

**(Muslim) American Exceptionalism:
Contextualizing religiosity among young Muslims in America**

by

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(Muslim) American Exceptionalism: Contextualizing religiosity among young Muslims in America

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Abstract

A series of tragic and near-catastrophic events – from Fort Hood to Times Square – have renewed fears of so-called “homegrown” terrorism. Analysts and researchers, in turn, have begun to question previously held assumptions about America’s Muslim communities: Are Muslim-Americans truly assimilating; or are they, like their European counterparts, prone to isolation and, possibly, radicalization? One point of comparison in this discourse is religiosity, thought to be prevalent among alienated European Muslims and shown to be increasing among Muslims in the United States. Recent studies, for instance, indicate that second-generation Muslim-Americans are straying from predicted assimilative patterns and asserting a more religious identity. Examining these phenomena in context, however, evidences unique, or exceptional, circumstances that have collectively shaped a more organic form of religious expression among America’s Muslims. Ultimately, the current conflation of young Muslim-American religiosity with alienation not only belies, but also undermines this community’s closer correlation to the broader society.

A. Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, American media, law enforcement, and politicians all focused on foreign perpetrators, foreign states, and foreign ideologies. News coverage throughout the fall of 2001 featured intelligence gathered by CIA and FBI officials on hijackers of exclusively Middle Eastern descent, said to be a part of an international organization, and led by a former Saudi national. The subsequent military incursions into Afghanistan and, later, Iraq further underscored the threat's far-off origins. Indeed, throughout his administration, President George W. Bush often reinforced this perception of a distant enemy with his repeated use of the phrase: "We're fighting them over there so we don't have to fight them over here." Today, although America continues the fight "over there," recent events have brought into question how safe we truly are "over here."

A string of incidents, concentrated over the past two years, highlight the somewhat discounted, though never dismissed, prospect of domestic terrorism. From the tragic killings at Fort Hood, to the five Pakistani-American teens caught trying to train at a jihadist camp in central Asia, to the failed Times Square bombing, this series of violent plots originating on US soil has pushed analysts and researchers to reconsider how susceptible Muslims in America are to extremism. Many such analyses are keen to point out seemingly troubling parallels between American Muslims and their discontented co-religionists around the world, specifically those in Western Europe and particularly in terms of religiosity. Somewhat neglected in this discourse, however, are the reality and implications of the Muslim community's parallels to broader American society.

This study counters the presumption that increasing religiosity among young Muslims will likely breed alienation and possibly lead to a surge in so-called "homegrown terrorism." Fundamentally, the analysis argues for a kind of "Muslim-American exceptionalism." Here,

“exceptionalism” – leaving aside any later added or unintended connotations¹ – refers to the original Tocquevillian use of the term denoting an observed and essential difference.² In the case of Muslim immigrants, particularly the emerging second generation who are the specific focus of this study,³ it is clear that unique historical, demographic, and societal circumstances collectively set them apart from analogous populations in other Muslim-minority countries – to say nothing of those in Muslim-majority states. Chief among these distinctions are the conditions under which Muslims first arrived on Western shores. This initial bearing set the tone for how the respective host nations received and ultimately absorbed their newcomers, with Muslim-Americans and their European counterparts charting variant evolutionary courses.

Complementing this intercontinental disparity is an intergenerational divergence found within the Muslim-American community. Specifically, contrasting first-generation suppositions about leadership and institutions with those currently holding sway among Muslim youth evidences not only far less ambivalence about being an American, but also far more confidence in an indigenous base for Islamic knowledge. Moreover, although there are indications that second-generation youth are shedding some of their parents’ cultural peculiarities, as assimilative

¹ According to Howard Zinn, for example, American exceptionalism supposes “that the United States alone has the right, whether by divine sanction or moral obligation, to bring civilization, or democracy, or liberty to the rest of the world, by violence if necessary.” Howard Zinn, “The Power and the Glory: Myths of American exceptionalism,” *Boston Review* (summer 2005), <http://bostonreview.net/BR30.3/zinn.php> (accessed November 29, 2010).

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Francis Bowen, trans. Henry Reeves (Cambridge: Sever and Francis, 1863), 42. Seymour Lipset, former Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, interprets this original use to simply mean “qualitatively different from all other countries.” Seymour Martin Lipset. *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1996), 18. William Galston, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, expanded on Lipset’s sentiment in much starker terms: “Let me make it clear that exceptional does not mean superior, contrary to what many Americans believe, and contrary to what many non-Americans believe we believe. Rather, exceptional means different. It means an instance that breaks with a general pattern.” Brookings Institution, *Reexamining American Exceptionalism*, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2008/0423_exceptionalism/20080423_exceptionalism.pdf (accessed November 29, 2010).

³ In light of this focus, any subsequent mention of Muslim(s) in the text or footnotes, unless otherwise noted, refers to immigrant Americans (usually specified as either first or second generation) to the exclusion of other sub-categories including, but not limited to, African-Americans and white converts. Similarly, this study’s observations are exclusive to Sunni Muslims, though it’s possible that many of the claims made herein hold for immigrants belonging to other denominations, as well.

theories would predict, they're simultaneously embracing their religious background and, in some cases, even prioritizing it to a greater extent than the previous generation. This rise in religiosity, much like the general account of Muslim immigrants in the West, must also be considered in context.

After surveying the uniqueness of Muslim-Americans, both historically among their global peers and contemporaneously against preceding generations, the study concludes by briefly considering some relevant policy implications. Should the legislative acts and philosophical goals of other Western countries *viz.* their immigrant Muslim populations influence American law makers? What actions, if any, should politicians and law enforcement take to curb the spread of extremist ideologies among Muslims in America? Examining first some of the roots of Western anxiety and Muslim immigrant angst provides a useful framework for answering these vital questions.

B. The Disparate Experiences of Muslim Immigrants in the West

An atmosphere of general suspicion toward Muslim-Americans, bordering on animosity, was not always as pervasive as it is today. Importantly, the months following 9/11 saw politicians speak of Muslim-Americans in terms of necessary allies rather than potential enemies,⁴ even amidst a populist backlash against Islam and its adherents.⁵ Also during this

⁴ In his first congressional address following 9/11, for example, President Bush stated: "The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying in effect to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends."

⁵ In 2001, the US Department of Justice recorded a 1,600 percent increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes from the prior year. Jen'nan Ghazal Read, "Muslims in America," *Contexts* (fall 2008): 40.

period, despite some initial reactionary responses,⁶ Muslims in America were largely depicted as well-adjusted and content with their minority status. Their seemingly smooth interaction with American society was brought into even sharper focus later in the decade as disturbing events highlighted the troubles other Muslim minorities in the West were having with their adopted countries, and vice versa.

The coordinated bombings of the Madrid train system in 2004 and the London transportation system in 2005, along with civil unrest in France during October and November of the same year, underscored not only the seeming failure of European countries in assimilating their Muslim populations, but also the apparent American success in that regard. Comparisons of these two Western backdrops routinely emphasized, for example, the relative ease with which Muslims advanced through American society in stark contrast to the ghettoization of their counterparts in cities across Europe.⁷ Although the reasons for these disparate conditions may be myriad, specific historical, geographical, and socio-political realities have to varying degrees impacted each community's respective trajectory.

⁶ The accusatory rhetoric during this early period was not limited to the usual channels of talk radio and cable news; some conservative political journals similarly struck an unduly critical tone against Muslim-Americans. In an article published in the fall of 2001, for example, Tom Bethell bluntly states: "We can no longer assume that Americanborn, Mosque-attending, Mecca-facing Muslims find no incompatibility between their devotion to Allah and their loyalty to America." [sic] Tom Bethell, "The Challenge of Islam, The Anguish of the West." *The American Spectator* 34, no. 8 (2001): 92.

⁷ See, for example, Moises Naim, "Arabs in Foreign Lands," *Foreign Policy* 148 (May-June 2005): 95, 96 (juxtaposing 2000 census data that indicates Arab-Americans are better educated and wealthier than average Americans with general data revealing that European Muslims, of which Arabs constitute a significant proportion, are "poorer, less educated, and in worse health than the rest of the population"); Salam Al-Marayati, "A need for integration, not isolation, in America," *Newsday*, August 25, 2005, a25 (remarking that "[t]hroughout Europe, cultural barriers separate Muslim ghettos from mainstream society. In general, European Muslims belong to the underclass... In the United States... American Muslims are relatively more educated and affluent than European Muslims, they are typically more interested in integrating into mainstream society."); Lisa Miller, "American Dreamers," *Newsweek*, July 30, 2007, 25 (commenting that "Muslim Americans represent the most affluent, integrated, politically engaged Muslim community in the Western world," implicitly comparing them to European Muslims).

The Origins of Muslim Immigration to Europe and North America

One key factor influencing the current state of Western Muslims is the circumstances under which they (or their recent predecessors) first immigrated to their host country. In this respect, the immigration policies that America and several European countries put in place following World War II played a critical role. In the United States, from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, official quotas largely limited Muslim immigration to individuals seeking asylum from war-torn countries and oppressive regimes – most of whom were well educated, and often members of influential families.⁸ Then, in 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) paved the way for an influx of Muslims that continues to this day. During the initial decades following the INA’s passage, however, obtaining a visa depended largely on whether a potential immigrant could fill a need in the US labor market. Generally, then, the Muslims that came to America during this period were: 1) from numerous countries, 2) educated and sought to advance their education, and 3) given the opportunity to settle and participate in American affluence.⁹ Thus, from the outset, conditions were in place for America and its Muslims to forge a mutually beneficial relationship.

Policy makers in post-World War II Europe similarly shaped the continent’s immigrant relations for decades to come, though their decisions led down a much more fateful path. Rebuilding after the most devastating war in history required a concerted, long-term effort – and, more pressingly, manpower. Mindful that their decimated populations plainly limited any large-scale reconstruction, governments across Europe began turning to foreign workers throughout the 1950s and 1960s to fill blue-collar posts. Though Germany is the country most emblematic

⁸ These included Palestinians displaced by the founding of Israel, Egyptians whose property had been nationalized by President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Iraqis fleeing their country after the 1958 revolution, elite Syrians excluded from government participation, and Eastern European Muslims escaping Communist rule. Yvonne Y. Haddad, “A Century of Islam in America,” *Hamdard Islamicus* 21, no. 4 (1997): 3.

⁹ Ibid.

of this economically driven immigration boom, “[t]he fabulous post-war prosperity of France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and other West European countries was also boosted by immigrant labor, mainly from Turkey and North Africa.”¹⁰ Unlike in America, then, Muslim immigrants to Western Europe during the post-war period were: 1) largely from a single country or region, 2) comprised mostly of unskilled laborers, and 3) never meant to settle and incorporate into the larger society. This initial state of affairs set the stage for future volatility and strained relations between Europe and its Muslims.

Although Muslim immigrants were a large part of the solution during Europe’s post-war labor shortage, their presence in several host countries eventually became problematic. Crucially, in the decades following the inception of guest-worker programs, the multitudes of migrant laborers and other ex-colonials ballooned beyond all expectations. This trend owed much to family reunification policies, which despite their liberal underpinning were never meant to encourage foreign laborers to stay beyond their allotted time.¹¹ Perhaps just as important, however, was the proximity of the migrants’ home country.

As with the Hispanic population in America, geography has catalyzed tensions between Europe and its Muslim immigrants. Just as a shared border with Mexico and relative closeness to Latin America has increased the number of illegal immigrants to the US from those regions, the allure of a better life only a short boat or plane ride away has enticed “swelling numbers of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa – many of them arriving without any

¹⁰ Colin Nickerson, “A lesson in immigration,” *The Boston Globe*, April 19, 2006, http://www.boston.com/news/world/europe/articles/2006/04/19/a_lesson_in_immigration/ (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹¹ Even when France shifted its immigration policy in the 1970s to allow family reunification for migrant workers, generous subsidies to return home at the conclusion of their working years reflected the government’s enduring hope that that these immigrants would eventually leave the country. See Caitlin Killian, “The Other Side of the Veil: North African Women in France Respond to the Headscarf Affair,” *Gender and Society* 17, no. 4 (August 2003): 569.

visas, or overstaying their visas and melting into the ethnic suburbs.”¹² In any case, however it was that they came to settle in Europe, it quickly became clear Muslim immigrants were there to stay.

Demography and its Discontents

Despite taking steps to accommodate their new demographic reality, it was evident that European governments did not fully accept it. Some countries opted for a policy of “multiculturalism,” wherein immigrant groups were allowed to retain many of their cultural practices, most notably language, rather than adopt the host’s norms and customs. Over time, however, this approach often strained immigrant-indigenous relations as, arguably, “it was designed not to equip the ‘guest-workers’ with the necessary capacity and skills to live a life of fellow Europeans, but to enable them to return to their home countries.”¹³ The upshot, in any case, was that far from mutually benefitting one another, “Europe in the post-World War II era became the realm of ‘parallel societies,’ in which native and immigrant populations occupied the same countries but shared little common ground.”¹⁴

Even when European governments did engage their Muslim communities, their actions often erected barriers rather than bridges to integration. In particular, European governments mindful of their ever growing and ever more alienated Muslim populations have over the past decade taken invasive legal measures to root out extremism, often through the curbing of religious expression.¹⁵ These policies, seemingly meant to draw Muslims into civil society, often underscore the differences between Western and Islamic culture. As a result, European

¹² Nickerson, “A lesson in immigration.”

¹³ Asef Bayat, “When Muslims and Modernity Meet,” *Contemporary Sociology* 36, no. 6 (November 2007): 510.

¹⁴ Nickerson, “A lesson in immigration.”

¹⁵ See notes 19, 21, 103 and 104.

communities are increasingly exhibiting what Daniel Fried, formerly one of the US State Department's top analysts on European affairs, terms "exclusionary nationalism."¹⁶ This trend, Fried fears, indicates that European governments are simply unable to distinguish between peaceful piety and the more violent kind.¹⁷ At a New York Public Library panel discussion on migration policy in Europe, Swedish Ambassador Ingmar Karlsson alluded to this conflation: "[Sweden] is the most secular nation in the world... Expressions of, say, a normal piety by Muslims is by many Swedes seen as a sign of fanaticism and something very strange."¹⁸ The oscillating rationales behind recent policy decisions – sometimes security, sometimes secularity – further speak to Europe's inability, or unwillingness, to reconcile with religion. This condition is particularly evident in the case of France.

Although several European countries have in recent years restricted public displays of religion,¹⁹ allowed inflammatory political propaganda²⁰ and instituted more stringent

¹⁶ *The Economist*, "Look out, Europe, they say," June 24, 2006, 29.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ New York Public Library, "Migration Policy, Response and Reaction: The Status Quo (Islam in Europe, Part II)," 77min 31sec, MP3, http://media.nypl.org/audio/live_2009_06_10_islam_part2.mp3 (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹⁹ These restrictions, initially focused on clothing and other accessories, sometimes feign impartiality. See Globalia Magazine, "Discrimination in the Name of Neutrality," February 26, 2009, <http://www.globaliamagazine.com/?id=633> (accessed November 29, 2010) (analyzing the blanket ban on religious symbols within Berlin's civil service sector); ThinkSpain, "Minister supports school's 'headscarf' decision," April 22, 2010, <http://www.thinkspain.com/news-spain/17958/minister-supports-schools-headscarf-decision> (accessed November 29, 2010) (reporting on a supposedly general ban on headgear in several Madrid schools). More often, however, these sorts of laws directly target Islamic dress. See Ian Traynor, "Belgium moves towards public ban on burqa and niqab," March 31, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/mar/31/belgium-public-ban-burqa-niqab> (accessed November 29, 2010); AFP, "Italian town bars Muslim 'burqini' swimsuit," *The Age*, August 20, 2009, <http://www.theage.com.au/world/italian-town-bars-muslim-burqini-swimsuit-20090820-er0g.html> (accessed November 29, 2010). See note 22 for the legal genesis of this kind of legislation.

²⁰ The provocative posters circulated prior to a recent Swiss referendum against the building of minarets highlight the incendiary tactics currently employed by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and other anti-immigration parties across Europe. See Rob Beshizza, "The poster that convinced Switzerland to ban minarets," *boingboing*, November 30, 2009, <http://boingboing.net/2009/11/30/the-poster-that-conv.html> (accessed November 29, 2010). See note 22 for a recent French placard clearly inspired by SVP imagery.

immigration policies,²¹ France stands out as both one of the earliest and most austere proponents of this trend.²² To this end, the French government has also aggressively – and unapologetically – advanced the policy of *laïcité*²³ not simply within the context of national security, but in its own right.²⁴ Increasingly, these assertions of national character, while most evident in France, are emerging in other European contexts, as well.²⁵ Collectively, this continental recalibration points to the key philosophical difference between European and American attitudes toward Muslim immigrants.

²¹ In one German state, for example, Muslims seeking citizenship are put through a more rigorous interrogation composed of questions tailored to their background and beliefs. See Sonia Phalnikar, “New Rules for Muslims in German State Blasted,” *Deutsche Welle*, May 01, 2006, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,1840793,00.html> (accessed November 29, 2010). See note 22 for similar measures imposed on potential Muslim immigrants to France.

²² The French “Law on Secularity and Conspicuous Religious Behaviors and Symbols in Schools,” often colloquially referred to as the “French headscarf ban” for its disproportionate effect on young Muslim schoolgirls, ostensibly set the tone for subsequent anti-religious, anti-immigration platforms across Europe. See Caroline Wyatt, “French headscarf ban opens rifts,” *BBC News*, February 11, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3478895.stm> (accessed November 29, 2010). Following its passage, France’s secularizing policies have grown more assertive and far reaching. See Lizzy Davies, “French cross-party committee to recommend partial ban on full veil,” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/25/france-report-veil-burka-ban> (accessed November 29, 2010); Katrin Bennhold, “A Veil Closes France’s Doors to Citizenship,” *The New York Times*, July 19, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/19/world/europe/19france.html?_r=2 (accessed November 29, 2010); Lizzy Davies, “France denies citizenship to Moroccan man who forces wife to wear full veil,” *The Guardian*, February 02, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/02/france-values-republic-veil-women> (accessed November 29, 2010); Ennahar, “A French court allows posters detrimental to Islam and Algeria,” March 09, 2010, <http://www.ennaharonline.com/en/news/3343.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

²³ Although there is no direct equivalent in English, French *laïcité* is usually translated simply as “secularism,” though imbued with a more dogmatic and broad connotation. Speaking in stark terms about this pervasive national mindset, Henri Astier asserts: “Secularism is the closest thing the French have to a state religion... To this day, anything that smacks of official recognition of a religion - such as allowing Islamic headscarves in schools - is anathema to many French people.” Henri Astier, “The deep roots of French secularism,” *BBC News*, September 1 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3325285.stm> (accessed November 29, 2010). While issues such as the Muslim headscarf may get framed in terms of how they can or cannot accommodate *laïcité*, the concept itself is an independent, historical, and fundamental element of French culture more generally.

²⁴ President Sarkozy’s comments early in 2010 during France’s debate on banning the face veil (alternately referred to as the *niqab* or *burqa* – although the former is a full face covering while the latter is a full body cloak almost exclusive to Afghan society) underscore this development in French politics. In supporting the parliamentary measure to ban the veil in public, for example, Sarkozy said these garments have “no place in France” and called them an affront to France’s “republican values.” John Lichfield, “Sarkozy launches new law to ban the burka,” *The Independent*, April 22, 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sarkozy-launches-new-law-to-ban-the-burka-1950713.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

²⁵ In a more general context, German Chancellor Angela Merkel commented the day after a ceremony commemorating national reunification that Muslims living in Germany need to conform to “fundamental German values,” adding “there is no leeway on this.” Indo-Asian News Service, “Muslims should conform to German values: Merkel,” *Hindustan Times*, October 04, 2010, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Muslims-should-conform-to-German-values-Merkel/Article1-608196.aspx> (accessed November 29, 2010).

In her commentary comparing Muslim integration in America and France through the prism of the veil controversy, Kristine Ajrouch suggests that distinct social climates in America and France critically affect the overall tenor of their respective Muslim populations. The existence of a relatively well-defined and promoted national French character, for example, offers less space for ethnic differences than the more varied understanding of what it means to be “American.” Similarly, the stricter French perception of secularity fosters a more antagonistic atmosphere for religion than the more malleable American notion of separation between church and state. In France, more specifically, “secularity means removing from the public realm any sign of religion, whereas in the US secularity allows broad latitude for the freedom to practice religion.”²⁶ With its hardline assimilationist ideology, France effectively shirks the American model of compromise and instead offers Muslims an ultimatum. In this way, French-Muslim identity is more likely to develop from a defensive posture, thus reinforcing already established isolationist tendencies within these immigrant communities.²⁷

Arguably, then, the initial conditions surrounding Muslim immigration to Europe may not have led to the current dearth of integration among many Muslim communities were it not for an exclusionary ethos that, while perhaps most prevalent in France, has spread to varying degrees across the whole of the continent. Indeed, as they urge Muslims to participate in and contribute to the broader society, many European officials simultaneously define their culture in

²⁶ Kristine J. Ajrouch, “Global Contexts and the Veil: Muslim Integration in the United States and France,” *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 3 (fall 2007): 322.

²⁷ Younger woman raised in France, for example, are more sensitive to the discrimination and double standard they believe underwrite the headscarf ban. Thus, while still imbued with its religious significance, “choosing to veil emerges as an important political maneuver among recent immigrants and the second-generation. Ajrouch, “Global Contexts and the Veil,” 323.

avowedly secular,²⁸ narrowly ethnic,²⁹ or explicitly Judeo-Christian³⁰ terms that call into question Muslims' place on the national landscape. Although these circumstances don't entirely preclude the possibility of integration,³¹ the public and official perceptions they engender make it much more difficult for Muslims to accept, and gain acceptance from, European society. As John Esposito comments in his latest volume, *The Future of Islam*: "Despite being citizens, [European Muslims] have at best moved from being 'guests' to being 'foreigners.'"³² Concerning the effect these belittling labels have on the community's youth, Esposito notes: "Often younger generations in Britain, France, and Germany become alienated both from their European identity and from the traditional national... identities of their parents."³³ Thus, rather than alleviate the estrangement that is an ample breeding ground for extremist ideology, much of the emergent policy and political discourse across Europe clearly compounds it.

²⁸ See notes 23-25 and accompanying text.

²⁹ Germany, for example, with its firmly ingrained national myths and corresponding imagined community, has historically favored a policy of *jus sanguinis*, citizenship by ancestry, instead of the more commonly applied *jus soli*, citizenship by birth. Indeed, vestiges of these legal propensities remained even after German naturalization law was liberalized nearly two decades ago: for a number of years following the change in policy, civil servants were still required to sign declarations of their German lineage going back at least two generations; and, to this day, a person's birth in Germany does not entitle them to citizenship if their parents are both foreigners. See William Safran, "Citizenship and Nationality in Democratic Systems: Approaches to Defining and Acquiring Membership in the Political Community," *International Political Science Review* 18, no. 3 (1997): 320-323.

³⁰ Disputes over whether to reference religion in the original EU constitution and its successor, the Treaty of Lisbon, suggest that European sensibilities regarding their Christian heritage still hold sway. See Brandon Mitchener, "Birth of a Nation? As Europe Unites, Religion, Defense Still Stand in Way," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 11, 2003, A1; Nicholas Watt, "Merkel backs more Christian EU constitution," *The Guardian*, August 29, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/aug/29/germany.eu> (accessed November 29, 2010). More recently, following President Christian Wulff's comment that "Islam also belongs in Germany," German polls indicated widespread unease with the country's Muslim population. A number of conservative politicians seized this opportunity to rebuke Wulff, asserting instead that "while Islam is a part of daily reality in Germany, ours is a Judeo-Christian tradition." See Siobhán Dowling, "Should Muslims Be Treated on an Equal Footing?" *Spiegel Online*, October 08, 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,722065,00.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

³¹ In a 2006 Pew Global study, for example, 42% of Muslims in France thought of themselves as "French first," which is just shy of a comparable tally for Christians in the United States who identified as an "American first" (48%). The Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns About Religious and Cultural Identity* (Washington, DC: Pew Global, 2006), 3.

³² John L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 28.

³³ *Ibid.*

C. The Evolution of Muslim-American Leadership and Institutions

Across the Atlantic, societal norms are no less significant to the immigrant experience. Indeed, despite immigrating under circumstances less likely to induce alienation, first-generation Muslims in America have over the past few decades remained as isolated from broader society as their European counterparts. What's more, instead of softening their ties to religion as previous immigrant groups had done, this community's second-generation actually asserted their religious identity more vigorously. Unlike many of their European counterparts, however, these Muslim youth faced few barriers to their religious expression. What's more, they found much more overlap, even reciprocity, with their dual Muslim and American identities. Nevertheless, these past and present realities, especially given their potential to buoy misguided aspersions, make it all the more necessary to examine the context in which young Muslim-American religiosity developed and came to be defined.

As fear and uncertainty grew in the aftermath of the terrorist acts in New York and Washington, DC, "What does it mean to be Muslim?" required a more refined response. Perhaps more pressing, however, "What does it mean to be Muslim *in America*?" demanded a fundamental reexamination.³⁴ For young Muslims coming of age across the United States, it was through expanding institutions, up-and-coming leadership, and established societal principles that they forged responses to these vital questions. Notably, however, the American mosque played a limited role in this process.

³⁴ Commenting on the how years of war and terrorist acts have affected second-generation identity, Syed Ali states: "One result of these events has been self-evaluation on the part of Muslims in America. They ask themselves what it means to be Muslim, and if, indeed, they are Muslims in any meaningful way." Continuing, Ali quotes an interviewee, a suburban New York City imam, who distills this sentiment: "In times of crisis, you need to define yourself. In times of dormancy, you can be complacent." Syed Ali, "Why Here, Why Now? Young Muslim Women Wearing Hijab," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 4 (October 2005): 524.

The Immigrant Mosque in America

The mosque is an indelible and ubiquitous feature of Islamic societies both past and present. In recent decades, as Muslim immigrants settled *en masse* in Western Europe and America, these houses of worship have become more and more common across majority non-Muslim lands, too. Over its more or less brief history,³⁵ the American mosque³⁶ has taken on several characteristics conditioned by its setting. In particular, while these institutions retained their widespread religious significance amongst practicing Muslims, their once broad social relevance became divided along generational lines. This development owes much to the historical origins and contemporary arrangements of mosques in America.

Beyond its *raison d'être* as a house of worship, Muslim immigrants originally envisioned the American mosque not as a conduit for integration, but as a substitute for, and analog to, communities back home. In effect, “[I]ike the Italian, Irish, and Jewish immigrants before them, many [Muslims] hunkered down in ethnic enclaves”³⁷ when they reached America’s shores. This initial impulse fostered, more often than not, a culturally homogenous³⁸ and linguistically limited³⁹ mosque environment. While such a setting felt familiar to first-generation immigrants,

³⁵ In their landmark study surveying American mosques at the turn of the century, researchers commissioned by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) note that “Mosques are relatively young: 30% of all mosques were established in the 1990s and 32% were started in the 1980s.” Ihsan Bagby, Paul M. Perl, Bryan T. Froehle, *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait* (Washington, DC: Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2001), 3. This finding dovetails with Pew’s finding that “roughly two-thirds (65%) of adult Muslims living in the United States were born elsewhere, and 39% have come to the US since 1990.” Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream* (Washington, DC, Pew Research Center: 2007), 1.

³⁶ As this study is narrowly focused on immigrant Sunni Muslims (see note 3 and accompanying text), any consideration of mosques in America, unless otherwise noted, refers only to those in which these immigrants or their descendants make up a majority of the congregation.

³⁷ Miller, “American Dreamers.”

³⁸ In terms of the two main sets of Muslims immigrants in America, South Asians and Arabs, *The Mosque in America* study puts the percentage of total mosques dominated by either group at 42% (28% and 15%, respectively). An additional 16% of all mosques are evenly distributed between South Asian and Arab immigrants. The report, however, does not present specific data on mosques dominated by less prevalent though, particularly in large metropolitan areas, not entirely uncommon immigrant groups such as Turks, Somalis and Albanians. Bagby, *The Mosque in America*, 19.

³⁹ See note 41 and accompanying text.

it was far less recognizable to their offspring who found little overlap between mosque culture and the American society they were raised in.

From the outset, and largely on through to today, mosque leadership maintained these original conservative objectives.⁴⁰ Notably, *imams* charged with guiding worshippers were often imported from the country or region of the congregation's majority. Consequently, the sermons delivered in mosques led by non-native English speakers were either: 1) in broken/heavily accented English, 2) in the *imam's* native language followed by a cursory English translation, or 3) exclusively in the *imam's* native language.⁴¹

This cultural and linguistic divide not only hindered young Muslims' religious learning, but also their social integration. Beyond having little experience with, and insight into, the complexities of American society, it was not unusual for imported *imams* – who were often brought in on contract for a defined period of time – to waver on whether or not it was even permissible, from an Islamic standpoint, for one to live in the United States. As Lisa Miller, senior editor at *Newsweek* observes:

There are so few homegrown Muslim clerics in America today—and almost no institutions for training them—that prayer in most mosques is led by a scholar fresh off

⁴⁰ Further commenting on the relative infancy of the American mosque (see note 35), Ihsan Bagby notes that “Mosque leadership reflects this formative stage, with the current leadership being composed of either first-generation Americans or first-generation Muslims.” Ihsan Bagby, “Imams and Mosque Organization in the United States: A Study of Mosque Leadership and Organizational Structure in American Mosques,” in *Muslims in the United States: Identity, Influence, Innovation*, ed. Phillipa Strum (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), 19.

⁴¹ *The Mosque in America* study reports: “Ninety-seven percent of mosques use English as the main language, or one of the main languages, for the message of the Jum’ah Khutbah (Friday sermon).” This analysis however, does not speak to the qualitative use of English nor does it specify which language takes precedence during the weekly sermon. More importantly, the report does not disaggregate the data to highlight figures specific to immigrant dominated mosques. Had it done so, the 3% of total mosques that conduct their sermons exclusively in a foreign language, coupled with the study’s finding that “[o]f the mosques that do use English, 47 percent use one or more additional languages,” would likely yield more sobering statistics on the role of English in these houses of worship. Bagby, *The Mosque in America*, 9.

the plane from Lebanon, say, or Saudi Arabia, someone with no connection to America and no affinity for its culture.⁴²

Speaking generally about the lingering ambivalence towards America still present among older segments of the Muslim community, Mohamed Nimer, author of *The North American Muslim Resource Guide*,⁴³ asserts:

To be sure, some Muslims maintain an isolationist attitude toward US society. Some believe that American society is largely hedonistic and morally corrupt...[and that] Muslims ought to avoid contact with organized society.⁴⁴

Indeed, this resentment, to varying degrees, was not uncommon among the first generation of Muslim immigrants, whether layman or leader, and highlights the intellectual gap that existed between them and their American-raised progeny within mosque confines.

In effect, then, second-generation Muslim-Americans were initially exposed to a largely monotone understanding of Islam conveyed in a religious space relatively isolated from the broader community.⁴⁵ Had their religiosity ultimately taken hold in this milieu, they may very well have carried forward these barriers to integration. As it was, with their conscious decision to fashion American mosques into mirrors of communities in Muslim-majority countries, early Muslim immigrants effectively limited their value as a social space to the generation that founded them. Thus, when the need for a more nuanced understanding of Islam arose in the

⁴² Miller, "American Dreamers."

⁴³ Mohamed Nimer, *The North American Muslim Resource Guide: Muslim Community Life in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁴ Mohamed Nimer, "American Muslim Organizations: Before and After 9/11," in *Muslims in the United States* (see note 40), 5.

⁴⁵ These conditions, though somewhat tempered in recent years, remain largely in place. Bagby, in a follow-up to his expansive study on American mosques (see note 35), solemnly comments that "[a]lthough desirous of moving past existing barriers and into the general community, the reality is that most immigrant mosques still live a largely sectarian existence." Ihsan Bagby, "The Mosque and the American Public Square," in *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hopes, Fears, and Aspirations*, ed. Zahid H. Bukhari, Sulayman S. Nyang, Mumtaz Ahmad, and John Esposito (California: AltaMira Press, 2004), 345.

aftermath of 9/11, young Muslims in America turned to new outlets and leaders for guidance in not only developing, but contextualizing their religious identity.

The Muslim Students Association

Given the particular circumstances under which American mosques originated and subsequently operated, many second-generation Muslims experienced little convergence between their faith and American culture until college. In general, one's college years are formative regardless of their background; yet, in light of the starker communal shift it represents, university life often plays a more significant role in the development of specifically Muslim-American identity. One quantitative basis for this phenomenon is that more Muslims attend an institute of higher learning in the United States than the average American.⁴⁶ Beyond their statistical significance, these greater numbers buoy the most salient feature of Muslim-American campus life, the Muslim Students Association (MSA).

The MSA, much like many of the mosques in America, was initially established to meet the needs of a growing immigrant community. Founded in 1963 by a group of graduate students temporarily studying in America, the MSA was originally much more insulated than it is today. Given its international bearing, revivalist movements emanating from the Muslim world, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, held sway throughout the organization's early years.⁴⁷ During this period, anti-Western rhetoric, though far from dominant, was not entirely uncommon. As more acculturated students began populating the association, however, MSA leadership took steps to

⁴⁶ See Gallup, *Muslim Americans: A National Portrait* (Washington, DC, Gallup: 2009), 23. Poll finding nearly two-thirds of Muslim-Americans attended college (63%) as compared to just over half (51%) of the US general population. Cf. Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans*, 18. Survey indicating Muslim-Americans (47%) are less likely than the average American (54%) to have received some college-level education. The discrepancy in these studies is likely attributable to varied methodologies, particularly in regards to sampling.

⁴⁷ Garbi Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press: 2004), 92.

quash this fringe element, including halting overseas funding to the MSA's national wing. Altaf Hussain, the former head of MSA National, confirms this shift noting that MSA chapters today "are much more mainstream in thinking and much more rooted in America" than they were when he started college in 1987.⁴⁸ This rootedness is at the heart of the MSA's pivotal role in developing Muslim-American identity.

For many young Muslims in America, the MSA functions as their preliminary, sometimes primary, means of building a hyphenated sense of self. This directive hinges on the organization's ability to compensate for the shortcomings of the mosques' social and educational mechanisms. As Garbi Schmidt observes in her study of Muslims in Chicago, where the MSA was first established:

Among the [current] generations of young Muslim Americans from which the organization gains its members, religious inspiration and interpretations are no longer imported from abroad. Rather, Islamic perspectives develop through the members' interactions with one another and with the non-Muslim majority surrounding them.⁴⁹

These more diverse interactions, coupled with a more inclusive organizational structure and native leadership, enabled MSAs to offset the alienation many young Muslims experienced at American mosques.

Buttressing much of the MSA's capacity in forming a more holistic identity is its pluralistic environment. As opposed to the mostly homogenous makeup of American mosques,⁵⁰ MSAs have a breakdown that more closely approximates the relatively diverse backgrounds of Muslim-Americans as a whole. That is, whereas mosques often have a congregation primarily

⁴⁸ Paul Barrett, *American Islam: The Struggle for the Soul of a Religion* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 2007), 237.

⁴⁹ Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America*, 93.

⁵⁰ See note 38.

made up of, for example, Egyptian, Pakistani or African immigrants, the MSA members are an amalgamation of these and other racial and ethnic backgrounds. As Jamillah Karim notes, “[i]ntegration between African American and second-generation Arab and South Asian Muslim occurs most often on university campuses.”⁵¹ This diversity thus undergirds the organization’s closer correlation to American society as well and facilitates its role in not only shaping a Muslim identity, but placing that identity within a broader framework.

Complementing the MSA’s diverse foundation is an organizational structure that offers its members a sense of agency. More specifically, the participatory structure of the MSA affords many Muslim youth their first opportunity to lead, or actively engage in, an Islamic endeavor. This holds true primarily for the executive officers of the organization,⁵² though the general members are often also introduced to a degree of ownership over American Islam during their college years that, theretofore, had been limited if not altogether absent. In order to live up to their newfound responsibilities, both the lay leadership and general membership are compelled to enhance their religious knowledge – a compulsion all the more necessary given the religiously confounding traditions many of them grew up with.

In addition to differing social philosophies, first- and second-generation Muslim-Americans often had divergent understandings of religious practice. As Geneive Abdo notes in her profile of a Yemeni community in Dearborn, Michigan, “[t]he first generation of Muslim immigrants to America generally did not concern themselves with distinguishing between

⁵¹ Jamillah Karim, “Between Immigrant Islam and Black Liberation,” *The Muslim World* 95, no.4 (2005): 501. One result of this exposure to more varied backgrounds has been an increase in inter-ethnic marriage among second-generation Muslim-Americans (see text accompanying note 54).

⁵² Speaking on the increased visibility of Muslim on American universities after September 11, Geneive Abdo notes that “Muslim student leaders have found themselves in great demand; they are often called upon to explain the basics of Islam to campus audiences of hundreds of students.” Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America After 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 191.

tradition and religion.”⁵³ Young Muslims have, in various ways, pushed back on this tendency with actions at once religiously permissible yet culturally frowned upon. Perhaps chief among these “rebellious” acts is inter-ethnic marriage. Considering this phenomenon from a wider perspective, Abdo comments:

[Y]oung American Muslims are increasingly open to the possibility of marrying outside their own ethnic group, as they work to create an indigenous Islamic identity that is compatible with modern American society.⁵⁴

Indeed, these more mixed marital patterns that Abdo and others have observed in the Muslim community⁵⁵ is in line with established trends in other religious and ethnic minority groups in America as they progress generationally.⁵⁶ This tendency, moreover, is part and parcel of a generally integrative philosophy among second generation Muslim-Americans. In light of this mindset, it was important that they find scholars and students of knowledge that sympathized with their need for a more liberal yet, in many ways, more genuine understanding of their faith.

The religious leaders that second-generation Muslim-Americans turned to during their college years often differed from those affiliated with most American mosques. More specifically, the *imams* common to mosques across America, while knowledgeable in religious tenets and jurisprudence, offered little in the way of social counsel to anyone beyond the first

⁵³ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 46. This trend, in turn, sometimes brought to light lingering racism that persisted as a cultural remnant in some immigrant Muslim communities. See Ibid., 41 (detailing tensions over a Yemeni girl marrying a Ghanaian male, both Muslim).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Denise Al-Johar, “Muslim Marriages in America: Reflecting New Identities,” *The Muslim World* 95, no. 4 (October 2005): 557-574; Stephen Magagnini, “American Muslims mix modern, traditional routes to marriage,” *The Sacramento Bee*, October 31, 2010, <http://www.sacbee.com/2010/10/31/3141339/american-muslims-mix-modern-traditional.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁵⁶ The 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey, for example, reported that the intermarriage rate for Jews who have married since 1996 is 47% compared to 17% for couples married before 1970. United Jewish Communities, *National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: United Jewish Communities, 2003), 16. Similarly stark percentages are found in the Hispanic community where intermarriage stands at 30% for US-born Hispanics versus 10% for foreign-born noncitizens and approximately 16% for foreign-born naturalized citizens. Sharon M. Lee and Barry Edmonston, “New Marriages, New Families: US Racial and Hispanic Intermarriage,” *Population Bulletin* 60, no. 2 (June 2005), Figure 11, 26.

generation of Muslim immigrants who imported them from overseas. The children of these immigrants, who had a greater attachment to America and less of a need to affiliate with their ancestral homeland, sought out scholars and preachers who, beyond their religious qualifications, possessed the linguistic skills and social acumen amenable to leadership in North America. Campus MSAs often facilitated this search by showcasing a wide range of up-and-coming and well established Muslim leaders through periodic guest lectures and especially during the umbrella organization's regional and national conferences. Essentially, then, second-generation Muslim-Americans mimicked their parents' pursuit for culturally relevant *imams* – though with notably different outcomes.

A Shift Toward Indigenous Leadership

In looking for more socially adept leaders, young Muslim-Americans by and large have turned to native scholars rather than those brought in from overseas. This is not to say that these second-generation youth have altogether shunned the imported *imams* found in the traditional mosques they grew up with – those individuals and institutions are still integral to Islamic praxis in America. In the same way, however, that these sons and daughters of immigrant Muslims found settings that allowed them to form a more well-rounded religious identity,⁵⁷ they also gravitated towards leaders that understood how to apply Islamic knowledge with both religious and social awareness.

⁵⁷ Although this study specifically highlights the MSA's role in socializing North American Muslims, other parallel and subsidiary organizations (many of them formed only within the last decade) have recently risen to fill certain niches within and outside the MSA's general sphere. Examples of such groups include Muslim Interscholastic Tournament (MIST), which focuses on extracurricular and sporting activities, and Muslim Youth of North America (MYNA), the youth wing of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), catering to junior high and high school aged Muslims.

Among the high-profile leaders fitting these more culturally conscious criteria are a number of North American converts to Islam. Hamza Yusuf, perhaps the most recognizable Muslim in America, is a white convert known for his eloquent speeches, which often draw hundreds of listeners. His extensive travels through the Muslim world, and firsthand experience with the educational shortcomings found therein, have also made him an ardent proponent of indigenous Islamic scholarship in America.⁵⁸ Sherman Jackson, a Religion Studies professor at the University of Michigan, is an African-American convert who, though specializing in Islamic law, writes extensively on Islam in America, particularly on historical and contemporary issues within the Black Muslim community. Dr. Jackson's popularity among second-generation Muslim-Americans indicates this demographic's acceptance of a more inclusive Islam, as opposed to the culturally specific versions many of them were exposed to as youths in alternatively Arab, Asian, or African-dominated mosques.⁵⁹ Another academic, Ingrid Mattson, further illustrates the appeal for a more intellectual discussion of Islam among many young Muslims. As a white female convert, her ascent to the presidency of ISNA, the largest Muslim organization in America, also highlights the more involved role women play among Muslim-American leadership. Collectively, these and other authentically Western yet avowedly Muslim leaders dispel the myth of Islam's foreignness and visually root the religion in North American culture.

Additionally, the current generation of young Muslims has embraced Western-raised leaders with ethnic backgrounds more traditionally associated with Islam. Two of the most prominent scholars in this regard are Muhammad Alshareef and Yasir Qadhi, the founder of Al

⁵⁸ Yusuf's advocacy tangibly manifested in the recent founding of Zaytuna College, which seeks to become America's first fully accredited Muslim institution of higher learning (see notes 68-71 and accompanying text).

⁵⁹ This popularity is evident in the success of winter and summer intensive programs that Dr. Jackson teaches as part of the American Learning Institute for Muslims (ALIM).

Maghrib Institute and its dean of academic affairs, respectively. Both Alshareef, an Egyptian raised in Ontario, Canada, and Qadhi, whose parents immigrated to Houston, Texas in the mid-1970s, are prime examples of the acculturated *imam* in North America. Notably, their appeal goes beyond scholarly bona fides (both studies at Medina University in Saudi Arabia, one of the most respected centers of Islamic learning), relying just as much on the method and means through which they disseminate their knowledge. Each has, for instance, lectured not just on core Islamic principles, but on social responsibility⁶⁰ and community building.⁶¹ Moreover, Alshareef hosts a Facebook fan page⁶² that updates with links to his video journals while Qadhi writes periodic, widely circulated posts on the popular group blog MuslimMatters.⁶³ In addition, both Alshareef and Qadhi have dozens of their sermons and lectures posted on YouTube, many of which are “unofficial” recordings published by their ever-expanding fan base. Collectively, these and other ethnically Eastern, yet culturally Western, Muslim leaders undercut the perception of, on the one hand, Islam’s inadaptability, and, on the other hand, the lack of classically grounded scholars in North America.

Despite being acculturated in the West, however, the vast majority of current North American Muslim scholars nonetheless received their religious instruction abroad. This reality is a bit of a double-edged sword: it challenges the view that foreign-trained *imams* invariably undermine American values, yet it also highlights the dearth of domestic educational options heretofore available for aspiring Muslim leaders. In recent years, however, the call for

⁶⁰ See, for example, Muhammad Alshareef, “Being the Best Neighbors in Society,” 67 min 15 sec; from HalalTube, MP3 <http://www.halaltube.com/audio/ms-Being-the-Best-Neighbours-in-Our-Society.mp3> (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁶¹ See, for example, Yasir Qadhi, “A Vision for the Muslim Community,” 31 min, 42 sec; from HalalTube, Flashvideo <http://www.halaltube.com/yasir-qadhi-a-vision-for-the-muslim-community> (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁶² Facebook, “Muhammad Alshareef” <http://www.facebook.com/nationbuilder.prime> (accessed November 29, 2010)

⁶³ For an archive of Yasir Qadhi’s articles, see MuslimMatters, “Posts by Yasir Qadhi” <http://muslimmatters.org/author/yasir-qadhi/> (accessed November 29, 2010).

indigenous scholarship has been answered by both non-traditional and more conventional establishments. The subsequent growth of these educational institutions reflects the contemporary conditions and future aspirations of the Muslim-American community.

Emerging Educational Institutions

Opportunities to study the traditional Islamic sciences in America were decidedly more limited a decade ago. Over that span of time, a number of organizations emerged offering local, national, and virtual religious instruction. Notably, whether in a classroom or online, these educational outfits cater primarily to college-aged youth. This focus is in part due to the coursework's intellectual demands, yet no doubt also draws on the aforementioned experiential and associational significance of campus life for second-generation Muslim-Americans.

Al Maghrib Institute's organizational structure exemplifies this close tie in to the Muslim college experience in America. Similar to the MSA's branch model, which established the association in dozens of universities around the United States and Canada, Al Maghrib depends on volunteers forming a *qabeelah*, or "tribe," in their city as an outpost for the institute's weekend classes. Moreover, each *qabeelah* has an *amir*, or leader, that heads the *shura*, or council, in much the same fashion as the MSA's executive structure. Thus, the responsibilities that come with involvement in an Al Maghrib branch parallel or, in the case of young professionals, continue those instilled from involvement in the MSA.⁶⁴

Al Maghrib likewise draws on pedagogical and socializing mechanisms familiar to young Muslims. The educational model that the institutions currently employs shuns the traditional notion of a centralized hub and instead deploys its instructors to teach their single- or double-

⁶⁴ See note 52 and accompanying text.

weekend courses at various cities across North America. In addition to these classes often taking place in college lecture halls, the methods utilized outside of the classroom also tread on familiar ground. Specifically, Al Maghrib administers an online forum where instructors post supplemental materials and answer questions while their various media and writings elsewhere on the internet further complement the coursework.⁶⁵ The forum additionally serves as a conduit for students and volunteer leaders to arrange study sessions and compare notes, all of which is often subsequently done over the internet. This reliance on and preference for virtual communication is, of course, not exclusive to Muslims, but prevalent among all youth. Its adoption in this context, however, is part and parcel of another way in which this generation of Muslim-Americans diverges from their predecessors.

The socialization and education of young Muslims, most markedly over the past decade, has largely occurred by way of amorphous or transitory settings. For the first-generation of Muslim immigrants to America, the mosque took on a new, more central role in the community:

The mosque became a place where children could be instructed about their religion, possibly in the language of their parents; where religious holidays could be celebrated with dinners and games; and where life-cycle events such as *aqiqah* (births), marriages and deaths could be solemnized. The non-American mosque model would not have been central to any of these functions, but in the United States, mosques replaced the extended family, social networks and social and educational institutions.⁶⁶

With their increased, more varied access to institutions and networks, however, second-generation Muslim-Americans frequently disaggregated these centralized mosque functions and,

⁶⁵ Al Maghrib Institute, "Community Forums," <http://forums.almaghrib.org/> (accessed November 29, 2010)

⁶⁶ Bagby, "Imams and mosque organization in the United States," 21.

in the process, often eschewed the physical realm altogether in favor of virtual communities.⁶⁷ Even when their social interactions with co-religionists and Islamic instruction did take place in real-world settings, the locations were often makeshift or short-lived in contrast to the well-established traditional mosque space. MSAs, after all, are usually a part of an individual's life only for the four or so years that they're in college. Additionally, given the relative infancy of many such organizations, their accommodations are sometimes ad hoc basements or shared student centers. Similarly, the location of weekend courses, like those of the Al Maghrib Institute, is often subject to the availability of banquet halls and college auditoriums. Factor in, too, the importance of annual conferences, whose dates and venues constantly shift, and it's clear that the uncertainty or even abstraction of place is of no consequence to the current generation of Muslim youth in America. This ethereal ethos is perhaps emblematic of the still nascent character of the American Muslim community. There are already signs, however, that this proclivity is starting to give way to a more settled outlook.

One institution capitalizing on this trend is Zaytuna College, which aims to become the first fully accredited Muslim institute of higher learning in America.⁶⁸ Founded by Hamza Yusuf, the college opened its doors to an inaugural freshman class in fall 2010 and intends not only to build on, but accelerate the progress of Muslims in America. Central to their mandate is establishing indigenous and authentic American-Muslim scholarship. Their goal, however, is not to supplant the traditional arenas of learning in the Muslim world, but rather to undermine the

⁶⁷ Indeed, though much has been written on the potential dangers of the internet *viz.* Islamic extremism, the indispensable role of online sources and communities in countering radicalism and socially grounding one's religious identity is often overlooked.

⁶⁸ Zaytuna's uniqueness and novelty indeed hinge on its bid for full accreditation as another institution, the American Islamic College, previously sought to grant accredited four-year degrees, but, despite opening its doors nearly three decades ago, has to date achieved no higher than partial accreditation. "American Islamic College returns to Chicago," *WBEZ*, <http://www.wbez.org/blog/american-islamic-college-returns-chicago> (accessed November 29, 2010).

notion that comparable instruction is inherently impossible on American soil.⁶⁹ In the college's own words: "By aspiring to produce scholars who understand the specific needs of contemporary societies, we believe Zaytuna College has an important contribution to make in the indigenization of Islam in the West."⁷⁰ Further to their vision, Zaytuna states quite plainly on their website that "Islam has never become rooted in a particular land until that land began producing its own religious scholars."⁷¹ Beyond its specific resonance, this sentiment speaks more generally to the overall intentions of Muslims in America.

The institutions and leaders featured in this study, and others like them, illustrate how young Muslims desire to ingrain themselves and their communities in American society and do so through the prism of Islam. In the former instance, second-generation Muslim-Americans clearly diverge from their parents; notably, however, the later circumstance similarly evidences a shift among the generations. Indeed, for large swaths of young Muslims, growing up in America not only conditioned, but also enhanced their religiosity.

D. Rising Muslim-American Religiosity

Recent research points to the resurgence and, in many cases, primacy of an Islamic identity among second-generation Muslim-Americans. A number of these studies highlight the central role 9/11 played in this regard. While no doubt the events of that day had far-reaching effects on American (including Muslim-American) psyches, their influence on young Muslims was perhaps more catalytic than formative – raising questions, primarily about their place in

⁶⁹ Notably, in addition to accreditation under the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), Zaytuna is also seeking recognition from "major educational institutions in the Muslim world, such as Egypt's al-Azhar University." Zaytuna College, "Why Zaytuna College?" <http://www.zaytunacollege.org/about/> (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

society and the role of religion in their lives, rather than providing answers. In the process of examining these internal quandaries, many Muslim youth settled on a seemingly contradictory posture at once at odds with the historical trajectories of immigrant minorities and, at the same time, uniquely born of the American experience.

Negotiating Assimilation, Integration and Isolation

The story of immigrants in America is typically one of assimilation. Ethnic minorities arriving on US shores as foreigners will, the belief goes, eventually and collectively blend into the national landscape. The once hostile now benign, if not benevolent, status of Irish- and Asian-Americans is often pointed to as evidence of this phenomenon. Similarly considered in the rubric of the vaunted American “melting pot” are religious minorities. There are indications that many members of these communities also follow an assimilative path, along the way diluting, if not altogether discarding, their culturally specific identities. Such is the case, for example, with large numbers of Catholic Latinos.⁷² Certain commentators have even described this trend in somewhat dire terms:

In immigrant communities across the United States, a battle is being waged for the souls of Hispanics – and a distinctly American style of worship is beginning to take hold.

According to a landmark study, as many as 600,000 Hispanics in this country leave the Catholic Church every year in favor of Protestant evangelical churches.⁷³

⁷² See Fernanda Santos, “Catholic Latinos in US lured away by Pentecostalism,” *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/world/americas/20iht-pentecost.1.12161573.html?_r=1 (accessed November 29, 2010); Associated Press, “Poll: Young Hispanics less likely to be Catholic,” *USA Today*, August 10, 2010, http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-08-11-hispanic10_ST_N.htm (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁷³ David P. Goldman, “Church-Going Among US Catholics Slides to Tie Protestants,” *First Things*, December 21, 2009, <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2009/12/21/church-going-among-u-s-catholics-slides-to-tie-protestants/> (accessed November 29, 2010).

Viewed in this existential manner, it's not merely dilution, but usurpation that "jeopardizes" assimilated immigrants. This is certainly the stance that some in the Israeli government have taken with the launch of a recent ad campaign describing assimilation as a "strategic national threat" and calling on citizens to report on diasporic Jews "in danger" of marrying non-Jews.⁷⁴ In the case of Muslim-Americans, conversely, cultural intermarriage and the influence of American norms on religious practice often reflect an enhanced, rather than diminished religiosity.

In a roundabout way, second-generation Muslim-Americans largely conform to expected assimilative patterns with regard to ethnic identity. Researchers have found, for example, that "many Muslim American youth are losing their ethnic languages."⁷⁵ However, other phenomena seemingly in accordance with this trend often have ulterior, even predominate explanations beyond the normal lure of assimilation. As previously discussed, one such case is the rise in interethnic marriage among young Muslims.⁷⁶ While this tendency is still far from the norm, its increased commonality and acceptance is as much attributable to the disaggregation of old-world culture and religion as it is the adoption of new-world norms. In her study of Muslim marriage patterns in Houston, for example, Denise Al Johar observed that "[m]arriages among some Muslims are increasingly governed by religious principles rather than traditions from 'back

⁷⁴ Cnaan Liphshiz and Dana Weiler-Polak, "Not all Jews appreciate Israel's new anti-assimilation campaign," *Haaretz*, April 9, 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/not-all-jews-appreciate-israel-s-new-anti-assimilation-campaign-1.8487> (accessed November 29, 2010). For the ad in question, see "Advert for saving Jewish youth from 'getting lost,'" [*sic*] 34 sec; from YouTube, Flashvideo http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPYGdglxIe4&feature=player_embedded (accessed November 29, 2010). This promotion no doubt drew on data from the National Jewish Population Survey citing a nearly 50% intermarriage rate among American Jews (see note 56). Perhaps even more distressing for those concerned about maintaining Jewish culture, "[i]n-married and intermarried Jews differ dramatically in the extent to which they raise their children as Jews. Nearly all children (96%) in households with two Jewish spouses are being raised Jewish, compared to a third (33%) of the children in households with one non-Jewish spouse." United Jewish Communities, *NJPS*, 18.

⁷⁵ Fait Muedini, "Muslim American College Youth: Attitudes and Responses Five Years After 9/11," *The Muslim World* 99, no. 1 (January 2009), 42.

⁷⁶ See note 54-55 and accompanying text.

home.”⁷⁷ Those prioritizing in this way, and opting for what Al-Johar dubs “self-initiated marriages,” tend to “emphasize their religious identification and practice above their national origin.”⁷⁸ Thus, many young Muslims are curtailing their inherited cultural peculiarities not exclusively, or even necessarily, to conform to American cultural norms, but rather to assert a more pronounced Islamic identity. This attitude is perhaps most evident in the proliferation of the veil, or *hijab*, among second-generation Muslim-American women.

In her essay examining the post-9/11 symbolism of the headscarf, Yvonne Haddad observes that, among Muslim-Americans, “an increasing number of adolescents and young adults (daughters of immigrant Muslims) are assuming a public Islamic identity by wearing the *hijab*.” This trend runs counter to the community’s anticipated path:

The integration and assimilation of second and third generation Muslims into US society was expected to proceed according to a predictable trajectory noted among previous immigrant groups. The children of the immigrants would shed their parents’ religious and cultural markings and become more Americanized.

In cases where there is some reassertion of cultural legacies, it usually does not manifest until at least the third generation. The September 11 attacks, however, established and accelerated what Haddad calls a “re-Islamization” among Muslim youth.⁷⁹

Although Haddad focuses on the timing of this phenomenon, the surroundings and conditions under which it often took place are similarly significant. More specifically, for many young Muslim-American women, the college experience, and the break from cultural patterns it facilitated, was crucial in their decision to adopt the *hijab*. While conducting her research on Chicago MSAs, for example, Schmidt recalls witnessing a number of young Muslim women

⁷⁷ Al-Johar, “Muslim marriages in America,” 567.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Yvonne Haddad, “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon,” *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 3 (fall 2007): 253.

start wearing the headscarf, to the point where it was at times even institutionalized. Schmidt recounts one instance in which a college Muslim Women's Association (MWA) held a dinner event commemorating those who took on the *hijab* during the preceding year. Notably, the honorees each spoke of the critical role MWA and MSA meetings played in shaping their choice. The acceptance and support exhibited through these associations was sometimes, however, the exception to the rule.⁸⁰

In many instances, the term “re-Islamization” is a bit misleading as it connotes a return to a previous form and level of religious practice. The reality is that many young Muslims are asserting their faith in ways, and to an extent, beyond their predecessors. As with the rise in inter-ethnic marriage, the increased observation of the *hijab* is often directly at odds with parental customs and experiences. A *New York Times* article published in late-2001 illustrates some of the familial struggles second-generation Muslim-American woman faced when first donning the headscarf. Sarah Karim, for example, chose to initially hide her adoption of *hijab* from her parents and when her extended family found out, they warned her that “she would never be able to attract boys.”⁸¹ She, like other students mentioned in the piece, found that Muslims of her own generation were much more understanding and encouraging of her choice, especially in college settings that offered support groups absent in most high schools. In his study examining the proliferation of *hijab* among Muslim youth, Syed Ali similarly found that, among his participants, “women come to a decision to wear *hijab* relatively early, unlike their mothers and aunts who, if they wear it at all, have adopted it in middle age.”⁸² Remarkably, some of the young girls in Ali's analysis actually took up the headscarf in direct opposition to

⁸⁰ Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America*, 106-107.

⁸¹ Laura Goodstein, “Muslims Nurture Sense of Self on Campus,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 2001, b1.

⁸² Ali, “Why Here, Why Now?” 519.

their parents. This act, conditioned as it is by both an assertion and rejection of expected immigrant behavior, highlights the qualitative underpinnings of second-generation Muslim identity.

While yielding much of their ingrained ethnic distinctiveness, young Muslims, through their desire for Islamic knowledge, adoption of religious dress, and overall prioritizing of their faith, are still by and large shirking the assimilative path of previous religious minorities. The aforementioned examples of selective adaptation point to what some Muslim educators have described as a “rejectionist tendency” among second-generation Muslim-Americans wherein they seek “neither to assimilate into the national melting pot nor to live ‘separate but equal,’ like their parents.”⁸³ Thus, while spurning isolationism, this young community simultaneously exhibits a seeming aversion to assimilation. This later condition is the basis for much anxiety among certain analysts and commentators.

Hyping the “Homegrown Threat”

Initially, as noted earlier,⁸⁴ Muslim-Americans were thought to be on a previously established trajectory of assimilation or “Americanization.”⁸⁵ This perception, however, has largely given way to an awareness that many young Muslims are undergoing a more nuanced integration. Writing in blunt terms, Geneive Abdo dismisses the “comforting media narrative that has developed around the approximately six million Muslims in the United States, who are often portrayed as well-assimilated and willing to leave their religion and culture behind;” asserting instead that “the real story of American Muslims is one of accelerating

⁸³ Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street*, 190.

⁸⁴ See paragraph accompanying note 79.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Jennifer Friedlin, “The Americanization of Islam?” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 29, 2004, 29; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, eds., *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

alienation...with Muslims in this country choosing their Islamic identity over their American one.”⁸⁶ She further associates this rising religiosity with a sense of isolation from the broader community; a situation she feels parallels that of Western Europe. This depiction, however, is strangely at odds with not only numerous studies and examples cited herein, but also Abdo’s own research. In any case, to stem off the logical deduction one could draw from this claim, Abdo later underscores that she found few indications of homegrown militancy within the Muslim-American community – a conclusion some recent reports are more hesitant to endorse.

The presumption that, in the case of Muslim-Americans, religiosity and alienation often go hand-in-hand is indeed at the core of many recent analyses of an emerging “homegrown threat.” An Oxford Analytica brief distributed in the fall of 2009, as incidents of domestic terrorism in America were beginning to multiply, exemplifies this development:

A sizeable portion of the immigrant Muslim-American population is becoming more religious and alienated from mainstream US society. This is true particularly among second-generation Muslims. This trend is similar to the growing religiosity among Muslims in many countries in Western Europe.⁸⁷

A landmark NYPD counter-terrorism study similarly casts suspicion on rising religious sentiment. In the radicalization process the report outlines, for example, the second of four stages is described as “Self-Identification,” in which an individual undergoes “religious seeking” by means of “trusted social networks made up of friends and family, religious leaders, literature and the Internet.”⁸⁸ Moreover, while acknowledging that American Muslims have adapted, and

⁸⁶ Geneive Abdo, “America's Muslims Aren't as Assimilated as You Think,” *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2006, b3.

⁸⁷ Oxford Analytica, “UNITED STATES: Young Muslims' piety, alienation rise,” *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief Service*, October 15, 2009, 1.

⁸⁸ Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York: NYPD Intelligence Division, 2007), 32.

have been allowed to adapt, far more than their European counterparts, the report nonetheless cautions that “[d]espite the economic opportunities in the United States, the powerful gravitational pull of individuals’ religious roots and identity sometimes supersedes the assimilating nature of American society.”⁸⁹ This perception that one’s religious and American identities are somehow at odds similarly informs much of the recent ruminations on rising domestic terrorism.

To be sure, there is evidence that young Muslim-Americans are not only cultivating, but also prioritizing their religious identity. In a 2007 Pew survey, for example, 47% of American respondents considered themselves “Muslim first.”⁹⁰ While this ratio is much lower than in Britain, Germany, or Spain (81%, 66%, and 69%, respectively), the numbers converge somewhat when focused on the youth demographic, with 60% of 18-29 year olds in America choosing Islam as their primary identifier.⁹¹ This finding has taken on a more ominous undertone in light of allegations that Nidal Hasan, the gunman who opened fire on soldiers at the Fort Hood army base, relayed to a classmate his belief in being a “Muslim first and American second.”⁹² Yet, Muslims are not alone in giving preference to their religious, rather than national background. Notably, in a 2006 Pew survey, 42% of American Christians considered themselves “Christian first.”⁹³ That this statistic is not similarly bandied about like the one specific to Muslim-Americans speaks to the air of suspicion uniquely surrounding Muslim religiosity.

Ultimately, this double standard bucks the close correlation Muslims have to American society at large, both economically and socially, and American Christians in particular,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁹⁰ Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans*, 6.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² On the Record w/ Greta, “I’m Muslim First, American Second’ - Former Classmate of Suspected Ft. Hood Shooter Recalls Red Flags,” *Fox News*, November 10, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,573548,00.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁹³ Pew Global, *Muslims in Europe*, 3.

religiously. These parallels are born out in the Pew research data detailing, for example, that “family income among Muslim Americans is roughly comparable with that of the population as a whole,”⁹⁴ and “[i]f anything, Muslim Americans are more likely than the general public to believe that hard work is the path to success.”⁹⁵ In terms of religious identity, 70% of Muslim Americans who have a high level of religious commitment say they consider themselves to be Muslims first while a comparable 59% of Christians who say religion is very important identify as Christians first.⁹⁶ Yet Christians, by dint of their emphasized Christianity, are seldom if ever accused of lacking national pride. Conversely, the suspicion fostered by Muslim religiosity reflects, perhaps, lingering doubts as to whether Islam is compatible with American culture. Such presumptions similarly belie the data as “[m]ore than six-in-10 US Muslims (63%) say they see no conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society.”⁹⁷ This sentiment is likely even stronger among immigrant Muslim-Americans, who are among the greatest beneficiaries of America’s religious freedoms. Indeed, this latitude to freely practice one’s religion has prompted a burgeoning, somewhat surprising debate: Is America the best place for Muslims to live?

American Ideals – America as Ideal

Over the past year, a number of high-profile anti-Islam, anti-Muslim incidents have marred the American landscape. Sometimes these episodes emerged in response to terrorist or would-be terrorist acts, yet, more often, they targeted the community building actions of a

⁹⁴ Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans*, 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30. Specifically, 71% of all U.S. Muslims believe that “most people who want to get ahead can make it if they work hard” while a somewhat smaller percentage (64%) of the U.S. general public agree with this statement. Among foreign-born Muslims, the percentages are even higher: 74% overall and 76% for those arriving after 1990.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

wholly benign group of Muslim-Americans. In the latter instances, a conflation of Muslim and extremist coupled with an almost anthropomorphized fear of *sharia*, or Islamic law, informed much of the widespread outrage. This formula was most evident in the vitriolic debates surrounding the so-called “Ground-zero mosque,” yet similarly suffused the backlash over other proposed Islamic centers across the country. Given this antagonistic atmosphere, it’s perhaps a bit counterintuitive that many Muslims are not only content with, but grateful for practicing Islam in America.

In an op-ed published on the eve of this current wave of Islamophobia, Merve Kavacki, a former Turkish MP now lecturer of International Affairs at George Washington University, distilled a widely held belief within the Muslim-American community, summed up in the title of her piece: “Best place for Muslims to live? America.” Kavacki’s central premise is that the United States is more conducive to an Islamic lifestyle than any country in Europe (due to the continent’s historically tense relationship with the faith) or any predominantly Muslim territory (where “expression of religion is often perceived as a threat to the secular state”). Expanding on this latter circumstance, Kavacki hypothesizes that:

In Turkey, where the vast majority of the population is Muslim, you will not find a lawyer with a beard or a student at a university wearing a headscarf, but you can find plenty in New York City. In Tunisia, you won't see a religiously dressed physician at university hospitals – but you can in Alabama.

Kavacki’s own history speaks to this theme as, after being elected into office, she was prevented from taking her parliamentary oath due to her *hijab*, which is prohibited for Turkish civil servants to wear. Yet in America, not only is Kavacki allowed to wear the *hijab* in virtually any

setting, but her right to do so is protected by law. Indeed, donning the headscarf in America has taken on added meaning for many Muslim women.⁹⁸

The *hijab* is a powerful marker of Muslim identity in America's public spaces – one that visually singles out the individuals who wear it yet legally has no bearing on their share of collective societal goods. That a veiled Muslim woman in America has the same access to education and employment as any other citizen is an increasingly rare freedom to find in Western or even Muslim-majority societies. This egalitarian ethos is not lost on the young women who choose to wear the *hijab*. Although donning the veil for wholly religious reasons, many second-generation Muslim-American women often cite American civic values of religious liberty, individual freedom and the right to be judged by one's merits as informing their decision. As Schmidt observed regarding college-aged Muslims:

[T]hese young women's portrayals of the value of Islamic womanhood sounds strikingly like the fulfillment of American secular ideals. Muslim women see themselves as 'liberated'; they are to be hired on the basis of their skills and evaluated in terms of personality, intelligence, and behavior.⁹⁹

Put differently, "the veil in the US represents an expression of American identity."¹⁰⁰ At a lecture discussing "Muslims in the West," Yasir Qadhi, who not only received a Masters degree from the Islamic University of Medina but also a PhD from Yale University, addressed his audience and distilled the Muslim-American's reality in more general, much starker terms:

For those of you who do have a "back home," let me ask you a very blunt question.

Think about the situation "back home," think about your friends and relatives... Look at

⁹⁸ Merve Kavakci, "Best place for Muslims to live? America," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 28, 2009, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0928/p09s01-coop.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

⁹⁹ Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America*, 109.

¹⁰⁰ Ajrouch, "Global Contexts and the Veil," 323.

their mentality, look at the way they view the world. Look at the way they view religion... Ask yourself a very blunt question: Where would you rather have been born and raised?¹⁰¹

Speaking for himself, and in terms of spirituality, Qadhi replies: “I thank Allah... that I was born and raised where I was [in Houston, Texas].” Such statements speak to what fundamentally sets Muslim-Americans apart from their co-religionists around the globe.

What makes young Muslim-Americans unique – what makes them *exceptional* – is the organic way in which their religiosity took form. For their parents, who grew up in Muslim-majority countries, Islam was often infused with so much cultural baggage and conditioned by an overwhelmingly homogenous environment. Moreover, their religious expression was often bound by oppressive state intervention. For their modern European counterparts, ethnic enclaves frequently sustained the homogeneity of home countries, and, by extension, a monotone understanding of Islam. Additionally, the state’s secular sensibilities frequently place social and legal checks on one’s religiosity, increasingly putting Muslims on the defensive.

In America, conversely, a diverse and, generally, far more religious setting provided Muslims an ample space to develop religious identities less rife with ethnic idiosyncrasies and more in harmony with Western mores. Emerging multi-ethnic, multi-racial Muslim-American communities, more specifically, curtail culturally specific understandings of Islam and promote instead a more intellectual approach to religion. In effect, “[y]oung Muslim Americans don’t want to practice their faith blindly; they want rational explanations for why behavior is acceptable or not.”¹⁰² Moreover, unlike, ironically, in France, Muslim-Americans have

¹⁰¹ Yasir Qadhi, “Muslims in the West: Where are we Going– Yasir Qadhi - Part 2 of 2,” [sic] 32min 15sec; from Google Videos, Flashvideo <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4527213427005200992#> (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹⁰² Abdo, *Mecca and Mainstreet*, 19.

benefitted from the state's *laissez-faire* approach to religious expression, which has fostered a more apolitical and self-defined identity. It seems, therefore, that the experience of young Muslims in the United States evidences that their growing religiosity is an articulation of, rather than a threat to, America's freedoms, liberties, and societal norms. Essentially, then, conflating rising Islamic sentiments in the United States and Europe not only ignores recent history in these two regions, but undermines American dynamism and adaptively – that is, what makes *America* exceptional. For as generally detrimental as this misguided outlook is to Muslim-Americans, however, it's all the more harmful if allowed to guide public policy.

E. Conclusion

Second-generation Muslim-Americans have thus far trekked along a largely unpredictable path, with their future trajectory no more certain. Though growing up in a religious space fashioned to suit the needs and customs of newly arrived immigrants, these sons and daughters of the first generation of Muslim migrants to the US eventually molded institutions and turned to leaders more attuned to the indigenous American experience. Along the way, many Muslim youth shunned common wisdom on assimilation and instead asserted their religiosity in ways and to an extent largely unfamiliar to their parents and unexpected for a still nascent minority group. Although this process was prompted in large part by the catastrophic events of 9/11, it was subsequently shaped by ingrained American norms and values. Given this context, the rise in Muslim-American religiosity, in and of itself, seems hardly a cause for concern. Nevertheless, the recent isolated incidents of extremism beg the question: How should the US government deal with radical Islam?

With the prospect of domestic terrorism seemingly on the rise, it's possible that American law makers will begin looking towards the policies of Western Europe for guidance. Although intrusive counter-terrorism measures, such as spot ID checks¹⁰³ and targeted surveillance of predominantly Muslim neighborhoods,¹⁰⁴ are in and of themselves disconcerting, the rhetoric of European legislators when dealing with the "Islamic threat" is all the more troubling.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, elected officials have already shown signs of a shift toward a Euro zone mentality. Notably, rather than quell the virulent reactions against Islam and Muslims over the past year, as their counterparts from both sides of the aisle invariably did in the aftermath of 9/11,¹⁰⁶ some politicians have instead legitimized populist fear and anger by, among other things, introducing state legislation banning the utilization of *sharia* as a legal basis¹⁰⁷ and openly questioning whether Islam is even a religion at all.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, this track could have dangerously counterproductive effects.

While aiming to root out extremism through harsher counter-terrorist policies, American law makers could unwittingly sow its seeds. The successful integration of Muslim-Americans, highlighted throughout this study, shouldn't be taken for granted:

[R]acial profiling, the lack of direct communication between Muslims and the government, and the use of paid confidential informants to monitor the Muslim

¹⁰³ Bruce Crumley, "Fighting Terrorism: Lessons from France," *Time*, September 24, 2001, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,176139,00.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹⁰⁴ Paul Lewis, "Surveillance cameras in Birmingham track Muslims' every move," *The Guardian*, June 4, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jun/04/surveillance-cameras-birmingham-muslims> (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Geert Wilders, a bombastic Dutch MP, is the most notorious example of an anti-Muslim European parliamentarian. He's been quoted, for instance, calling the Quran "a fascist book which incites violence" and Islam "the ideology of a retarded culture." BBC News, "In quotes: Geert Wilders," *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11469579> (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ See notes 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁷ Joel Siegel, "Islamic Sharia Law to Be Banned in, ah, Oklahoma," *ABC News*, June 14, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/Media/oklahoma-pass-laws-prohibiting-islamic-sharia-laws-apply/story?id=10908521> (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹⁰⁸ Eric Shelzig, "Tenn. Gov Hopeful Questions If Islam Is a 'Cult,'" *ABC News*, July 27, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory?id=11263226> (accessed November 29, 2010).

community are all causing an increasing rift between American society and Muslims. In the end, these issues could undo the integration that American Muslims have previously achieved and create the same marginalization and exclusion from society facing European Muslims.¹⁰⁹

Along these lines, the recent arrest of a Somali youth in Portland, Oregon has raised questions about law enforcement tactics that border on entrapment.¹¹⁰ To add insult to injury, the local mosque that this alleged terrorist sometimes attended was the target of a seemingly retaliatory act of arson, further compounding already heightened tensions between these local Muslims and the broader population.¹¹¹ Shortly after this series of events played out, a similarly dubious FBI sting, in which an informant was planted inside a Southern California mosque, left another large group of Muslim-Americans feeling estranged from and targeted by federal officials.¹¹² Such incidents and heavy-handed policing procedures undermine the government's greatest resource in combating extremism with the Muslim community: Muslim-Americans themselves.

A free, prosperous, and civically-minded Muslim population remains the most effective deterrent to homegrown radicalism. By extension, the most effective governmental and law enforcement policies in this regard are the ones that engender these traits in the Muslim community. To this end, a vigorous defense of legally sound mosque projects would be one of the most potent strategies these agencies could employ. Besides the positive impression this would leave on Muslim hearts and minds, this approach also yields a more direct security

¹⁰⁹ Moushumi Khan, "The European Problem," *Slate*, July 24, 2007, <http://www.slate.com/id/2171071/> (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Glenn Greenwald, "The FBI successfully thwarts its own Terrorist plot," *Salon*, November 28, 2010, http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/11/28/fbi (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹¹¹ David Gardner, "Revenge arson attack on mosque after Christmas tree lighting ceremony car bomb plot is foiled," *The Daily Mail*, November 29, 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1333931/Blaze-Portland-mosque-revenge-attack-car-bomb-plot-Christmas-tree-ceremony.html> (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹¹² Jerry Markon, "Mosque infiltration feeds Muslims' distrust of FBI," *The Washington Post*, December 5, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/04/AR2010120403720.html> (accessed December 6, 2010).

benefit. The probability of radicalization in a large, shared communal space, after all, is far less than in the makeshift gatherings of basements and rental units.

Publicly and continuously acknowledging the key role that Muslims play in keeping America safe is another crucial task for officials. That, more than nine years and countless press releases after 9/11, there are still allusions to Muslims not speaking out against terrorism highlights a key failure of communication. In truth, Muslim-Americans have not only strongly condemned, but actively combated terrorism on US soil. There have been numerous cases where information provided by Muslim citizens has led to the direct prevention of a terrorist plot, including the now infamous failed Times Square bombing. In the case of the five Pakistani-American who went to train at an overseas jihadist camp, the informants were, remarkably, the teens' own parents. Commenting on the this case in the context of a still prevalent air of suspicion surrounding Muslims, Shaded Amanullah, founder and editor-in-chief of *altnuslim.com*, succinctly states: "There's nothing more that Muslims can do than turn in their own families."¹¹³ Indeed, despite assumptions to the contrary, Muslims are fundamentally no less loyal than any other citizen of the United States. In sum, the best way to guard against domestic Islamic terrorism is to ensure, rather than curtail Muslim freedoms, and recognize that they are – both in their actions and their beliefs – by all means fully American.

The story of Muslim-Americans is still unfolding. As first-generation immigrants relinquish their leadership posts in America's mosques, there's every indication that this community's second-generation will imbue these established religious institutions with the same indigenous character evident in emergent MSAs and Islamic education seminars across the US. There are hopeful signs, too, that, recent vitriol notwithstanding, America will maintain the

¹¹³ Omar Sacirbey, "Muslims say new security rules unfair, ineffective," *The Oklahoman*, January 7, 2010, <http://newsok.com/muslims-say-new-security-rules-unfair-ineffective/article/feed/121323> (accessed November 29, 2010).

unique socio-political qualities that have thus far allowed its Muslim community to thrive – both economically and spiritually.¹¹⁴ Indeed, any other course would be virtually anathema to the American enterprise; the freedom to openly and passionately practice ones religion, after all, is among the bedrock principles on which this country was founded. For, as Tocqueville observed over 175 years ago, “in America, one of the freest and most enlightened nations in the world, the people fulfill with fervor all the outward duties of religion.”¹¹⁵ Similarly today, as it did then, religiosity doesn’t threaten, but exemplify American values.

¹¹⁴ Both the proposed ban on *sharia* and Ron Ramsey’s rant on the qualification of Islam as a religion (see notes 101-102) eventually received official rebukes. In Oklahoma, a federal court judge issued a preliminary injunction preventing the state election board from certifying the controversial amendment while in Tennessee, though it’s distressing that it came to this, the Department of Justice wrote a brief asserting that Islam is, in fact, a religion. Jess Bravin, “Oklahoma Sharia Ban is Blocked,” *The Wall Street Journal*, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703957804575602922807855194.html> (accessed November 29, 2010); Ashley Jones, “On Islam and the Law: DOJ Files Brief in Tennessee Mosque Case,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 2010, <http://blogs.wsj.com/law/2010/10/18/on-islam-and-the-law-doj-files-brief-in-tennessee-mosque-case/> (accessed November 29, 2010).

¹¹⁵ de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 307.

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