the larger American society” (2009:82). Because their analysis of backlash is so intimately linked to mobilization theory and social movement literature, it makes sense that their framework argues backlash ultimately leads to the political integration of the targeted population (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009:14).

While Peek (2010) offers a very insightful and detailed understanding of the different manifestations of the backlash experienced by Muslims, her analysis also lacks a serious conceptual conversation about the impact of the racialization process on the

backlash against Muslims. Although she mentions that since 9/11/01, dark-skinned people have been mistaken as Muslims and have been subject to violent attacks and profiling, the conversation is very minimal and lacks any conceptual understanding of how Muslims have become racialized. It must be noted that both analyses of backlash take different analytical approaches towards conceptualizing the backlash against Muslims after 9/11/01 and both offer unique insights and details about backlash from their frameworks. However, what is collectively missing from these two analyses on anti-Muslim backlash is two-fold. The first issue is the lack of a conversation that contextualizes this physical dilemma of the Muslim community within a historical and structural analysis of racial oppression against other non-white populations. The second issue is one that has unfortunately become all too common when speaking on the subject and that is that both analyses fail to seriously problematize the conflation of terrorism with Islam and the manner in which Islam has been racialized to be synonymous with terrorism. Furthermore, these scholars have failed to challenge the problematic use of the terms “terrorism” and “radical” and have come to accept their popular uses as it applies to Muslims *prima facie*. Therefore, the following section lays the foundation for the argument that the conceptual parameters of what constitutes “backlash” must be expanded to take into consideration the different forms of backlash that have not been considered within existing conversations about anti-Muslim backlash.

ENTRAPMENT

In order to effectively understand the totality of the backlash waged against the Muslim community, any serious conversation on anti-Muslim backlash must incorporate

an analysis of the numerous cases of what the state has identified as “home-grown terrorism.” Home-grown terrorism,” according to Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, “is a new kind of terrorism. [Terrorism] is not only coming from outside the United States in, but it is also growing inside our own country” (Democracy Now 10/6/10). As this section will demonstrate, it is these so-called cases of “home-grown terrorism” that provide the strongest evidence for the assertion that the racialization of Muslims has egregiously made being a Muslim in the United States an act of terrorism.

The Cases of Entrapment

According to the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice’s report *Targeted and Entrapped*, since September 11th, 2001, “the U.S. government has targeted Muslims in the United States by sending paid, untrained informants into mosques and Muslim communities. This practice has led to the prosecution of more than 200 individuals in terrorism-related cases” (2011:2). This report effectively goes through three high profile cases in which the FBI sent paid informants, agent provocateurs, into several Muslim communities in order to “prevent” acts of terrorism. These cases include, as I mentioned previously in this chapter, the case of the Newburgh Four, four African American men from Newburgh, New York that were arrested on charges of attempting to bomb a synagogue; the case of the Fort Dix Five in which four Albanian brothers and their Palestinian friend were arrested on charges of attempting to bomb the Fort Dix Air Force in New Jersey; and the case of Shahawar Siraj Matin who was charged with attempting to bomb the 34th Street subway station in New York (CHRGJ 2011). Another important case of entrapment involves another Muslim man named Mohammed Hossein and

Yassin Aref, the Imam of the local mosque in Bay Ridge, New York, who were charged with money laundering and conspiracy to support terrorism (Democracy Now 10/6/10).

Although all four cases involve ethnically and racially diverse members from the Muslim community, they all share similar patterns in regards to how these so-called terror attempts were constructed and foiled by the FBI. Most importantly, “[i]n all three cases, Muslim men were arrested on terrorism charges. In all three cases, no terrorist crime was actually committed. In fact, no one was killed or injured. And all three cases rely heavily on hundreds of hours of surveillance secretly recorded by a paid government informant” (Democracy Now 10/6/10). The fact that most of the men involved in these cases of entrapment had no previous criminal records prior to their charges of being “home-grown terrorists” is really telling about the desperation of the U.S. government to prove that it is working hard to combat terrorism (Democracy Now 10/6/10).

Unfortunately, while critics of these cases argue that the Muslim men involved in these cases were victims of entrapment, in court “the entrapment defense has consistently failed, because juries have either found that there was no inducement or that the government had proved predisposition beyond a reasonable doubt” (Democracy Now 10/6/10).

Patterns and Implications of the Cases

As Targeted and Entrapped effectively elucidates, the major underlying assumptions that are driving these cases of FBI constructed home-grown terror are the conflation of Muslims with terrorists (6), the view that Muslims in the U.S. are increasingly becoming radicalized and more accepting of violence (as evidenced by the

Peter King's Congressional Hearings on Islam) (7), as well as the policies of preventative policing employed by law enforcement officials across the country (2011:8). These assumptions essentially create a dangerous self-fulfilling prophecy because law enforcement and government officials effectively racialize Muslims and Muslim-looking people as terrorists, claim that all Muslims living in the U.S. are undergoing a process of radicalization and are predisposed to terrorism, and thus employ policing practices that allows them to construct fake terror-plots and then hand pick any individual from the Muslim community that is in the process of "radicalization" to carry out those plots. (CHRGJ 2011). To make matters worse, it was reported earlier this year that the New York Police Department used an anti-Muslim video to train officers. "[O]fficers were shown the 72-minute *The Third Jihad* video in the NYPD's required counterterrorism training courses. *The Third Jihad* is said to depict gruesome imagery coupled with the argument that Muslim leaders and organizations in the United States are part of a plot of global jihad" (Democracy Now 1/20/11).

This state constructed self fulfilling prophecy of Muslim radicalization has led law enforcement officials and the FBI into recruiting and releasing paid informants, or agent provocateurs, into Muslim communities across the country (CHRGJ 2011). These actions are of course justified within the distorted and problematic framework of the state because of the assumption that Muslims in the U.S. are increasingly becoming radicalized. Accordingly, preventative measures must then be taken to prevent any attempts of "home-grown terror." However, as Alicia Williams-McCollum, the aunt of one member of the Newburgh Four, David Williams, effectively articulates, "[t]his is

entrapment. You're going to send an informant into an impoverished community, the most impoverished county, to do your trickery. You ain't stumbled upon a cell. Nobody ain't tell you that someone was plotting to do anything. You created a crime!"

(Democracy Now 10/6/10). Indeed, the use of paid informants in all four of these high profile cases represents a larger pattern of state-sponsored backlash against the Muslim community. In fact, 62 percent of the 50 most high profile "home-grown terror" cases since 9/11/01 has involved the use of paid informants. According to Karen Greenberg from New York University's Center on Law and Security, "[t]he conviction rate for those cases that involved informants is almost a hundred percent; it's 97 percent. So that gives you a kind of sense of how important they are and how useful they've been" (Democracy Now 10/6/10).

With a conviction rate of almost 100 percent in cases of "home-grown terror" involving paid FBI informants, it's important to ask who are these informants and what do they gain from infiltrating Muslim communities? According to Karen Greenberg, "[w]hen you're dealing with informants, you're dealing with people who have been convicted of or threatened with conviction or found in the act of some kind of criminality. And there is everything in their interest to make sure that they do what the FBI wants" (Democracy Now 10/6/10). Shahed Hussain is one of the paid informants that was hired by the FBI after the feds had exposed his license scam through a sting operation in 2003. However, according to Anjali Kamat "as Muslim communities in America came under increased scrutiny after 9/11, Shahed Hussain proved to be very useful. He was a Muslim willing to spy on fellow Muslims in exchange for amnesty.

Instead of sending him to jail or deporting him, he got off on a plea deal, and the FBI hired him as an informant (Democracy Now 10/6/10).

Of course, this is not the first time the FBI has systematically recruited individuals to infiltrate and monitor the actions of racially and religiously oppressed minority populations. For Native American, Latino, and especially African American communities, these actions by the U.S. government are reminiscent of the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) that was established to infiltrate, co-opt, and neutralize more militant sections of the revolutionary struggles for freedom and racial justice. Imam Salahuddin Muhammad, the Imam of the Mosque in Newburgh New York, states

I believe that what we are seeing today with the FBI surveillance and the FBI allowing for agent provocateurs to enter into Muslim communities is the same thing that happened in the '60s with a lot of the black nationalist organizations. That's what I see happening today in the Islamic community. The FBI, they are sending these agent provocateurs into the community, and they are cultivating and nurturing and actually creating situations that would never have occurred if they didn't have their man in there to do that. (Democracy Now 10/6/10)

This point is very important because it emphasizes the need to contextualize the particular case of Muslims within a larger historical legacy of white supremacist oppression against communities of color within the U.S.

Moreover on the topic of paid informants, the New York Police Department has instituted the innocuously titled Demographic's Unit in which certain "ethnic" officers

were deployed into ethnic communities to monitor the daily activities of those communities (Democracy Now 8/25/11). According to Matt Apuzzo, the co-author of the AP report that broke the story, the NYPD also had three tiers of informants that performed different surveillance tasks. The first tier involved seeded informants that are “the nosy neighbors, the woman hanging out on the stoop all day, you know, keeping an eye on what’s going on in the neighborhood, and she’d pay—she’d provide information. They had directed informants that they could say, "Go out and gather information on this one topic"(Democracy Now 8/25/11). They had people they could send out to an event just to be eyes and ears. And they also had a group of informants called, informally, "mosque crawlers," whose job it was just to go to the mosques, you know, not always the same mosque, just pop into the mosques and keep an eye open. If there’s radical things being said, report back” (Democracy Now 8/25/11). The three tier level of informants warrants the need to question whether the NYPD has criminalized political views and beliefs that are critical of the United States and its foreign and domestic policies. Ultimately, the message that is being sent to the Muslim community and the broader United States public is that the problem of terrorism lies somewhere hidden within the different Muslim communities around the country and that Muslims are the sole perpetrators of acts of terrorism in the U.S. and around the world. Certainly, more attention needs to be paid to the actions of law enforcement officials as well as the FBI and CIA in their role in contributing to what I have termed, *the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist*.

THE MYTH OF THE DORMANT MUSLIM TERRORIST

Mark Potok, the director of the Intelligence Project for the Southern Poverty Law Center, stated while on Democracy Now on March 10, 2011 that the majority of domestic terrorism, or what the U.S. government has termed “home-grown terror” is not coming from the Muslim community, but is in fact coming mainly from whites (Democracy Now 3/10/11). I posed the question in the beginning of this thesis that if the majority of “home-grown terror” is in fact being carried out by whites and not Muslims, then why is the U.S. government and larger public constructing terrorism to be solely a Muslim issue? The *myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist* is indeed a myth that has been forged within the white logic of U.S. white supremacy that has an historical precedence which is best exemplified in the myth of the Black rapist as explicated by Angela Davis (1983).

The Myth of the Black Rapist

In the chapter *Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist*, from her book Women, Race, and Class, Angela Davis (1983) describes this destructive and politically charged myth of the Black rapist as an ideological tool constructed by whites to maintain hegemonic control over the Black community. As Davis argues, “the myth of the Black rapist was a distinctly political invention” (1983:184). I draw on Davis’ analysis of the myth of the Black rapist mainly because there are strong parallels to be made between how white supremacy constructed the larger Black population to be predisposed to criminal activities and how the Muslim community in the U.S. is constructed as being predisposed to terrorism.

According to Davis, Black men were targeted by this myth as being mindless hyper-sexualized animals that could not resist raping white women. The flip-side of this myth was the myth of the promiscuous Black female (Davis 1983; Roberts 1997). Whereas whites used the myth of the Black male rapist as justification for the egregious lynchings of countless Black men, whites simultaneously created the myth of the promiscuous Black female as justification for their brutal raping of Black women (Davis 1983:176). Again, drawing parallels to the myth of the Black rapist, Muslim men have been constructed by the white Christian logic as inherently predisposed to being ruthless terrorists whereas the Muslim female has been constructed as a veiled, submissive, and oppressed victim that needs to be liberated. It is no coincidence that one of the justifications used by the Bush administration to invade and expand the “war on terror” was to liberate oppressed Muslim women. As Laura Bush so compassionately put it, “[b]ecause of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women” (U.S. Government 2002).

A Predisposition to Terrorism?

As Bonilla-Silva states, “[r]aces, as most social scientists acknowledge, are not biologically but socially determined categories of identity and group association” (1997:472). However, what happens when a particular religious community becomes racialized and that racialization process conflates that religion with the phenomenon of terrorism, ultimately implying that followers of that religion are predisposed to

committing acts of terror? This language of predisposition implies that followers of Islam are uniquely susceptible to becoming radicalized and engaging in terrorism as if this predisposition is genetic. This implies that given the right circumstances, the “terrorism gene” can be triggered and thus result in the Muslim individual degenerating into a mindless terrorist bent on destroying the United States. The right circumstances, of course, have been determined by the FBI and NYPD to be fake terror plots in which agent provocateurs deceive unsuspecting Muslims into carrying out these bogus plots. These cases of entrapment, the Newburgh Four, the Fort Dix Five, etc., are reflective of this devastating myth that has come to engender the racialization of Islam, Muslims, and Muslim-looking people. As Byng states, [a]fter 9/11, the images of Muslims and Islamic theology as inherently predisposed to violence and terrorism were most prominently voiced by conservative Christian leaders (2008:664). Unfortunately, however, this voice has extended far beyond the conservative Christian leaders and has become the official policy of law enforcement agencies, the FBI, and the CIA.

The language of predisposition has been a reoccurring theme in the aforementioned cases of FBI entrapment. For example, in the case of the Newburgh Four, the U.S. Assistant Attorney David Raskin stated that the four men were “criminally minded [people who] wanted to do something to America” (Democracy Now 10/6/10). According to Anjali Kamat of Democracy Now, “[i]n court, the government has admitted that the FBI picked the targets and supplied the men with the fake bombs and the missile. But the government says the fact the men actually planted the bombs near the Riverdale synagogue is evidence of their willingness to commit

terrorism” (Democracy Now 10/6/10). Again, we see the dangerous rhetoric of a willingness or predisposition to commit terrorism espoused by the United States government.

Ultimately, what has occurred is that the U.S. government, along with the FBI and law enforcement agencies has effectively conveyed the message to the rest of the United States that the threat of terrorism comes only from the Muslim community and given the resources and right circumstances, any Muslim will be willing to carry out an act of terrorism. Thus, by employing this myth, the United States government is able to do two important things. First, the government has effectively silenced the Muslim community from becoming politically active and challenging the imperial policies of the United States government. Second, the government has absolved itself from the acts of terrorism that it carries out throughout the world. As Glenn Greenwald, constitutional law attorney and legal blogger at Salon.com argues,

When a government building blows up, when someone goes on an indiscriminate shooting rampage aimed at teenagers, it’s horrific. And yet, at the same time, the United States and its allies have brought killing like this, violence like this, to numerous countries around the world that receives a tiny fraction of the attention that this attack received...it prompts a tiny fraction of the interest in denouncing it and in declaring it to be evil. And it just struck me that when we think that Muslims are responsible for violence aimed at Western nations, it receives a huge amount of attention in the American media, and yet when the United States brings violence on that level to Muslim countries, kills an equal number of

civilians, dozens of people killed by drone attacks and the like, and tons of people killed that way over Afghanistan over the past decade, it barely registers. I mean, an attack like this, this level of death in Iraq, for example, or Afghanistan, would barely register on the media scale. (Democracy Now 7/26/2011)

Again, this myth of the dormant male Muslim terrorist serves as a political tool of white supremacy and imperialism to divert the attention away from what the United States is doing to people of color throughout the world. It is for this reason that this myth is so dangerous for the Muslim community in the United States, and ultimately around the world.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I undertook this research project with the hopes of gaining an understanding of how young Muslims in the U.S. interpreted, were affected by and coped with the destruction of the World Trade Centers and the subsequent backlash that was brought upon the Muslim communities across the United States after 9/11/2001. Understanding that my own position as a second-generation Muslim male would influence my research in many ways, I viewed this not as an impediment but rather a great advantage to conducting this research project. The Muslim community in the U.S. after 9/11/01 was literally under attack, thereby causing members of the community to be cautious. Being a member of this community within a large Midwest metropolitan city allowed me the privilege of having access to a large cross-section of the Muslim community and the trust necessary to engage in conversation with and eventually interview members of the community.

THE DATA

The data for this thesis is the result of an independent research project that was conducted in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. College-aged Muslim students from two prominent universities within this metropolitan city were interviewed in-depth about their experiences prior to and after September 11th, 2001. Already being situated within one of the universities, I was able to contact Muslim students that were actively engaged in the Muslim Student's Association (MSA) and in positions of leadership within the organization. After gaining the permission of the president of the

organization, I was allowed to give weekly announcements after the Friday congregational prayers about my research project in order to recruit potential participants. I was also permitted to post two lists on the organization's announcement/informational table located outside of the Mosque for potential participants to sign up to be interviewed. After making a series of announcement for four weeks, I was able to secure a list of 20 participants of which 14 participants were interviewed.

A similar pattern of recruitment was followed in the second university in which I gave an announcement regarding the research project and the need for potential participants at an event celebrating the beginning of Ramadan hosted by the Muslim Student's Association (MSA). I gained the permission of the president of the organization to make this announcement as well as to directly contact students holding positions of leadership within the organization. I was successfully able to secure a list of 15 participants of which nine were interviewed.

THE PARTICIPANTS

At University A, I interviewed 14 respondents--nine men and five women--a disproportion possibly due to the easier access I had to Muslim men rather than Muslim women. The separation of the communal spaces by gender allowed me to have more access to Muslim men and less access to Muslim women within the MSA. The participants ranged in age from 18 years to 35 years old, with the majority ranging between 18 and 22 years of age. All participants were undergraduate students with the exception of one graduate student. Eight out of the 14 participants were enrolled in the

Pre-Medical program and majoring in one of the physical sciences (biology, chemistry, etc.). Additionally, a good portion of the participants were raised in the surrounding suburbs of the city in which the university was located.

At University B, the second university in the Midwest, the participants were all undergraduate students majoring in a variety of fields ranging from business to political science. This diverse interest in majors provided a unique cross-section of the Muslim community within this university. Moreover, the Muslim Student's Association at this university had been known to be more "liberal" than others when it came to the separation of the genders, thereby contributing to the more equal distribution of male and female participants (four men and five women). These participants ranged from the ages of 18 years to 30 years old and all identified as Sunni Muslims. Out of the nine participants that I interviewed, six were of Pakistani/Indian descent and the rest were of Arab descent. It is important to note that all but one of the participants from both sites were either first-generation or second-generation Americans from Arab or South Asian backgrounds. The one participant that did not fall into this category was a Latina, (half Mexican, half Puerto Rican) who had converted to Islam after 9/11/2001. Of the 23 participants, 14 participants were from middle-to upper-class backgrounds, while nine out of the 23 were from lower-middle-class to working-class backgrounds. This is important to note because this research project provides an insight into the experiences of a particular cross-section of the Muslim community.

INTERVIEW SETTING

Most of the interviews that were conducted with participants from the first university took place in private study rooms located in the university's main campus library. The majority of the interviews conducted with participants from the second university took place in the main campus' student center. The majority of the interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour long while some interviews lasted one to two hours. The participants were interviewed using an interview guide that I developed which included a series of open-ended questions starting with their personal backgrounds, their experiences of being Muslim before 9/11/2001, their experiences after 9/11/2001, and lastly questions dealing with how they interpret and respond to the backlash against Muslims. These four broad categories of questions were influenced by the relevant literature that deals with Muslims in the U.S. and the aftermath of 9/11/2001.

Due to the sensitive nature of this research, most of these interviews took place in private, quiet settings, maintaining a secure environment in which the participants would be willing to share their experiences without fear or hesitancy. This is not to say that all the participants in this research were afraid to speak out or share their stories. Rather, I felt it necessary to provide a space in which participants could feel safe to share their thoughts without worrying about who is listening to what they are saying. Ultimately, this private space provided an intimate and comfortable environment to conduct this type of research. Moreover, after conducting the interviews, I transcribed the tapes as soon as I could and used an alphanumeric system to identify the different participants and further

ensure the anonymity of the participants. Furthermore, after I transcribed the interviews, I deleted the tapes of the interviews and maintained the transcripts in a personal external hard-drive.

ANALYSIS

Upon completing the interviewing process, I analyzed the interviews by coding the data through a process of identifying patterns present within the data as well as using the extended case method (Burawoy 1998). Consequently, some of the patterns that emerged from the interviews I conducted were an adverse impact of 9/11/2001 on the social and religious identity of the participants, experiences of anti-Muslim backlash which constitute micro-aggressions, verbal harassment, property damage and vandalism, and experiences of hyper-surveillance and state repression.

The experiences of Muslim and Arab Americans in the United States have been unique and there has been limited research conducted that pertains to the racialization of this group. The general findings of the original project echoes the complexity of race relations in the U.S., specifically that historical context (and the legitimization of institutions such as our government and the media machine), shapes how certain groups in society get racialized and how that racialization, in turn, creates negative consequences that affect their overall life chances. This concept of the state affecting the life chances of different groups of people comes from Omi and Winant's (1994) theory of "racial formation" which has been the dominant literary research of contemporary race studies

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The following sections provide a small glimpse into the lives and experiences of American Muslim men and women living in a post 9/11/2001 society. The different themes and the selected quotes serve as the empirical data for the theoretical framework established in Chapter II. The empirical data was gathered from the interviews conducted with mostly Arab and South Asian American Muslim men and women university students between 2007 and 2008. The picture that these quotes paint is reflective of the overall social and political climate towards Muslims in the United States. The first section, “The Era of the Muslim,” sets the stage for the rest of the sections as it provides the overall sentiment of most of the participants. That sentiment is a recognition that throughout the United State’s history, this country has always deemed a certain population of people to be the sworn enemy of the nation, it’s citizens, and it’s security.

The next section, “Anti-Muslim Backlash,” provides an understanding of the specific types of backlash these participants experienced in their daily lives. These various forms of backlash really represent the gamut of the material dilemma that Muslims in the United States are facing. More importantly, this section demonstrates the need for scholars of racial oppression to reexamine the manner in which religion and race conflate, especially as it pertains to the experiences of Muslims in the United States. The following section presents the diverse ways in which the participants in this study interpreted, rationalized, and reacted to the backlash they experienced. This section is

important because it demonstrates that the Muslim community, even in its response to the backlash, is not a monolith. The last section provides the participant's attitudes towards the United States media and government in their role of perpetuating the anti-Muslim backlash. This final section ties the chapter together by examining how the participants analyze and respond to the damaging role of the media and the government in fostering and perpetuating a hostile climate towards American Muslims.

THE ERA OF THE MUSLIM

Simply by watching television on a regular basis, going to the movies, and listening to our president tackle issues of foreign policy, an average American citizen can recognize that Islam is one of the most talked about topic in the public and private sphere. From politics to pop culture, the spotlight is shining on Islam and Muslims; consequently, this phenomenon has not been lost on most of the participants in this study who have recognized this social and political change after 9/11/2001.

The participants in the research noted that this attention on Islam and terrorists have constituted grounds for a new era of foreign policy. This is an era that has pitted the United States and the West against Islamic extremists living in the caves of Afghanistan and Iraq. When asked whether the image and status of Muslims and Islam will convalesce, one 19-year-old Sunni Arab male from University B participant stated:

I hope so; I'd like to think so because, throughout the U.S.'s history, there's always been some kind of enemy. Like during World War 2 there were the Krauts and the Japs, for Germans and Japanese. In the past 20-30 years, it's been the Russians, and now we have entered the era of the Muslim, and I really don't

wish this upon any other race, but I think it will soon end, not soon, but it will end eventually for the Muslims. As fast as we are growing in numbers I think people will come to realize that we are here to stay, and you know we're just contributing as much, we are contributing as much to society as they are, so I think it will change probably, I don't think it will be in my lifetime, but it will eventually change.

The Era of the Muslims is an era in which Muslims have been constructed as the enemy of the United States who ultimately pose a dangerous threat to its citizens and its way of life. This acknowledges that Muslims, just like the Native American, Black, Latino, and Japanese communities before them, have been demonized and treated as the eternal enemy of the sanctity of the United States. This participant is hopeful that things will get better for the Muslim community as time goes on but recognizes that this change will be slow and will not be seen by him in his lifetime. Similarly, an 18-year-old Sunni Muslim of Pakistani descent at University A responded to the question about why someone had ripped the head scarf off of his sister's head by stating:

Probably because of (pause) [of] ignorance, or maybe intolerance, but mainly because of hegemony. . . [T]he media, they, insulate certain information, and then, they, absorb...the rest of it, you don't get the whole picture. . . it's, really sad because for America, you always need a scapegoat, to...blame. And now it's, just the Muslims turn to take that blame. That's how I see it.

According to the participants, we are now living in an era in which Muslims and Islam are the enemy of the United States. I titled this section "The Era of the Muslim" because

this has been a shared sentiment amongst several of the participants and has signified the recognition of the problematic nature of past and present U.S. foreign policy. Also, it indicates that at least some of the participants are aware that because of 9/11/01, the definition of being a Muslim has changed, especially in the United States. This Era of the Muslims sets the tone for the rest of the chapter that will describe the different forms of backlash and repression faced by the participants in this study.

ANTI-MUSLIM BACKLASH

In a supposedly “color-blind” and “post-racial” society where mainstream society believes that the United States has finally achieved a racial democracy, a wealth of empirical data and information has been collected that reveals quite the opposite about racial equality in the United States (Bonilla Silva 2006; Picca and Feagin 2007; Lewis 2003). The data collected in this project clearly indicates that racial injustices occur on a regular basis and that Muslims, South Asians, and Arab Americans are increasingly falling victim to multi-level forms of backlash. Therefore, the following sections will describe the various manifestations of backlash against the participants in this study.

Hyper-Surveillance

The overt forms of racism and discrimination that were prevalent during the Jim Crow era have increasingly diminished at least within the public sector of the United States. However, the majority of the participants have experienced overt, bigoted forms of racism since the attacks of 9/11. Some experiences have been more life threatening than others; yet, each instance has been traumatic to each participant. The issue of increased and intrusive surveillance of the Muslim communities across the country has

become a major component of the anti-Muslim backlash. Unfortunately, however, the experiences of some of the participants that were interviewed demonstrates that the extent of the surveillance has elevated to forms of hyper-surveillance in which even Muslim youth fell victim to this repressive form of social control.

This phenomenon of hyper-surveillance often times is a result of the white supremacist construct of the *myth of the dormant Muslim* terrorist. To reiterate, the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist is a self-fulfilling prophecy constructed by whites that treats all Muslims as potential terrorists, which thus warrants the use of preventative policing strategies. The experience of one participant demonstrates the power of the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist in policing the Muslim community. When asked if he had ever experienced discrimination due to being a Muslim, a 19-year-old male Sunni Muslim from Palestine at University A respondent stated:

Yes! I don't know if you have ever heard of an 8th grader or a freshman. A kid in [his] freshmen year of high school having the FBI coming to visit them. But I had a FBI agent come to visit me at home cause one of my teachers, actually she said some things to the FBI that I was quote un quote planning to do. And [the accusations were] completely false. Completely false, and she was reprimanded by the school principal and the district and she admitted that what she said was wrong. And she was... She was fired. But yeah.

Again, this is a good example of how young Muslims were victims of hyper-surveillance. In this case, there is a female teacher who is most likely white that had the power to construct a story about an 8th grader and report it to the FBI. The fact that the

teacher was fired most likely indicates that the teacher did not notify or turn to the principal or administration before inciting a full FBI investigation of a student. When asked to explain in further detail as to what his teacher accused him of, the participant stated:

She said, I, she didn't specifically say what I wanted to do. I mean it never came to me personally; it went straight to the FBI. I really never... I never really got the story straight from the FBI. They just told me that you were planning on. I don't want to say bombing. But they planned on me...destroying something. I, they never fully classified what it was, but they said that she received a...I gave her a very threatening vibe after 9/11. And I always thought I was very friendly with this teacher, and I never in my life said anything... First of all, anything that happened on 9/11 I never agreed with. And she just basically told them that I was jumping for joy after the attacks.

Again, we can see the power of the myth in this example. The participant's teacher reported to the FBI that she received a "vibe" from the participant that caused her to be suspicious of him. The fact that there was no concrete evidence makes this myth so powerful; no evidence is needed, a simple feeling of suspicion will suffice to warrant an FBI investigation of the Muslim community, no matter how young they are. When further questioned as to why he believed his teacher accused him, the participant responded:

Well that Tuesday morning. I remember, it was a Tuesday morning my principal came in and told us what had happened. . .I had the look of disbelief just like the

rest of the class. But for the rest of the day she was giving me dirty looks. I didn't know why. I guess she was mad at the Arab people or the Muslims I don't know. But she just was giving me dirty looks. And she and I had always had a very cordial relationship. But after that, she just really never looked at me the same. She just, for instance like on tests and stuff she would mark off things she normally wouldn't. Papers, she would find things to slam me on. Just very unjust.

The participant is painfully recalling just how difficult it was for young Muslim children in school after 9/11/2001. Indeed, it is the nature of the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist that when Timothy McVeigh carried out a terrorist attack in Oklahoma City, young white males were not being held responsible for the attack. However, young Muslims all over the country were subjected to this type of paranoia and hyper-surveillance from teachers, administrators, and other forms of authority and carried the burden of an event that had nothing to do with them.

In another interview with a 19-year-old Sunni Muslim Palestinian male from University A, the question was asked if there had ever been an instance where he had been blatantly discriminated against because of his religious affiliation. The participant emphatically responded "Yes!". After being asked to describe the instance, the participant began the conversation saying:

. . . A person, [be]cause my name is [Ahmad] and I am a Muslim, he said, "you terrorist, you bunch of these things." . . . Because of my religion he attacked me, it was purely discrimination and he reported me to the NSA [National Security Agency]. Yeah he sent me...a message on facebook. . .with some religious

discrimination, so I replied with a peaceful message, and told him you know, this is not right what you are saying. The stereotypes are not true of me at all, and, some of them, that you pointed at me could be true of you, but I would not say them about you however, so you should, you shouldn't say stuff then. I told him, I asked God that he has [be guided on the right path]. He got angry and started, made more religious discrimination because I told him you shouldn't have these stereotypes of all people because of their religion, and as a result he contacted the NSA and told them that I was going to blow up the Sears Tower for example. And then, the FBI came and they arrested me [in my] class. . . [T]hey [FBI] asked me some questions, you know like why, they took all of my emails and everything about that, they told me like, what do you do with these, asked some questions personally about me just to know, to make sure.

The respondent was escorted from his college biology lab, interrogated in the campus security office for three and a half hours. It is important to note that the respondent didn't have an attorney present and from what the respondent shared, he did not mention whether or not he was read his rights, offered an opportunity to call his parents, or have any type of counsel.

These cases of hyper-surveillance involving the FBI are more elevated forms of hyper-surveillance; hyper-surveillance can also manifest in more seemingly innocuous forms of being watched by the white gaze. For example, when asked the question what determines a Muslim "look," one 20-year-old Sunni Muslim male of Pakistani descent from University B respondent stated:

The person will have to look Middle Eastern because every time somebody meets me for the first time always asks me if I am Arab. . . Since I am keeping the beard, I feel like. . . I am being watched, like not watched but I mean, like people just looking at me, or I am being stared at. . . I was in the elevator this morning, and people were looking at me on my way to class. . . I just ignored it, I was just like whatever because I am doing this for myself, keeping the beard for myself, [and] so I don't need anybody's approval in doing that. And, probably something else, is, you know, probably tall, my age is, you know 20-30's, and, has some sort of good educational background, because most of the people you see who are terrorists that are on TV have some sort of educational background in probably law or some sort of science field, or, aviation, that kind of stuff.

While explaining that for Muslim men, the beard has become a symbol of religious identity, this participant recalled an incident that happened to him that day of feeling as if he was being stared at and under the scope of others because he also had a beard.

Attacks, Verbal Harassment, Vandalism and Violence

Again, the nature of this backlash against the Muslim community has manifested in many different ways. The majority of the participants in this study recounted personal experiences of being verbally harassed, had property vandalized, their mosques attacked, etc. For example, a 19-year-old Sunni Muslim male of Indian descent from University B was describing an instance where he had been discriminated against because of his religion and stated:

Yeah, I remember the actual, the night of September 11th we, I was watching the news then they started to say that Osama bin Laden started to do that, so I was like Oh Crap it's going to be a Muslim thing now. So then usually at that time, my brother and me would always go to the mosque on Tuesday, we would always go there to pray Isha, the last prayer [of the day], so this night my brother was kind of like maybe we shouldn't go. And I was like whatever man I don't care, whatever happens, happens. So then we went and we were walking, we parked the car and crossed the street to go into the Mosque and then some guy just happened to see us and he just yelled out like "Damn Terrorist" or something like that and then he just drove away.

The experience of this participant demonstrates again the notion of the Era of the Muslim because his first reaction to being told by the news that Osama bin Laden was behind the destruction of the world trade centers was "it's going to be a Muslim thing now." Moreover, as this individual was on his way to prayer with his brother, he was verbally harassed by being called a terrorist by a person driving past them. Indeed, many participants shared similar encounters in which people yelled things such as "terrorist" at them.

Another common pattern that emerged from the data was that the property of the participant's or their family were damaged or vandalized after 9/11/2001. For example, in response to the question of whether there has ever been any instance in which you felt discriminated against, one 20-year-old Sunni Muslim male of Pakistani descent from University A stated:

Yeah, especially in, I was in, like right after 9/11 had happened, people, I don't know who did it but, I remember my father would have this company car, that he didn't own, it was just a company car he would get it changed every... couple of months. And a couple of days after 9/11, they came and slashed his tires, broke all the windows...threw threatening letters into our mailbox and that kind of stuff. And...spray painted our house... So just seeing that, and also, and when we went, one time my sister, she always used to wear the headscarf and somebody actually tore it off of her head while going to class. And ever since she stopped wearing it, because she was so, scared of wearing, putting it back on her head, that it might happen again.

This participant was able to catalogue a series of experiences of backlash without hesitation in one stream of consciousness. Not only was his father's company car vandalized, but their house was spray painted, they had threatening letters sent to their house, and his sister had an encounter in which her headscarf was physically torn off of her head while in school. The participant's sister's headscarf speaks loudly about the particular experiences of Muslim women after 9/11/2001 and will be discussed in the following section. Unfortunately, these instances were in no way isolated after 9/11/2001 and many participants shared similar encounters of property damage and vandalism.

However, the backlash against Muslim women after the 9/11 attack is underreported and unacknowledged. When asked the question about her experiences with religious discrimination a 19-year-old Sunni Arab Muslim woman from University B] recalled a frightening experience at her suburban Islamic school. She stated:

[The school] had to be shut down for a week after 9/11 because there were riots outside of my school and someone had phoned in a bomb threat and so our school had to get shut down for a week...Because the school is located in a highly populated Muslim community, random people from the neighborhoods were rioting outside of my school. It got so bad that the mayor of the city organized a ring of supporters around the school.

The everyday threats, verbal and physical attacks against Muslim women and children cannot be underestimated or discounted. A research study done after 9/11 provided alarming evidence that Muslim American women, after the 9/11 attacks, experienced an unprecedented rise in the number of premature births that are directly connected to the racism and discrimination they experienced after 9/11. The research provides undisputed evidence that there are clear physical consequences for Muslim Americans that experienced backlash from the 9/11 attack.

Backlash against Muslim Women

These types of incidents were very common amongst the participants, incidents where participants felt victim to racial epithets or being called “terrorists.” However, a pattern that emerges from the data is that Muslim women fell victim to this type of backlash more frequently and in more threatening ways. For example, when asked if there had ever been any instance since 9/11/2001 that you have been blatantly discriminated against because of your head dress, one 22-year-old Sunni Muslim Latina participant from University A stated:

Yeah,, I was actually on the bus once going up north from my house on North and Pulaski in Humbolt Park and I was taking the bus up North, and, I remember right on Irving Park and Pulaski, the guy got off, but there was a time frame, he was just bashing everybody, like every ethnicity on the bus, and he was Latino. First he started bashing this black girl and, she completely ignored him, and then I heard him say something about me!, and I was the only Muslim on the bus, obviously, in the neighborhood and I looked back, I didn't give him a dirty look, I just looked back and looked at him and then I just kept sitting on the bus. And, he started saying really dirty things to me that were very sexual, very hurtful, and saying things like, I mean, my husband's going to dominate me, I am not going to be educated, we should go bomb your country, and I just tripped and I just looked at him and I'm like you're going to bomb Puerto Rico? And, I remember my heart was pounding so much and I felt so angry, and he just kept bashing me and just saying some really dirty things to me, and right on Irving Park, I guess the woman he was with kind of grabbed him, and I smiled at him when he was getting off the bus, and that just ticked him off so much he was going to come hit me, and the woman grabbed him and he started swearing at me and I kept smiling, and I remember I just sitting there, and thinking how quickly that it happened, and so people on the bus were speaking in Spanish and they were saying, like you know why was he doing that to her she wasn't doing anything, she was quietly sitting in the bus, and I spoke back and I said yeah I didn't do anything, you see, and I spoke back in Spanish, did you see what kind of... what

that is, that's not, I didn't do anything. And I, it's very interesting that one of the guys asked me he said are you a Hija De Maria, and Hija De Maria is this very Hispanic thing in Roman Catholicism, where girls vow to maintain their chastity until they are married, and usually they do a headscarf more like nuns kind of, and it was just very interesting that he thought that was that. And I said no I am actually Muslim, so he... was right I was Muslim but I'm not an Hija De Maria.

When further asked if she felt as if these types of threatening moments are isolated incidents or if it indicates a larger ignorance about Islam within the American public, she stated "I think it happens, and you know people don't really know about it. I, I filed a complaint with CAIR [Council on American-Islamic Relations] because I was really upset that they bus driver didn't do anything because I saw him looking from his rear view mirror and I was really upset, I got off on Bryn Mawr, I remember getting off on Bryn Mawr, and I told the bus driver, I was like you didn't help me out bro, and I got off. He didn't say anything, he was African American." The experience of this one participant is indeed a powerful insight into the threat that Muslim women who wore the hijab or any type of head covering faced after 9/11/2001.

In another interview with an 18-year-old Sunni Muslim female of Pakistani descent from University A, when asked the same question as the previous respondent, this participant responded:

Yeah..in high school, I came from an Islamic private school and I remember my first day of high school, I was just terrified because first I wasn't wearing a uniform, I wasn't wearing a hijab, the head scarf, and I just thought, and it was, it

was the year after 9/11. So, I thought that people were going to look at me as a stereotype and a misconception and just, you know throw their abuse at me, and,, especially in Evanston because Evanston, not many Muslim students, there was only one other Muslim girl, Pakistani in my graduating class. And my brothers were the only other Muslims I knew in the entire school so, I just thought, and especially with this huge Jewish population in Evanston and this huge black population in Evanston, I just, I was scared that, people are going to be really rude to me. And, that actually did happen when I tried out a hijab one day, in sophomore year and, I remember the first day I put it on, people in the hallway started yelling out Bin Laden, and you know really rude comments and, I went to the student center, somebody tripped me. And, I guess I had my feelings really hurt, but that didn't stop me.

We see in this excerpt that this Muslim woman not only had to deal with the pressures and fear of going from a private Islamic school to a public high school but also had to worry about being targeted because of her religious affiliation. As she recounted, the first day she tried to wear the hijab to school, she was verbally harassed and physically tripped by her classmates. When asked further about other instances in which she or anyone else in her family was discriminated against, the participant stated:

Yeah, a lot, my mother especially when, if we're out, because my mom, obviously looks like a traditional Pakistani mother, and people just, you know, I remember once when we were in Dominick's this, one, some lady, just yells out, and she. We were in, in the line, and some, some lady just yells out go back to

where you came from. And my mother turns around, and, the lady starts yelling at her for no reason, it didn't make any sense, but luckily there was another Uncle, (laughs) right there, so he told my mom, just calm down, don't say anything, and we just walked away. It was, it was rude, it didn't make any sense why she was saying that, but it happened.

These experiences of Muslim mothers being harassed in grocery stores or carrying out daily errands were not uncommon within the data that was collected. The frequency of these attacks that were reported throughout the country further indicates the particular experiences of Muslim women facing backlash after 9/11/2001.

Micro-Aggressions

Another form of backlash that was common within the data was the experience of micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions are defined as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano, Ceja, Yosso 2000:60). In the case of some of these Muslim participants, however, many of these cases of micro-aggressions seemed to be less than subtle and unconscious. For example, when asked if anything had happened on the university's campus in which someone was discriminated against because of their religious affiliation or physical features, one Arab male participant responded:

I think when you get to the university level, people start maturing a little bit, I mean in their minds they are not mature, but I mean you start getting to that age when you know what to say and when to say it, you are not going to outright discriminate against somebody but people do people they sometimes they don't

think I'm Arab or Muslim so they will feel free to say something and I mean. I got it one time if I can digress a little bit, but I was going to a [Wildcats] game and it was negative 8 below wind-chill, the wind-chill, and they were patting everybody down and some guy turned around and looked straight at me I was probably maybe one of maybe 15 Muslims in the whole stadium and he looks at me and says, "It's too cold for" he used a derogatory term for homosexual "terrorists." I just looked at him and he's like "they are used to all that sand." I just I mean this was while I was at [University A] but nothing on campus [that] I can remember.

In another interview, when asked how he feels when Islam is a topic of conversation amongst people that are not Muslim, one South Asian male participant stated:

When I first initially hear it I think I realize, I kind of get a little tense, but I quickly like you know, ease down, calm down, even if they say something negative or positive I don't get, I never really get heated, cause I know that that's just their opinion and I think they have the right to express their opinion. J.S. Mill taught us that everybody has a certain opinion and you can't try to prohibit that person's opinion because whether you like it or not there could be certain truths to their statements. Whether it's bad or good. Like for instance you can't prohibit a KKK rally even though you think that from the core of your soul that its blatant racism, you still can't prohibit them from doing that, because they still have the right to do whatever they could, because they are not really harming anyone. So if somebody would say something negative towards Islam or

something like that, I could just, I would be tense, but I would try to in the most civilized way I could try to retort that response or just calmly argue with them.

But never take it into a heated battle.

We see in this excerpt that there is a physical tenseness or tension that arises within the Muslim when Islam is being discussed within a classroom setting or any other setting amongst non-Muslims. As demonstrated by the experience of this participant, this tenseness arises out of the need to counteract or debunk misconceptions or lies about Islam and Muslims. It would be important for further research to explore how Muslims deal with this issue ten years after the 9/11/2001 and whether or not Muslims have become accustomed to being on guard to protect their religion and identity.

In another interview, an 18-year-old Sunni Muslim male of Pakistani descent from University A answered the question of whether any of his family members had any experiences of being attacked or discriminated against by stating:

Oh my mom could probably say something because I remember, one time I was, my mom and my sister and I we were at a... Jewel or a Dominick's and we were waiting in line and, my mom forgot to grab to something, and my mom told me to wait in the cashiers line and she'll go grab, you know whatever she forgot, I forgot what it was too, and so she comes back and there was this lady behind us, and then, the lady to my mom "excuse me ma'am you cut us". And my mom said, no my son and my daughter are waiting right here, I just forgot something, so I am sorry you know if you think that what I did was cut you, and then the woman just started yelling and screaming, like oh you Muslims, you know you

think what you can do whatever you want, you come here and take our jobs, and take our education and just like ruin you know ruin everything, and my mom just like listened, my mom was listening to this and she just like, do you have any idea of what you are even saying, you are not even, you have no idea what kind of struggles we have been through, especially my family, and just knowing that, you just, just for us to know that you can't even relate to that, and, just you know just like dumb stuff like that, it's just completely unnecessary, you know, people did, they just, it's because of the lack of you know, knowledge that they have here, through, I would say mainly cause of the media, you know, they are always insulating things, always, always, always, and they never put you know, give like, any sort of positive images, anything like, it's always negative, like never seemed to be good.

Again, these experiences of micro-aggressions as they apply to the Muslim community tend not to be subtle or unconscious, rather somewhat overt and deliberate. Nonetheless, these experiences make a big impact on the victims of these encounters. In their efforts to deal with these types of encounters, many Muslims have taken on the role of defending Islam and representing it in a different light, thereby leading to a conversation on the next pattern identified within the data.

THE MUSLIM REPRESENTATIVE

A trend that has been identified amongst a relatively large portion of the participants is that they have been frequently asked questions about their religion or culture by their peers and professors in order to negate or justify their perceptions about

Muslims. This is a very common issue that most under-represented minorities face in settings of higher education. According to Ceja, Solorzano, and Yosso (2000), studying African American men and women in higher education, state that “[t]he students noted that being a member of a racial minority on their predominantly White campuses placed them in a position where they were perceived by others to represent the voice of their entire race. Steele and Aronson (1995) identify this "spokesperson pressure" as a part of stereotype threat. An African American male student explained it in the following manner” (2000:69). When asked to recall a specific instance where he had felt discriminated against because of his religious affiliation, one 21-year-old Sunni Muslim male of Indian descent from University A responded:

Maybe once in high school. But the thing is that, I know this person who was in theology class, he went to Loyola Academy also, and they started talking about Islam and what not. And they were talking about it in a negative light. I don't think that she meant it intentionally. Just, they were talking about Jihad or something, (pause) and so since I was the only Muslim in the class, it made it seem like I was responsible for all of the, just because I was the closest correspondent to the people that did Jihad, I mean that's wrong, I mean like unintentionally killing people, innocent people, I mean intentionally killing innocent people. So bringing that up and me being the only Muslim in class it made it seem like I had a connection with them, but obviously I didn't but I guess yeah.

This particular incident is interesting because this participant felt that being Muslim made the class view him as directly or indirectly responsible for the actions of a small group of Muslims that allegedly destroyed the world trade centers. This section is titled “The Muslim Representative” to elucidate the daily pressures that Muslim students face in spaces that are supposed to accommodate students by providing safe spaces of learning and growth. Instead, Muslim students are being asked to justify themselves and their very existence to their peers, educators, authority figures and society as a whole. There are different ways in which these Muslim participants have dealt with and responded to these external pressures, some of which include representing Islam, difficulty defending Islam, compromising Islam, and at times accepting the blame for how Islam has been demonized. Moreover, there are different types of coping mechanisms that are presented within the data in regards to how some of these participants come to terms with and cope with their experiences.

Representing Islam

Muslims have become the representatives of their communities throughout the U.S. whenever they leave the sanctity of their homes and interact with their larger society. This reality can manifest in different ways; however, Muslims in this study shared stories about being the only Arab or Muslim in their circle of friends and automatically were assigned to be the token representative, while others actively set out to disprove the misconceptions and educate others about Islam. I begin this section with a particular experience of the one 22-year-old Latina participant from University A in this study to contextualize the experiences of the other participants within a larger

context of racial oppression against nonwhites. When asked to share her experiences with friends in high school, this participant stated:

High school was a huge changing point for me because I went so far north on Bryn Mawr and Kedzie which is really on the north side, and I have never gone that far north in my life. So, high school was like a culture shock., where I was the first time interacting with white peers and Asians, and actually, I remember my, when my mom was around, she would tell me just like, make sure you're on your best behavior, you are representing the Puerto Ricans, you are representing us. So high school was definitely a culture shock, and definitely, hard to say but I had this huge inferiority complex when I went to high school.

This experience of her mother telling her to be on her best behavior reflects the response of parents that understand that minority children are always being judged, under constant surveillance, and held responsible for the actions of the entire community. Thus, the pressure for being a representative for the community comes from parents and loved ones as well, with the intentions of preventing any hardships for their children. Again, this quote helps to situate the experiences of the other Muslims in this study who themselves were part of other racial minority groups within a conversation about how racial minorities as a whole experience this type of pressure. For example, in response to the question of whether he had to explain his religious beliefs to anyone, one 19-year-old Sunni Muslim Palestinian male from University A shared:

When it first happened, I was in 8th grade, I did because, again where I grew up, my friends would, I mean people were asking... I was a part of the crowd, I was

one of the popular kids, I was always in the crowd, I was the only Arab in school... I was kind of like a circus act, but I mean everyone was cool with it...I always surrounded myself with good people. And I mean, just my friends were always there for me. But...one time my dad heard me talking to somebody and he said, "What are you doing? Why are you justifying?" You know, why are you trying to like, he's like you know your religion, he's like be proud of it, don't ever feel like you have to explain anything to anyone, he's like if they come to you in a manner where they want to learn, then you teach them, don't try to, don't try to correct them when they come to you in a manner, I mean. Do, do correct them when they come to you with ignorance, but don't try to say "oh it's because of this that we do that" you know "it's because of the Qur'an you know you're suppose to" he's like don't, don't, if they come to you in a hostile manner, just tell them, may peace be with you, you know when you come to me in a manner where you want to learn or where you want to higher your education in Islam come to me in that manner, he's like don't feel like you have to explain yourself. So ever since then, no.

We see within this quote a very complex and powerful statement on how being the only Arab in school made this person feel that it was necessary to be a caricature of his true self. Also within this quote is how Muslim parents dealt with and coped with their children being subjected to discrimination and backlash. This young Muslim, as an eighth grader, had become the representative for the entire Muslim community. It would be

important for further research to try to understand the psychological impacts that this type of backlash has had on Muslims who came to age after 9/11/2001.

Another manifestation of representing Islam comes in the form of Muslim participants actively negating misconceptions and teaching others about Islam with the hopes of curbing ignorant and discriminatory actions. For example, when asked if any non-Muslim has ever asked the participant about his religion, one 21-year-old Sunni Muslim male of Pakistani descent participant from University B responded:

It's, I mean I have had a couple interesting ones, I remember somebody in my first year in public school ask me if I was Muslim, and then I said yes I am. And then he asked me if I was related to Osama Bin Laden. And, I had told him that you know, I do not want to associate myself with such people because they are the ones that are giving my religion and my people a bad name. And, from there, we started talking about my beliefs, and how I live my life as a Muslim, in especially in you know in a Western culture like America. And after that, he realized how much of a struggle it is for Muslims to live in such, in such a way, especially in Islam, Muslims, because we are living with a double consciousness, we have to live with the strictness at home, and become good Muslims at home, and then we have to become like... our friends here, become socially open ... talk to girls, get to know people...sometimes they may include drinking and having girlfriends, or having boyfriends stuff like that, so it's, that was the type of discourse we had, and, the main aspects that everybody keeps talking about is

about marriage, and the social life, not really about the religious practices, because that's mainly what they are concerned about.

What this participant is talking about reflects the experiences of many young Muslims who were confronted with having multiple, often times conflicting, realities of being Muslim and living in a non-Muslim society. In another interview, when asked if the participant had ever experienced discrimination due to his religion, one 19-year-old Sunni Muslim Arab male from University A responded:

I always made sure I surrounded myself with good people so I mean I really haven't ever since, I mean kids are kids, some kids in high school would be calling me like terrorist this and that, but they were taken care of, put in their place when I told them, when I taught them about Islam, and they felt like idiots afterwards, but I still talk to these people to this day, and but I mean my aunts tell me all the time they say that they will be driving or something and someone just rolls down the window and yells "go home you effing terrorist" this and that, I mean I hear stories all the time.

This particular participant shared that despite surrounding himself with good people, he still confronted racial and religious discrimination by being called the racially charged term "terrorist." Similar to the other participants in this section, this respondent chose to become a representative for Islam and teach his harassers about Islam. Moreover, what this participant is illuminating is the reality of many Muslims who are told stories from their relatives, friends, parents, siblings, etc. about their experiences of facing anti-Muslim backlash in the forms of micro-aggressions, verbal harassment, property

damage, racial discrimination and physical violence. One participant, an 18-year-old South Asian female, Sunni Muslim from University A recalls how she dealt with similar harassment and backlash at school:

I started a the Islam Awareness Group that same year because I felt like, when people discriminate against me, I don't, I don't get mad or get back at them, I, I guess I feel like I should educate them because I think it's stupid and they don't know what they are talking about. So I started that group just to, show the true light of what, of what it is, why I am wearing this, you know, just to explain myself, and then yeah, and I guess that's when it stopped.

This participant felt as if she needed to be the educator of all her peers to the extent that she began a group to educate people so that the harassment and backlash would cease. In many ways, this was her way of coping with the backlash.

In another interview with a 34-year-old Sunni Muslim female graduate student at University A, when asked if non-Muslims ask her about her religion and her personal beliefs, she responded:

Typically if it's somebody that I don't know, sure, I mean most of my friends now know, you know what I mean like, I, you know especially my American friends, like they're, they know about, you know, what Muslims are like, through exposure to me and you know, . . . most of them came to my wedding, which was a very large Muslim wedding, you know, my husband's, family you know aren't, they're not religious you know, they're very liberal, kind of hippies from Maine, so, when we got married, like they learned a lot about it, so I feel like it depends,

but yeah I mean, I was at a work dinner party and I met my co-worker's husband and, he all of a sudden, like had a, you know, many, sometimes I get this, you tell somebody, oh you're you know you're Muslim, oh and then they want to sit you down and ask you, well don't Muslims believe in this, it says it in the Qur'an right? You know, like Muslims believe in dying for you know, religion, and then you're put in this like sort of defensive position where you have to, you know, sort of deconstruct the stereotypes that they have in their mind, and it's very difficult and yeah it's frustrating, you could, sometimes you're like I just came to my work party, I just wanted to be at my work without but, I'd rather talk to me about it then, and get a different perspective, than hold on to those stereotypes.

This participant, although it sometimes frustrates her to always be answering questions or clearing up misconceptions, is representative of many of the participants in this study that believe that it is better that they answer these questions or debunk certain myths about Islam than let non-Muslims rely on stereotypes or other institutional forces like the media or U.S. government for answers about Islam.

***Difficulty Defending Islam/
Compromising Religion and Political Views***

According to the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice's report *Entrapped*, "[m]-any Muslims—or those perceived to be Muslim—have intentionally altered how they practice or manifest their religion. For example, many have altered their physical appearance or dress, curtailed public prayer or worship, changed their names, or now avoid the discussion of politically-charged topics" (2011:44).

Accordingly, a few participants shared frustrations during their interviews about how the

political climate in the U.S. has changed and become so hostile to Muslims that have caused them to be less outspoken about their religious or political beliefs. This section is titled “Difficulty Defending Islam” because these participants shared moments when they felt defeated for not being able to be more vocal about their frustrations without there being serious punitive repercussions. When asked about what one 19-year-old Sunni Muslim male Palestinian from University A believed caused a change in how Americans viewed Islam, the participant responded by saying the media had a role in this and then continued to state:

I mean, really for example the people in the United States they always...for example I myself, I will owe many of the freedoms I have to the African American culture. And I think every minority group in the United States owe it too. Why because of the Civil Rights movement was started by the African American culture. So because they stood up for it in the 70's and they showed that they you know, they did not like this, and people sacrificed their lives this, you know for this cause, people understand that attacking, for example before the Civil Rights movements, people would do that about the African American culture, nobody would talk, or nobody would react that crazily, but after the Civil Rights movement, people would think twice about what they say, because they know it's wrong, and it has been publicly announced as wrong. So politicians change their view because of that. But for example, there, there hasn't been a big civil rights movement for the Muslim people yet.

When asked why in his opinion there hasn't been a civil rights movement for Muslims in this country, the same participant responded:

Because of, Muslim people are oppressed, I mean the African American culture in the beginning, I'm sure that there were people that were active, but they were oppressed. For example, if I stand up for the Muslim community, I could be taken to jail, right now at the current moment, and nobody could, I can't say anything about it. And they just put you in jail in the U.S. How about, maybe in the future, these circumstances maybe, wouldn't you know, all this bad oppression, this much would go down a little bit, and people would not be afraid to stand up for their rights, and to perform movements...There is a lot of active Muslims, but they are afraid to go publicly, or there is big people that stop them from going public. But at the African American time, I mean, it took the African American culture, it was a long process until they got I mean, I didn't come in a day they, because they were here before the Muslims obviously, a long time. So I am sure they tried to stand up for their rights for a long time, but they were held down, but after a while, they were able to stand for their rights.

These excerpts were important to emphasize because the participant recognizes that his citizenship rights in this country are owed to the struggle of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement who fought for equal representation under the law. However, this participant revealed the real threat that Muslims faced and continue to face in being too outspoken or vocal about the conditions of Muslims in the U.S. and around the world. As the participant stated, there is the threat of being imprisoned, deported, and

stripped of their rights at any moment. This sentiment is representative of the power and debilitating impact of the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist.

Moreover, the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice's report also stated "the effects of targeted surveillance and discrimination against the Muslim community have had serious implications for both the freedom of religion (Article 18) and the freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19). Many American Muslims are unable to practice their religion freely and are constrained in their ability to express their religious and political views without fear" (2011:44). One participant in this study, a 19-year-old Sunni Muslim Arab male from University A, shared about how the backlash against Muslims in this country led to changes he made in how he practiced his faith. In response to the question if 9/11/2001 impacted his life in any way, he stated:

It actually changed the way I talk, for example I was more open about my opinions before hand [but] after hand I might not be as open about my opinion as much because people might take it in the wrong way. And you don't want people to take it in the wrong way. I mean, it affects my freedom, because you have freedom of speech but now if you say something your opinion, people might consider you a terrorist, or a bad person, although it was just your opinion, and opinions do change when you are corrected. So you gotta, you watch what you say you watch how you act. For example I would have prayed anywhere, I used to pray like, I was a lot more open about prayer I would go pray, but now I wouldn't really openly pray. Now I do, but right in the beginning [after 9/11] I

wouldn't because people might take it, might think ok this guy might do something. So it affected me.

In another interview with a 19-year-old Arab Sunni Muslim male participant from University A, when asked if he hangs out with his Christian friends the same way as he would hang out with his Muslim friends, he responded:

With my Muslims friends, I'm a lot more, aggressive, (chuckles). Like my political views and my religious views because I would consider for example a Muslim friend as a person who has adopted my basic views so I'd go a little bit more on the extreme side, because it's within our, I'm extreme within my sect [Sunni Muslim], but then when I go outside, I try to represent the majority of the Muslims, so I don't present my personal views, I present the right Muslim views, which are the more moderate views.

As the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice's report reminds us, "[t]he ICCPR [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] guarantees the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and to freedom of opinion and expression" (2011:43). However, as we see with the experiences of these Muslim participants, these rights have been under severe attack within the Muslim communities around the country.

It's Our Fault

The last section of the Muslim Representative deals with the manner in which many of the participants have rationalized and in many ways internalized the blame for the severity of the backlash against the Muslim communities after 9/11/2001. In

response to the question of why people have a negative view towards Islam, a 19-year-old Sunni Muslim Arab male participant from University A responded:

Just what they see on the news pretty much, I mean they just, I mean look at the African American, they see somebody, like the average white person probably sees somebody on TV or in a show or something, an African American guy is robbing a bank, an African American guy in a music video is shooting a whatever, so I mean it's what people see is what they believe, and that's a shame because there's not enough positive influence from Muslims and it's our own fault, it's our own fault, that people think that, it's no one but ours, I mean I did feel sorry for Muslims maybe a year after 9/11 but its honestly our fault, Muslims are, you see Muslims every day, I was just studying right now, I'm the only one who's Pre-law amongst a group of maybe 15 future doctors, and lawyers, they make money, why aren't there channels out there being sponsored by Muslims to get the word out to the average American who sees on 14 different channels a negative view of Muslims, yes it is a shame that it has to be that way, but you know Muslims too have to change over time. And it's our own fault.

It is clear that this participant feels as though the Muslim community is responsible for the negative backlash against Islam because of the lack of organization within the community of not countering the misconceptions and falsehoods that have been spread about Islam after 9/11/2001. Another participant, when asked if whether his own views about his religion have changed since 9/11/2001, responded by stating:

I think it's been negative because the Muslims haven't been handling it well, like with this whole Denmark, the thing about...the cartoons or whatever, and whatever else just happened to happen, Muslims are always, they start riots and stuff like that. And that's the stupidest thing I have ever seen because instead of doing it peacefully and showing how true Islam would be, they go and they start riots and stuff, that's just making Muslims worst, worst off. So who would want to convert to Islam?

Moreover, when asked what needs to be done in order to better the image of Muslims and Islam, one South Asian male respondent stated:

(Sighs) What do I think needs to be done? First, many of the problems that arise, I believe are because Muslims are straying from the right path, and being influenced by, you know materialism, and all these things that Islam forbids. The first thing that we...should do is change ourselves. The second thing that we need to do is... I mean show the public that they're wrong, and stand up for what we believe in and speak out against any, in the first moment of discrimination we face. And explain not just stand up to them, and well you know, explain how Islam works.

What we see in this section is the extent to which this anti-Muslim backlash has led many participants to internalize the backlash and assume some sort of responsibility for the negative image of Islam and Muslims in the United States. Although these sentiments were shared as to the responsibility of the Muslim community in not doing enough to counter the backlash against Islam, the next section discusses the respondents'

views towards the actions of the media and U.S. government in constructing a negative image of Islam.

Media Portrayals of Muslims

The media has historically played an important role in perpetuating the racist attitudes of white supremacy towards racial and religious minority groups within the United States. This pattern does not stop when it comes to Muslims in the United States. According to Michelle Byng (2008),

Newspaper articles published between May 2002 and 2003 paint an informative picture of Islam and Muslims in the United States. If one did not know anything about Islam, these stories would tell one its rituals...[However], [a]ppearing parallel to the outline of “What is Islam?” and “Who are Muslims?” is another set of images. This set reveals the making of systemic social inequality against Muslim Americans. It is rationalized by projecting essentialist images that present Muslims and Islam as inherently and indelibly evil. (663)

It is safe to say that none of the participants in this study were unaware of this biased reporting in the media. For example, when asked the question of how the reputation of Islam changed since 9/11/2001, the one 22-year-old Sunni Muslim Latina from University A stated:

It’s sad but when people hear the word Islam, you think terrorism and I am like, the Unabomber was a Christian fundamentalist, how come they don’t think of Christian fundamentalism. There is just this whole idea of the other, the other side, and something that is totally different to people, I guess, I don’t know I

guess something people think that how can a religion encompass all aspects of society from your politics to the way you personally take care of yourself to the way you worship, I mean that is the beauty about Islam it covers every aspect of your life.

Interviewer: What do you think has fueled this change of reputation of Islam?

I think now the good thing is Muslims are definitely [being] more in the media, to try to teach people what Islam is, it's sad when there are certain cable networks that kind of have, people who are either on the extreme end of Islam, talking about Islam. Like some extremist Sheikh from like Iraq or something who, his views are totally not what the moderate Muslim, most moderate Sunni Muslim is. So I guess when certain cable networks have all of these people who are, at extreme ends and the American media think that we're all like that.

This particular respondent not only discusses how the media plays a role in constructing a polarizing image of Muslims and Islam as extremists but also how Islam has solely been conflated with terrorism.

When asked, if the government or the media assists in portraying an image of Muslims, an 18-year-old Sunni Muslim female of Pakistani descent from University B stated:

I don't know if you could say it's the government, I feel like it's the media. (pause) I mean if you turn on CNN, and all you hear about another suicide attack in Palestine on Israeli forces or something like that. You never hear the other side around. There's so much going on especially one of my really good friends lives

in Ramallah, and she's always telling me about all these crazy things, she has a curfew and everything and, you look at it differently and then you claim it to be something else and, it's not that...

In that same interview this participant responded to the question of how she would describe the way Muslims are portrayed on the news by stating:

I don't think we're portrayed [positively], every time I turn it on its always something wrong with the Muslim world or the Arab world, and I feel like there's never a chance for us to get in a good word about ourselves. And, I mean it's not just the, it's not just the Arab world, it's not, it's not only the Muslim world, I mean there's so many other parts of the [world] that are you know in the Muslim world, but they're just focusing on the Middle East. And I feel like that's another stereotype that all these people think that all Muslims are Arabs.

Similarly, another 20-year-old Sunni Muslim female of Pakistani descent from University B responded to the question of what the role of the media is in portraying an image of Muslims by stating:

I don't trust CNN anymore because every time I turn it on... I always get depressed, I always find something on wrong about, and, I mean it's good that they're covering that, but I feel like there's another side to it, you can't just be explaining just the bad side about it. And I go to BBC, BBC news.com and you know I find out the other side, or you know I have family overseas in Sudan and you know in the UAE, they call, they tell me what's going on you know. So, there's more to it and I feel like they're just putting out the bad.

Other participants in this study shared sentiments that are representative of the impact of the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist. For example, when asked whether the destruction of the world trade centers had an impact on his life, he responded:

Yeah I'd say, my life, no not directly, not directly my life, but the way I see things, yeah I'd say so. Well I mean like before I use to see a sister in a hijab or something and I would think that it was fine It's a sister in a hijab, but now when I see that, I, media is so perpetuating what their, idea that Islam is synonymous with terrorists then when I see them, they're to my mind, when I know that she is my sister in Islam, I think of her as you know a possibility of being like a terrorist, which is really stupid.

This is indeed a powerful quote that speaks to the influence of the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist on even influencing the way this Muslim male perceives Muslim women who wear the hijab. In another interview with a 21-year-old Sunni Muslim male of Indian descent from University A who was asked if the reputation of Islam had changed since 9/11/2001, he responded:

Yeah, I mean obviously there's like to me, there's like I said the media keeps perpetuating the fact that, Islam, even though they claim that they start off their with saying that Islam is, a religion of peace, and it should not be a...actually not, you shouldn't say all but the thing is that the media doesn't, I guess they are intentionally or non-intentionally, by showing all of these Muslims and these extreme traditional extremist Muslims that are doing these, terrorist bombings and you see how, they physically look even though yet the media says they

should not be equated with Islam, by their non-stop showing of Iran, of the non-stop showing on t.v. the American public, they subconsciously assume, and synonymous Islam and terrorism, even though the media...gives the one line and disclaimer.

This participant brings up the issue of the media offering superficial disclaimers about Islam being a religion of peace yet ultimately conflate Islam with terrorism through the images that they show. Similarly, another South Asian female participant noted the same sentiments when asked the same question by stating:

Yeah, and, (pause) again going along with the amount of terrorists and terrorists is synonymous with Muslim and Islam and you can turn off the t.v., the news, like the sound, and just look at the pictures when they're talking about terrorism and it's the deserts, the Mosques, its people praying, I mean those, those representations that go along with the segment that's on violence and terrorism, you know, or look at movies and see how you know, Muslims are, you know, violent Muslims are portrayed, they're always, they're always praying, there's the Azaan [call for prayer] in the background you know whatever. So, the perception has definitely become much more prominent and its much worst and, but at the same time, you know I'll say, maybe this is just me being in an academic circle, and in a liberal circle, and in Chicago, that it also seems like there are actually people trying to understand it a little bit better. You know, but that's smaller to the, I think the negative representation.

Many of the participants were aware of the process of making Islam synonymous with terrorism and violence and noted how the media has been responsible for contributing greatly to this process. Moreover, one South Asian male participant articulated that this process began well before 9/11/2001 by stating:

Mainly media coverage, because people...I remember talking to one of my Islamic studies teachers, he told me that during the 1970's people thought that Islam was an exotic religion, it dealt with fine carpets, and like, something you would see in Aladdin. But, ever since, 9/11, or like, I would probably say ever since from the first Gulf War, onwards, the coverage of Muslims has been seen as savages, terrorists, and it's, and it's still going that way, because you know, you see, yesterday in the news it talked about Iraq, and just, it's all negative, I don't see any positive coming out of the media supporting Islam, or saying that Muslims are people and things like that.

Government Portrayal of Islam

According to Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) “[i]mmmediately following the terrorist attacks, the government initiatives, a component of the “War on Terror,” set the standard for the treatment, or rather the mistreatment, of Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans...Some scholars have gone so far as to call them “state-sponsored terrorism””(4). When asked about the role of the government in portraying an image of Muslims, one 34 year old South Asian Sunni Muslim female graduate student at University A stated:

I am trying to remember this specific quote but like, politicians are centers who use it as, a platform on you know, war, or whatever, and... use Muslims as a threat to promote, you know, war in Afghanistan, or war in Iraq, or anywhere you know, who are, you know, supportive of the Patriot Act a, a very controversial law, and you know, using those stereotypes to, pass through, or to get support for those types of you know policies that curb civil liberties, not just of Muslims but of other people, you know, so people who promote you know the idea that speech shouldn't be free, that, if you disagree with the government, then like you know, you're a traitor or you're not supportive enough, or you're a threat, and then couple that with that stereotype that already exists. Or, Daniel Pipes, who goes around and teaches in the classroom, who, you know, is in any way sympathetic you know, to Palestinians you know, anyone who is like a Muslim, but you know, for political reasons.

Moreover, another 19 year old Sunni Arab male from University A shared a similar sentiment when responding to the question of what role the government has played in portraying an image of Muslims in the U.S. by stating:

I think this current administration. The bush administration does not sensitize with Muslims and is kind of fueling the hatred I think by recent actions. I think they are fueling the hatred...of Americans towards Muslims. By Bush's usage of the word Crusade, Holy War, and people just get that mentality that they are the enemy... One time I was asking some guy. He didn't know I was Arab or Muslim. He just said... he[was] like "those pigs, they are the enemies." And I just

looked at him and I said. I said. You know. I hope. There were so many things I wanted to say. So many things that I wanted to do at that point. But I just smiled at him and I said I think you are your own enemy because you do not know anything about you know about our culture. You don't know anything about. So I just left it at that. But I just think that the government is really not helping this matter.

This is a great example of a micro-aggression that was understood to be due to the political climate that was created by the Bush administration and its war on terror. It is unfortunate that in this particular moment in history where Muslims are facing tremendous pressure and backlash, Muslims feel that their own government is responsible for creating and perpetuating the backlash against the Muslim community.

The narratives shared in this chapter introduce us to a reality of American Muslims that is very different from the perception that is propagated by the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist. These narratives provide insight into how unique, diverse, and complex the Muslim community is. Moreover, the results in this chapter demonstrate that the categories of racial and religious discrimination become increasingly blurred when analyzing the Muslim experience in the United States. From the instances of hyper-surveillance of Muslim youth to the verbal harassment received by Muslims due to the conflation of having brown skin with terrorism, the discrimination faced by Muslims in this study reveal that markers of race and religion are inextricably tied together. Therefore, these results elucidate the need for social scientists to expand their

analyses of racism to incorporate a thorough analysis of the continued significance of white Christian supremacy in structuring racial oppression.

The subsection titled “Difficulty Defending Islam/Compromising Religion and Political Views” lays the foundation for the claim that the anti-Muslim Backlash (material dilemma) in general, and the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist in particular, works to better the interests of white supremacy domestically and U.S. imperialism abroad. This subsection reveals that the current climate in the United States has effectively deemed any criticism of the United States from the Muslim community to be treasonous and indicative of radical or extremist political views. Therefore, the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist and the anti-Muslim backlash has created a fear within the Muslim community, ultimately curtailing the expression of any political views that are critical of the United States. By instilling a real fear of deportation, detention, or long term incarceration within the Muslim community, the propagators of the myth have achieved their goal of politically silencing any real or substantial opposition from the Muslim community towards the U.S.’s imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and its controversial use of drone attacks in Pakistan. This fear has increasingly been reinforced by the numerous FBI entrapment cases and the introduction of “mosque-crawlers” into the Muslim communities around the country. Thus, the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist along with the hyper-surveillance of the Muslim community has silenced the leadership and the masses of the Muslim community, thereby curtailing any real political challenge to the continued threat of white supremacy and U.S. Imperialism on nonwhite populations at home and abroad.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

In this thesis, I have shown that the Muslim community in the United States is suffering not only from a physical dilemma which has resulted in racial violence and a multi-leveled form of backlash, but also an analytical dilemma in which the cause and nature of the backlash has not been effectively analyzed. The nature of the analytical dilemma is problematic because it has contributed to and exposed a lack of coherency and unity within the Muslim community in terms of its response to the backlash. This analytical dilemma has resulted in an ambiguous and amorphous analysis of the current political climate in the U.S. and the backlash against Muslims in its totality. On one hand, this anti-Muslim backlash is often referred to as Islamophobia, as is the case with the Center for American Progress' report, *Fear Inc* (2011). On the other hand, because this backlash is often times racially motivated and racially charged, the Muslim community has also rationalized this backlash as racism against Muslims. Therefore, this thesis problematizes the current literature on Muslims in the U.S. that does not address the process of racialization, the multi-leveled forms of violence against the Muslim communities, and the highly dangerous and politically charged conflation of Islam with terrorism.

Furthermore, the process of racialization is very important to emphasize because it is within this analysis that we can begin to understand why, after 9/11/2001, the Muslim community was not the only community that was under attack within the United

States. That is, the backlash against the Muslim community did not only target Muslim communities, rather, non-Muslim Arabs and South Asians, mostly Hindu or Sikh, also fell victim to the physical backlash. The theory of racialization allows us to problematize the manner in which religion and race are conflated, thereby creating a complex and volatile experience for those that are viewed as “Muslim-looking people.”

Throughout the thesis, I have conceptualized the limitations of the predominant sociological literature on racial oppression by analyzing non-Christian minority groups through those frameworks. The works of Bonilla-Silva (1997), Feagin (2010), and Mills (1999) offer powerful analyses for removing the concept of race and racism from the ideological level to the structural and systematic level. Although two (Feagin and Mills) of the three authors discuss the process in which Christianity began to be replaced by ideas of race, I have demonstrated that this notion of race replacing religion as the foremost tool of oppression leads to the normalization of Christianity within the racial structure. Moreover, Bonilla-Silva’s analysis of racial oppression is ultimately lacking a conversation about the role of religion in structuring racial oppression. I demonstrate that the Christian normativity embedded within the racialized social system is elucidated when examining a non-Christian, non-white minority population such as the Muslim population.

Furthermore, what my findings elucidate is that we must be more conscious of not treating racism as something separate from the hegemony of Christianity. As I stated earlier, we are able to identify and expose the Christian normative embedded within the racialized social system when analyzing non-Christian minority groups such as the

Muslim community. This normativity becomes apparent when we examine the manner in which Muslims have become conflated and synonymous with terrorists and terrorism. The racialization of Muslims and the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist work together to treat Muslims as a racial group who are genetically predisposed to committing acts of terror. This reality becomes apparent when we examine the way in which the term terrorist is only reserved for Muslims. That is, there is a blatant double standard for the use of the word terrorist in which Muslims are identified as terrorists but the terrorism carried out by whites is regarded as mentally ill or rogue behavior. However, even when we are analyzing the impacts of white supremacy on Christian minority groups, the Christian normative is still present and problematic. It was the aim of this study to extend the theoretical frameworks of scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (1997; 2003; 2006) whose analysis of the racialized social system is lacking a conversation on the significance and impact of Christianity as well as the works of Feagin and Mills who treat religion, particularly white Christianity, as an anachronistic form of oppression that has been replaced by racism.

The destruction of the world trade centers on September 11th, 2001 continues to be a defining moment in this country's history. Serving as the impetus for a broad scale justification for violence and warfare in the Middle East and North Africa, the United States has dichotomized the world into civilizations that value and love democracy and freedom and evil terrorists bent on destroying what the former cherish and value. The impact of this dichotomization of the world has had serious impacts on the Muslim communities across the U.S. that have been racialized as being dormant terrorists that

need the proper environmental stimulus to trigger their “terrorist gene.” The conflation of Islam and terrorism has not been a subtle process. Indeed, this process has been articulated through the divisive rhetoric of the corporate media and has been acted upon by law enforcement agencies such as the FBI and CIA. To believe that the Muslim community only suffered from backlash immediately after 9/11/2001 and that the backlash has subsided since then would be grossly inaccurate. The nature of this backlash has evolved into far more egregious forms. Ultimately, as the literature and as the participants in this study have articulated, the backlash against Islam and Muslims have effectively made being Muslim an act of terrorism.

During many of the interviews, the participants through their narratives described their confusion, frustration, and sense of distrust for the government and media that have criminalized their religion and have spread lies and misconceptions about who they are as followers of that faith. This distrust and sense of frustration has led many of the participants to deal with and respond to the backlash in certain ways. Some have taken advantage of the moment and have taken it upon themselves to debunk the falsehoods and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims by teaching others about their faith. The flip-side of this is that the broader American society has automatically assumed that the actions of a single individual Muslim reflect the thoughts and behaviors of *every* Muslim. In other words, Muslims have been held responsible for the destruction of the world trade centers simply because the alleged terrorists claimed to be Muslims. Other Muslims have found it difficult defending their faith. That is, the real and constant threat of imprisonment for being too outspoken or articulating political beliefs that are critical

of the United States has left some Muslims in a difficult position. Many have recognized that they must compromise their religion and or political beliefs to protect themselves from increased surveillance or physical backlash. In this thesis, I was able to uncover only a few ways in which Muslims have dealt with the backlash. Certainly, the broader Muslim population may have other methods in which they have responded to this anti-Muslim backlash.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

I think more social science research needs to be done to build a holistic analysis of racial oppression that explains the particular case of Muslims in the U.S. and the complex nature of the backlash that they have faced after 9/11/2001. Although the race critical theories of Bonilla-Silva and other sociologists effectively analyze racism as a system of oppression that has adversely impacted the life chances of racial minorities in the United States, their analyses lack a critical conversation about the continued significance of Christianity in structuring that racial oppression.

I think the ways in which these relatively young Muslims have been impacted by and dealt with the anti-Muslim backlash needs to be analyzed on a far greater scale. Indeed, the backlash has had a broader impact on Muslim communities across the country. Certain Muslim communities in New York and New Jersey have been under intense surveillance and repression by law enforcement agencies, thereby creating a particular experience that needs to be examined by social science research.

The myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist is indeed a real myth that has been constructed within the mind of white supremacist imperialism as a political tool for

maintaining the current racial order. The myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist has effectively conflated Islam and terrorism and has made being a Muslim an act of terrorism. Furthermore, this myth has allowed the United States to absolve itself from the campaign of terrorism it has carried out throughout this world. Moreover, the acts of terrorism that have been carried out by whites in this country have not been constructed as terrorism, thereby lending to the myth that only Muslims are capable of committing acts of terrorism. The larger impact of the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist must be analyzed further if we are to understand the total impact this myth has had on the Muslim community. This research has simply aimed to identify the existence of this myth as well as document its adverse impacts on the lives of the participants interviewed in this study.

One of the major shortcomings of this research is that the demographics of the participants included in this study only reflect a particular experience of the larger Muslim community. That is, despite the individuals themselves being very diverse in their views and attitudes, all the participants were Sunni Muslims and all but one of the participants were either Arab or South Asian Muslims. There was only one participant that was a Latina who was also a convert to Islam. Although this was an intentional decision on my part to focus on a particular cross section of the Muslim community when I first began formulating the parameters for my study, I soon realized that I was only capturing a glimpse of the total Muslim experience. Another shortcoming of this research is that in my attempt to explicate the racialization process of Muslims in the United States, I was only able to provide overviews of the different components that

constitute the racialization process. Entire studies can be conducted on the nature of the violence that was carried out against Muslims and “Muslim-looking people” after 9/11/2001. What was not discussed in my analysis, but certainly is important when analyzing the racialization process of Muslims, is the reality that Islam in the U.S. has been constructed to be a religion of foreigners and immigrants. To paint Islam as something outside of the U.S. further allows for the myth of the dormant Muslim terrorist to be all the more insidious and effective. Thus, as Islam was being constructed as a foreign religion that was only practiced by Arab and South Asian immigrants, the face of the potential Muslim terrorist was simultaneously racialized as being brown and foreign. The shortcoming in this study lies in the fact that I unintentionally contributed to this narrative that portrays Islam in the U.S. to be an immigrant religion. This narrative is very problematic because it ignores the rich history of Islam in the U.S. before the migration of Arab and eventually South Asian immigrants. That is, Islam in the United States has a deep history that has been greatly shaped by African American Muslims. African American Muslim communities such as the Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, the diverse Sunni Muslim communities such as the Darul Islam, Imam Warith Deen Muhammad’s community and the community of Imam Wali Akram are excellent examples of Islam’s powerful legacy within African America’s religious experience in the United States (Dannin 2005; McCloud 1995).

Of course, my intention was not to contribute to such a narrative that is ahistorical. However, it is after further reflection that I recognize that studies such as mine that attempt to analyze the Muslim community in the U.S. but mainly focus on the

immigrant generation or second generation Muslims from Arab or South Asian countries become implicated in this narrative. This shortcoming, however, can be resolved by first conducting a particular study on African American Muslims and their experiences of racial and religious discrimination before and after 9/11/2001. Then, conduct a study that examines the impacts of the material dilemma on a more representative sample of the racially and ethnically diverse Muslim population in the United States.

Therefore, future research would need to examine the experiences of African American Muslims as well as Latino Muslims after 9/11/2001. The more pertinent questions would deal with whether all Muslims experienced backlash and discrimination in similar ways after 9/11/2001. Were African American Muslims subject to the same type of treatment and backlash as the participants in this study? Did 9/11/2001 create any tensions or divisions within the larger Muslim community within the U.S.? Finally, do the experiences of African American Muslims further elucidate the existence of the Christian normative within the racialized social system?

As I mentioned previously, this study has only been able to provide overviews of the different components of the racialization process. It would be imperative for researchers to conduct a content analysis of the manner in which the state and corporate media define terrorism and decide who is and who is not a terrorist. The guiding questions of this research should examine the role of the state and the media in defining and framing terrorism. Can anyone be labeled a terrorist, or is the term terrorism only reserved for certain people? Indeed, more analysis needs to be done about the insidious conflation of Islam and terrorism. Ultimately, future research that is conducted on

Muslims in the United States must be contextualized within the history of racial oppression and violence against other non-white minority groups. By doing this, the particular case of Muslims can effectively be understood and analyzed within the larger historical and continued legacy of white supremacy and imperialism.

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