The Struggle for Meaning: The Faces and Voices of the Muslim Experience in Miami

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THE STRUGGLE FOR MEANING: THE FACES AND VOICES OF THE MUSLIM EXPERIENCE IN MIAMI

By
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A DISSERTATION

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THE STRUGGLE FOR MEANING: THE FACES AND VOICES OF THE MUSLIM
EXPERIENCE IN MIAMI, FLORIDA

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This project, as a participatory-research endeavor, seeks to empower Muslim-Americans with a sense of place and voice in an environment that has been more conducive to denying both of these considerations. Previous research on Muslims has not dealt with them fairly, despite any good intentions that may have existed. The point of the PAR project is to gain access to the Muslim experience, rather than speaking for these persons. Rather than use their voice, be their voice, or to speak for Muslims, a participatory research project desires to: speak with Muslims, echo their experiences, co-produce knowledge, and leverage resources as a researcher that may advance community autonomy.

The task in this project was to co-create a rendering of different Muslim experiences that has yet to exist. Turning towards Muslims as accomplices necessitated a turn away from the Western gaze that recognized Muslims as antithesis, as mission work, or as victims. An accomplice opens spaces and redirects resources to affirm diversity within a particular community. Together, as collaborators/accomplices/Muslims, we came to understand the meanings and concerns of this marginalized community. This dissertation, then, provides an insider’s account to the burdens, honors, and responsibilities of being a part of a “breaking” Muslim community in Miami. From
looking Muslim and feeling the pressures of embodiment to the violence and empowerment realized through Muslim bodies, the struggle for meaning represented a struggle for survival and community, as much as a struggle of faith.

When the committee examined the hundreds of pages amassed during the interview phase, five aspects of the community became evident: (1) locating community (2) relating the social to the Mosque, (3) breaking community, (4) structural violence, and (5) Muslim anomie. While the five phases captured dimensions of the Muslim community, most participants viewed the Mosque as the epicenter of Muslim activity. However, an important distinction was made between a Mosque rooted in homogeneity and exclusivity versus a Mosque as it ought to be. In the case of the latter, the Mosque represented an unfulfilled potential. That is, everything about being Muslim and a Muslim community represented an outgrowth that moved from an internalized actualization to an external materialization. To become Muslim was to be Muslim. To be Muslim was to become Muslim. In the case, of being rooted in homogeneity and exclusivity, boundaries between the Mosque and mainstream society became blurred. The paradox of this homogeneity is Muslim anomie.

These findings emphasize the need for Muslims to re-connect and build trust with each other, as well as to the need to connect to non-Muslim communities. Muslims will need to work through differences to help salvage the potential of the greater community. Indeed, the commitment involved in bridging communities, with distinctive outlooks, is a challenge but necessary. Therefore, a five point-initiative for Muslims involved in the struggle for community is proposed. This plan serves more as a launching point for “dialogical action” than a blueprint for fixing a community in crises.
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CHAPTER 1
GETTING STARTED

INTRODUCTION:

Research on anti-Muslim prejudice in the United States addresses a variety of topics: negative health outcomes (Nadal et al. 2012), social attitudes towards immigration (Creighton & Jamal 2015), lived experiences of Muslims immediately after 9/11 (Cainkar 2009), black/white attitude differentials toward Muslims (Zainiddinov 2013), pervasive identity crisis among second generation Arabs (Naber 2005), and the racialization of Muslims as a uniform and relegated social group (Grosfoguel 2016; Jamal 2008; Selod 2015; Selod & Embrick 2013). A synthesis of the respective studies exposes a coherent thread that depicts Muslims living in the U.S. as victims of both structural and cultural racialization. Racialization emanates from an ideological apparatus that organizes groups around perceived differences for the sake of subordinating social relations to the interests of a controlling group (Omi & Winant 2014). The performance of, and identification with, Islam leads to salient boundaries of an imagined American identity at both institutional and social levels (Alba 2005). Being Muslim in America, subsequently, represents a struggle against the political, religious, and social constructions formed by the state and legitimized by civil society.

A review of the literature reveals a pattern of treating the structural and cultural racialization of Muslims as two mutually exclusive phenomena. Despite the utility of each perspective in describing anti-Muslim effects, and to some degree the causal mechanisms that drive Muslim prejudice, consideration of Muslim agency has largely
gone unaccounted for in the literature. Therefore, the need for an analysis of both modes of racialization from a distinctively Muslim perspective exists. By examining the effects of Anti-Muslim bigotry from the Muslim-American perspective, an understanding of how these persons interpret, perceive, and react to the various forms of aggression directed at their identity, civil rights, and general well-being will become evident. This research project moves beyond the Muslim victimization narrative and attempts to analyze how Muslim-Americans navigate hostile worlds and assess their attempts to preserve a sense of humanity in the face of a range of assaults.

**THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM:**

Being Muslim and American has become not only a challenge for Muslims living in America, but also an apparent impossibility (Mamdani 2002). While being American is somewhat attainable for Muslims who seek to carve out a space in American society, the Muslim identity must be shed or hidden in order to achieve this status (Naber 2005; Selod 2015; Selod & Embrik 2013). The hijab, or the women’s head dress, the jalab (a women’s outer garment that covers her body), the thobe (a man’s version of the jalab), and the wearing of a “religious beard,” while highlighting “Arabic” features, constitute deviations from the social norms of American culture (Ahmed 2016; Cainkar 2009; Said 2001). Being American and Muslim has become a fabrication, and required a redefinition in order to appease Americans who believe a Muslim boogieman lurks about waiting to unleash terror into the world. This dichotomy between being Muslim and being American has become so pervasive that even within the category of being Muslim a more reductive fragmentation has taken place (Beydoun 2016).
In a sociological sense, such dichotomies serve to differentiate between a dominate group that ascribes to an ideology of superiority and subordinate groups (Blumer 1958). In terms of Muslims living in the U.S., dichotomies have now infected this increasingly racialized group. As Selod (2015) notes, Muslims who live in America are now perceived to be either good or bad Muslims. The good Muslims, an essentialist reduction (Gilroy 2002), represent those who adopt mainstream American ideologies and avoid transgressions against the norms of society by adhering to non-religious dress codes that mask a Muslim identity (Nadal et. al 2012). Additionally, the good Muslims reserve practices and performances associated with religion to the private sphere and to the institutions (Mosques) normalized as sacred spaces. Although embracing the sacredness of the secular, the good Muslims quarantine the social, cultural, and religious articulations of Islam in order to give primacy to Western interpretations derived from the Enlightenment Era (Ahamed 2016). The paradox appears when the good Muslim—the colonized—adopts the ideals that constrain the communal constitution of Islam (Fanon 1963; Grosfoguel 2016; Memmi 1965). The good Muslim is in fact a good Westerner first.

In line with classic assimilation theories—which sociologists recognize as an inclusionary theory that requires immigrants to shed their ethnic culture in order to fit into the host society—this good and evil binary serves as a gauge that measures how much conformity to the White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture is adopted by the Muslim “other” living in the United States (Gordon 1961). Those Muslims who disclose affinity with Islam endure social isolation and are regarded as imminent threats to American culture (Beck 2002; Grosfougel 2016; Jamal 2008). Thus, assimilation theories require
that bad Muslims in America exist outside mainstream culture and remain in a state of limbo, while they evolve through the process of adopting the host’s ways of doing, living, and being. The notion that Muslims outside the mainstream are backward or behind the times is a common perspective in academia and among assimilationists (Huntington 1993; Lewis 1990).

Assimilation theory is not concerned with the conflict and tensions that arise between the dominate and subordinate groups, that is, the power differentials between those in positions of authority (White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestants) and those who struggle against oppressive power (Tumin 1953). For the assimilationists, racism exists at the individual level and reflects mental dysfunctions, rather than an institutional, structural, and systemic construction designed to maintain, protect, reinforce, and create advantages for the dominant group (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Feagin 2013; Omni and Winant 2014). The point here is that assimilationists espouse American exceptionalism while distorting the American ideal of democracy. In the end, Islam and Muslims may serve merely as a reference that illustrates the limits of Americanness.

In the 21st century, the Muslim has become the target of a new and intense brand of American racism (Grosfoguel 2016; Meer, 2014; Selod & Embrick 2013; Silva 2016). For a growing proportion of Americans, the word Muslim has come to signify something perverse. For example, the notion of good or bad Muslim has become conflated with terrorism and irrationality. Beydoun (2016; 3) argues that “for Muslim Americans, demonstrations of good citizenship are tied to terrorism. Namely, they are obligated to condemn any and every act that involves a Muslim culprit, and fulfill the expectation and demand from the public at large to apologize for the actions of a deviant, distant few; all
of which routinely [falls] on deaf ears.” As already discussed, this dichotomy of good and evil leads to a paradox that occurs on a cultural level. Yet, a paradox also exists at a structural level, especially in terms of American citizenship. First, by being a good Muslim and shedding a religious identity, the Muslim American is stripped of his, or her, first amendment rights, thereby resulting in a Muslim American who possesses distorted religious rights when compared to the freedoms of other Americans. Accordingly, the Muslim person who sheds religious markers reflects “complicit-ness” to a reality that never leads to being truly American and, quite possibly, may not even lead to being truly Muslim (Bourdieu 1983; Murphy et. al 1994).

As of this writing, no study has considered the impact of forsaking a Muslim identity for one that is culturally and structurally inconsistent (Meer 2014). Being American is never questioned; researchers assume Americanness represents universally accepted ideals without ever considering that this reality embodies the activities and meanings constructed by Americans. Context is lost. In any case, the ideal and reality do not align. All men and women are not created equal, not endowed with inalienable rights, and hardly live in a society where democracy flourishes. The ideals so often assumed and reified as a social standard appear more as illusions that mask the realities of the oppressed. In fact, blame for the structural constraints that enable disparities to grow exponentially is assigned to cultural deficiencies (Huntington 1993; Lewis 1954 2002). The problem is that the prevailing, or dominant, reality is seldom questioned.

Second, the bad Muslims who give saliency to Islam suffer isolation, “micro-aggressions” in the form of verbal and physical assaults, and state sponsored surveillance that, in sum, leads to diminishing social spaces, opportunities, and freedom. (Cainkar
Additionally bad Muslim-Americans provide racial formation strategies and marketing propaganda to the state and media outlets that frame Muslims in a way that invites violence and aggression (Omi & Winant, 2014). This racialized project blurs the boundaries from which strategic actions commence (Alba 2005; Grosfougel 2013). The bad Muslim, accordingly, becomes an object presented to an audience that makes the world of the Muslim, American or otherwise, vulnerable to military, state, local, and public aggression (Said 1979).

The proverbial us-them divide becomes enacted for the purpose of benefiting global, economic, and political initiatives (Stokes & Raphael 2010). But additionally, the bad Muslim-American, who occupies a state of limbo in the assimilationist paradigm, serves a purpose within a conflict frame (Davis 2005; Omi & Winant 2014). The meanings assigned to a Muslim-American who embodies his, or her, Islam create a moral antithesis from which American and Un-American identities are defined. From a conflict perspective the paradox of being Muslim and American can be summed up in this sense: regardless of shedding their religious identity, the current social trend in America is that Muslims will never truly be accepted as Americans, or, at the very least, will never truly attain equity in American society.

Most studies that examine Muslim Americans within the conflict frame produce only surface level analysis. That is, being Muslim is more than performing the religious aspect of Islam. While the public declarations embodied in the hijab, thobe, beard, supplications, and fasting, reflect a religious identity, being Muslim is much more complex. Islam is a culture—one that takes various forms and is contingent on a complex
order formulated between the historic, political, economic, and sociality of a place. Being Muslim in Saudi Arabia is vastly different from being Muslim in Indonesia, which is vastly different from being Muslim in the United States. In order to address what it means to be Muslim, place is paramount because this factor will determine how the community is understood.

Islam is a culture, a religion; Islam is a way of being that relies on interpretation of the Quran on multiple levels, especially the collective. Interpretation of the Quran occurs on a communal level as much as on an individual level, if not more. Unlike Christianity which relies on top-down decrees (Luckmann 1967), Islam remains open to the possibility of “an individual Muslim entering into a vast and polyphonic discursive terrain that consists of the clamor of Muslim readers, speakers, critics, interlocutors, and audiences” who contribute to an interpretation of text (Ahmed 2016; 193). Because of this relativity in interpretative activities as collective, as cooperative, as communal, there is a serious problem with reducing Muslim to a homogeneous population. Muslims are vastly different communities based on sect, interpretations of the Quran, location, and manifest culture. Community shapes Islamic culture as much as Islamic culture shapes religious saliency.

**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The purpose of this study is, accordingly, to understand the experience of being Muslim and American in a post 9/11 American society—specifically, the greater Miami, Florida area. Because of Miami’s renowned diversity, Muslims who wish to live undetected, to quarantine all articulations that express public Muslim-ness, and to comply with clearly demarcated religious spaces, can do so. Those who desire social invisibility
possess the opportunity to “blend in” among the many shades of “brown” found in the greater Miami area. In short, this study is immersed in an environment where assimilation can be discussed as a desired end, impossibility, or ongoing phenomena. The opportunity to analyze how conflict manifests in everyday life also exists. From personal to social identity, conflict is expected to appear in many dimensions of Muslim life in Miami.

Thus, the research issue is: How do people perceive and describe their experiences of being Muslim and American? The key terms in this question are perceive, describe, and being. The focus of this study is on perception and description because these words suggest entrée into a relative world and do not assume that a universal understanding of being a Muslim in America exists (Fals-Borda 1991; Freire 2000; Murphy 2014).

Past studies have focused on how Muslims are racialized, the negative health effects of being racialized, the victimization of Muslims in America, and the experiences of such victimization (Beck 2002; Canikar 2008; Grosfoguel 2016; Jamal 2008; Nadal et al. 2012; Selod & Embrick 2013; Selod 2015). Because being Muslim is perceived differently by different Muslims, and may be even perceived differently by the same person in different situations or periods in life (Creswell, 2012), the perceptions and detailed stories about the experience of being Muslim serve as an invaluable resource to generate knowledge about intentions, motivations, rationales, actions, and other phenomena of being Muslim and American.

This study represents an opportunity to understand the shortcomings and advantages of assimilation and conflict theories, and, quite possibly, the need to rethink both positions regarding Muslim Americans. This investigation is not merely a snap-shot
of the life of Muslim-Americans, as is the case with most qualitative studies, but rather a collaborative study between researcher and research subjects that acknowledges one simple and often overlooked idiom: all knowledge has a biographical character. To be affective, the researcher should approach the experience of being Muslim-American with the understanding that a person is the product of a historical life that not only utilizes experience to understand the world but also to make oneself known or unknown (Lee 2015; Wallerstein 1997). The research community, far and wide, has yet to account for this principle in the renderings of Muslim-American life.

Take for example, the hijab. Researchers have examined how Muslim-women experience slights in everyday life (Cainkar 2009; Haddad 2004, Naber 2005; Nadal et al. 2012; Selod 2015). Nonetheless, how these women cope with these aggressions has not been investigated. This omission could possible extend from the general victimization of this group by researchers. When women remove the hajib, for example, in order to be more acceptable, the personal and communal meaning of this action is unknown. What is missing in the research on Muslim Americans, accordingly, is how these persons carve out a sense of humanity in a generally hostile environment. The meaning and significance of coping strategies remains unstudied (Gadamer 2008).

This project is guided by the following research questions: (1) What is it like to Muslim in America, (2) How do Muslim-Americans create meaning?, and (3) What strategies do Muslim-Americans employ to deal with hostile environments?
RESEARCH OUTLOOK

Methodology

All research should make the distinction between methodology and method. In the following section, I discuss the methodology that justifies my method and conclude with the procedural and data management practices involved in this research. Methodology is a theoretical orientation often taken for granted in most studies.

The problem with research on Muslim-Americans is, at root, a philosophical one. That is, these people are treated as simply variables that can be easily circumscribed (Blumer 1969). Most research on the Muslim-American experience deals with racialized identities and the subsequent loss of civil rights relative to other religious and ethnic groups in the United States. This perspective leads researchers to: (1) reduce Muslim-Americans to homogenous assemblages—thereby treating Muslims as an ethnic group rather than a culture (Ghayur 1981; Krijestorac 2016); and, (2) develop an epistemological approach towards Muslims that gives primacy to an object-subject dichotomy. Both tendencies accentuate methods more inclined towards treating everything, including human beings, as reified objects (Said 1983). Not only are Muslims confined to a homogeneous grouping that fails to consider distinctions among Muslim communities—characterized by commitments, concerns, and cares—but the methods employed often overlook how communities interpret their needs and problems.

If the assumption is made that the social world is constructed, and social interaction is a “bottom up” phenomenon, local knowledge (Fals-Borda 1988) becomes very important in any research project. In this regard, the bottom represents the domain of popular interaction and shared experiences. Hardt and Negri (2004) argue bottom-up
movements reflect the ungeneralizable nature of social action and interaction. However, respect for such perspectives seems overshadowed by a more preferred and commonly accepted paradigm that is based in dualism.

Research on Muslim-Americans has, for the most part, treated these persons as victims. The starting point of contemporary research on this topic originates from a relative top-down approach—at an institutional, organizational, or exogenous level that metaphorically hovers above or outside a local community. Rather than giving voice to victims of racialization, the researchers decontextualize local concerns through methodological reduction, abstraction, and generalization. The Muslim-American experience, as lived by Muslims, thus becomes distorted. This distortion leads to another philosophical dilemma when considering any approach to knowing and understanding the Muslim experience, the ontological problem (Dreyfus 1992; Heidegger 1962; Turkle 2012).

This epistemological distortion reflects an ontological problem, since knowledge is always tethered to activities in the world. Put another way, when human action is severed from knowledge, as dualists contend, the world of persons is obscured (Barrett 1986; Murphy 1989). Nonetheless, thinking and being in the world represent a unified experience. This logic is grounded in the belief that the conscious is always conscious of something, always embodied, and always present in the physical, concrete world (Husserl 1970; Todes 2001). To say the subjective and objective are distinct spheres, and that one can operate without the other, or that objective absolutes exist outside of individual or collective legitimization, produces a social world unable to move beyond reification and, thus, condemns research to treat life and the world as things, quantifiable objects, and
lifeless entities connected mainly through causal logic (Ellul 1964; Harraway 1991; Heidegger 1977; Said 1983).

This perspective assumes the subject obscures the object or the object simply impacts the subject. For example, research that examined Muslim-American identity in a post 9/11 society, as well as the processes that cause racialization, micro-aggressions, and criminalization in various social spheres, speaks about Muslim-Americans from a privileged positon. This is not to suggest that insight is not provided. Knowledge about anti-Muslim attitudes is gained. For example, Cainkar (2008) describes how structural forces reinforce a nativist perspective among Americans, (mostly white, Judeo-Christian, Eurocentric, Elite, Males), thereby awakening a latent morality inclined towards cultural exceptionalism. This nativist awakening leads to anti-Muslim sentiments. Furthermore, Selod’s (2015) qualitative research reveals how gender leads to various dimensions of racialization—women experience a more cultural form of racism and men endure a more structural one. Similarly, Nader (2005) documents second generation identity conflicts that lead to transmutations of Arab and Muslim youths who seek space in American society as Americans, Muslims, and Arabs.

However, in this research the participants never moved beyond the role of object or passive subject. In fact, the participants are not treated as active beings who shape their reality within a defined community (Freire 2000). Muslims, Arabs, and youths remain subjects who are observed, probed, followed, studied, and analyzed without ever providing input on the research design, or included in the purpose of the study. In each case an outside specialist is presumed to possess the only means to acquire true knowledge. The excerpts, case-studies, and events depicted unfold within a paradigm of
an already operationalized thesis or hypothesis. What emerges, therefore, is nothing more than the voice of the researcher who imposes an interpretation of a decontextualized problem. Everything is molded, crafted, and manipulated by the researcher to fit this presumption. Even those who are well-intended—those that seek to rectify the injustices of racialization and dehumanization—remain confined by a dualistic epistemology and ontology.

The result of this research strategy is that the living are dehumanized, reduced to quantified representations, and, subsequently, transformed into independent facts utilized to substantiate the very reductive maneuver enacted to attain knowledge (Barrett 1986). Qualitative work within this traditional paradigm produces research, where the process of accumulating and constructing knowledge is controlled mostly by the research professional. The social world is encompassed by a dualistic mindset focused on explaining, formulating, and generalizing meaning rather than constructing a cooperative understanding with those who are directly impacted by a phenomenon. The key point here is that the social construction of the social world is obscured. And because meaning is only relatively stable and mostly ungeneralizable, knowledge is constantly negotiated (Murphy 2014). Therefore, in order to understand meaning research based on the subject-object dichotomy must be abandoned.

The counter-orientation to dualism is constructive theorizing. This orientation represents an emphatic rejection of epistemologies and ontologies that distort the world with reductive practices, and, instead, demands an alternative sociology—one that puts the researcher in the world of people, at the heart of social problems, in contact with sufferers, and on a road concerned with cooperative understandings that move beyond
sequences, processes, and technological rationales (Ellul 1964; Feenberg 2011; Marcuse 1965; Winner 1977). The new concern centers on language, relations, and manifest meanings. In this case, the question is: how has being a Muslim-American been constructed in South Florida after 9/11?

Utilizing a subject-subject approach, a cooperative understanding of why Anti-Muslim attitudes happen, what is done about them, and where and when do communities contribute to mitigating the effects of micro-aggressions can emerge. In order to accomplish these goals, a participatory action-research design becomes paramount (Fals-Bodra & Rahman 1991; Feirre 1998; Murphy 2014). This approach supplies a way for Muslim-Americans to begin to take ownership of their problems and their solutions, as well as a way for research to depict accurately the manner whereby individuals and local communities make sense of their worlds.

Participatory action research is an attempt to not only move away from the subject-object binary but to also emphasize the constructivist axiom that reality is an outgrowth of individual and collective action. (Berger & Luckmann 1966). To the extent that cultural saliency is a “paramount reality” that reflects a negotiated understanding of a community, research must involve engagement, dialogue, and co-construction with those who are studied (Schutz 1962). In this case, participant involvement may provide insight into the world of Muslim-Americans. Indeed, this strategy reconciles the aforementioned epistemological and ontological issues.

Participatory action research is used to re-conceptualize human life and knowledge, and, in particular, Muslim-Americans and anti-Muslim-American experiences in Miami. This goal is achieved by setting three methodological goals: (1) utilize preliminary focus
groups to help identify and shape relevant questions to get at important experiences, (2) gain access to the community and the narratives that reveal cares, concerns, and commitments of participants, and (3) initiate the co-operative dialogue necessary to co-create an understanding on the Muslim-American experience.

The use of a steering committee to not only help formulate questions but to also negotiate the meanings found in the responses is consistent with the theory utilized (PAR). Knowledge is constructed and requires entrée into a community through a steering committee that stems from the community under study. In this way, the study begins to be collaborative.

The issue of power is always a point of contention with other research methodologies. Either this factor becomes a point of emphasis that must be revealed as an ongoing force within the research process—as with most conflict approaches—or is a point that must be mitigated through the research process. In the case of the latter, the goal is to remove as much of the human element as possible from the research endeavor in order to preserve the sanctity of knowledge itself.

However, PAR does not treat power as a force or as a contaminant. Rather, power is a natural human feature that occurs in all interaction (Fierre 1998). Power, in this study, is present throughout the interviews and with each meeting of the steering committee. The researcher brings to the table the academic knowledge gained through years of study, while the participants bring years of experience as living subjects. Each participant possesses power. Therefore, throughout the study close attention will be paid to how power manifests in and through the social interactions that take place. In some cases, exchanges among the participants and researcher will create overt expression of
power—where one voice might claim an element of authority over others. In other cases, power articulations may be more covert in nature. In either case, power is an essential component to this study. The mere fact that PAR advocates for a bottom-up approach suggests that power is always a matter to be recognized and mitigated (Fals-Borda & Rahaman 1991).

**Method**

Because this study centers on the experience of being Muslim and American, Muslims living in Miami will be the focus of attention—the majority will be citizens, however some participants may hold resident status. Special considerations for inclusion include an adequate gender representation and religious saliency. Additionally, only adult Muslims over 18 who speak English will be considered.

For this qualitative study, in-depth interviews will be conducted with 30 Muslim Americans. The interviews will range from 60 to 90 minutes and take place in the greater Miami area. All participants will be adults (older than 18) and come from an adequate representation of gender and religious commitment. Because studies have shown gender to be a key indicator for how hostility is manifested in everyday life, and because the performance of Islam is closely attached to symbolic performances such as dress, physical features, prayers, and fasting, the manner in which people interpret stress and employ coping strategies should vary according to religious saliency and gender (Cainkar 2009).

By examining degrees of religious commitments or at least what religious commitments mean to participants, a greater sense of what being Muslim and being American will become apparent. With regard to gender, the attempt is to move beyond
how the experiences differ between males and females; instead, the goal is co-create an understanding of how the coping strategies employed affect the social aspects of living as a Muslim under hostile conditions. Particular interest will be paid to recruiting participants who find different saliency in their Muslim and American identities. This qualification means that some participants will view the hijab, jalab, thobe, and other physical markers as essential components of their Muslim identity, while others will view these markers as non-significant performances (Goffman 1959).

The interviews will consist of semi-structured, open-ended questions about the everyday experience of being Muslim in America, co-constructed with a focus group comprised of community members. For example, some questions will probe the experiences connected with anti-Muslim discrimination, and be framed in way to get participants thinking about the meanings associated with this event. I may ask something along the lines of: Think about a time when you experienced blatant discrimination or prejudice because of your religion? Describe this event as best you can? How did you react in this moment? How did you feel? What did you perceive as the reason this event happened?

Other questions will probe what being Muslim means to the participants. This type of question may be framed as: What does being Muslim mean to you? What are the most important facets of this achieved identity? I will also ask about race, gender, and ethnicity and how these constructions matter in the participant’s everyday life. As Moustakas (1994) notes, the essence of this method is to establish the essential features about the phenomena of being Muslim-American. This strategy includes the practical, emotional, and lived experiences that go into making meaning in life.
Because neither researchers nor participants are blank slates, the interview process must begin somewhere. Nonetheless, these questions are simply a starting point. The basic idea behind participatory action research is that the participants can challenge these initial probes, suggest other questions, or give the project another direction (Fals-Borda 1987; Minkler 2005; Wallerstein 1999). In many respects, this strategy is consistent with what Herbert Bulmer (1969) refers to as a “sensitizing” methodology. This project represents an endeavor to co-construct with the participants the meaning of being Muslim in America, the strategies used to make sense of life, and the common patterns of life in Miami that may be unique to the Muslim community. In order to achieve co-constituted knowledge, all outcomes will be negotiated by the steering committee, the interviews will be conversational in nature so that a fusion between academic knowledge and experience can occur (Fals-Borda 1996), and last the awareness is present that this research is guided by a communicative structure (Buber, 1970; Habermas 1987) in constant need of authorization from subjects to balance out the interpretations rendered from the findings.

Participants will be located through the researcher’s contacts with friends, family, and colleagues who are active in the Muslim community (Marshall, 1996). These various domains include mosques, community centers, business associations, social clubs, and college universities. The sample will be expanded via snowball sampling—a technique that identifies other possible candidates that fit the criteria from participants in the study.

Each participant will be interviewed and recorded with an audio recorder, if granted permission, while follow ups will be necessary in order to clarify some statements, and to ensure that the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretations from the
first interview are consistent with the participant’s intended meanings (Freire, 1998; Silka et al., 2008). All follow ups will occur within three months of the first interview. Each interview will be transcribed separately and read several times to obtain a familiarity with each of the participant’s responses (Colaizzi 1978).

The organization of data begins with transcribing each interview. After transcribing, the themes that emerge will be examined (Creswell, 2012). These themes represent the core, or essence, of the Muslim-American experience. These meanings are listed, clustered into common categories, and form the foundation for the textual description of the experience. This information constitutes the narrative portion of the dissertation, in which the activities, responses, and perceptions of the participants are described.

From each transcription, key phrases that speak to the lived experience of being Muslim will be identified and formulated into significant statements. These statements will be clustered into themes, thereby allowing for commonalities to become manifest between participants’ accounts (Charmaz 2014). Themes that emerge as common patterns among participants will enable meaningful conclusions to be generated about the lived experience of Muslim living in a post 9/11 America. In each phase of the research project, a “steering committee” derived from the initial focus groups will be involved in interpreting meanings and organizing themes.

Because participants will be asked to describe their experiences of being Muslim in America during a time when Anti-Muslim discrimination has become a growing problem in the United States, reliving certain incidents may conjure strong emotions. The participants will be told that they do not have to answer any questions they find
uncomfortable. In addition, participants will receive a statement of consent that outlines the purpose of this study before the interview begins.

**CHAPTER SUMMARIES:**

In Chapter 2 the anti-Muslim phenomenon will be discussed within the context of current research, approaches, and conclusions. Special emphasis will be placed on the assimilation and conflict paradigms in order to ground the current scholarship on anti-Muslim racism around the discourse of inclusion and exclusion. While these studies describe and bring awareness to the growing problem of anti-Muslim racism, certain limitation are present that that prevent a real understanding of this issue. Not only do these limitations reinforce the need for this research endeavor, but more important the gaps will show that only a surface-level understanding of the Muslim-American experience exists. Additionally, terminology will be tentatively defined in this chapter. Terms such as American, Muslim, Islam, Being, and Community will be grounded in a community-based paradigm in order to establish perspective for the research.

Chapters 3 and 4 unpack the theoretical groundings that guide the methodology and method. The thoughtful reflection that gives a particular theoretical approach primacy over others (Stephens 2015) is the focus of attention at this juncture. The theoretical background of a participatory-action research approach will be discussed in order to understand why this strategy is important to understanding the Muslim-American experience. Specifically noteworthy is that this method helps identify important concerns, cares, and commitments of participants that can be revealed through cooperative engagement. The very essence of this study is a methodological endeavor oriented towards knowledge-sharing and knowledge-creating between researcher and participants.
The aim is to make this research a cooperative, co-constructed, rendering of the Muslim-American experience in Miami.

Chapters 5 and 6 report the findings of the study and their implications. In these respective chapters, analysis of data will lead to what Fals-Borda (1987; 329) calls an “awareness building process.” Consistent with participatory action research, the Muslim-American experience will be ascertained through “baseline findings” that will help inform and guide the interpretative process between researcher and steering committee members (Wallerstein 1999; 46). The hope is that joint analysis that utilizes participatory action research principles will lead to increasing accuracy in depicting the Muslim-American experience.

In closing, this research in not just a culmination of my formal education as a sociologist but entails a personal commitment to a community. This project, as a participatory-research endeavor, seeks to empower Muslim-Americans with a sense of place and voice (Teig et al. 2009) in an environment that has been more conducive to denying both of these considerations. My hope is that this research produces and stimulates a critical thought process whereby a community can transform an imposed reality filled with hostility and exclusion into a means for carving out a social and political space that not only disarms racist attacks but serves as a source for meaning-making and agency.
CHAPTER 2
BEGINNING POINTS: HOW IDEAS ARE TESTAMENTS TO THE PAST BUT
NOT NECESSARILY MOVES FORWARD

This is not a typical beginning for a literature review. This beginning goes outside the linearity typically found in most reviews. In doing so, this statement defies the techniques systematized by institutions with historical roots to the enlightenment era, to the Spanish Reformation that many regard as the birth of modernity but few remember as a zealous purge of Muslims, (Dussell 1993; Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006), and to an industrial period where rational processes and causality gained prominence (Barrett 1986). This research begins in defiance, not out of arrogance or self-indulgence, but instead from a commitment to its subjects and topics. One basic assumption is made: one who attempts to understand the stories and meanings of Muslims by using exclusively Western frames and techniques employs the very rationale used to marginalize this population, and, in some respects, mask their creativity. Thus, defiance is in order.

Many have called for a more humanistic sociology (Fals-Borda and Mohammed 1998; Freire 1998, 2000; Murphy 2014; Tuck and McKenzie 2015). In fact, an entire journal is dedicated to this very purpose. The call for humanistic approaches is a type of defiance against Western-rationalization. The modern, Western logic relegates “the human” to a fallible vessel whose inherent constitution impedes the acquisition of pristine knowledge (Dreyfus 2001; Murphy 2012; Rozak 1986). Even more, the human capacity is deprived of fulfilling its potential, not only as a knowledge-producer but as a house of knowledge. What is lost, concealed, and forgotten by this compulsion towards objective rationalization, towards Cartesian enlightenment, and towards one dimensional understandings, are crucial aspects of being that range from agency’s paradox—the
capacity to negate and create—to conscious awakenings that expose determinism as a false praxis (Marcuse 1964; Sartre 1957). Each of these aspects will be unpacked in the subsequent chapters, as well as how the current body of knowledge has provided insights into understanding Muslims in the world, but has yet to deal adequately with the lived experiences of Muslims in America.

When one becomes conscious of the limits of Western rationalization, this awareness makes the research process a political choice. Furthermore, the call for humanistic sociology becomes a type of gathering that seeks innovative ways to reveal, combat, and subvert non-humanistic approaches. Since Western-rationalization oppresses the human, all of its products stand as the “Master’s tools” whereby freedom becomes confined (Lorde [1984]1993). Indeed, what is the call for a humanistic sociology if not a challenge to all sociologists? The challenge is at hand, the gauntlet thrown; one can either continue to exist within the parameters defined by oppressors or “reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside [themselves] and touch that terror and difference in order to understand the conditions of life” and unshackle human potential (Lorde [1984]1993, p.113).

This study’s subjects are not merely facts of the research; they are, in fact, every aspect of the research. That is why the participants must be accounted for in every phase of this study, including locating the limits in the current knowledge. For this section, then, a reflexive statement, followed by insights gained during an interaction with one of this study’s participants, will help frame the current body of knowledge and move the study toward addressing any identified limitations. This strategy will also serve as an unorthodox stand against the typically structured dissertation. In this regard, one can
either engage theory to understand the world, or engage the world to understand theory. This research is oriented towards the latter orientation. The logic behind this beginning remains grounded in a belief that humans are the key to understanding theory.

**A REFLEXIVE STATEMENT**

This project changed me! Moving from epistemological immersions typical of academia to the outside, active life where meanings are not so evident and the rhythms, praxis, and attitudes of the social world happen with suddenness, proved disorienting at times. However, this experience did reinforce the notion that knowledge comes from the world and not from the world of books. Books may help one “become” knowledgeable, but in life is where the actual becoming happens; in the experiential world is where one finds, makes, and pursues purpose. In terms of this endeavor, I stand in part as a researcher presenting knowledge, and in part as a subject, a Muslim, and first hand witness to the manner in which systems and structures\(^1\) bear down with force on lives engaged in alternative lifestyles. My participants were also my brethren. I prayed with them, broke fast with them, met their kids, visited their work, looked at their pictures, shook their hands, smelled their perfumes, became sensitive to their voice-inflections, and embraced their humanity.

Sure, the intention was always to connect, that much can be read in methodological approaches and theoretical discourses, but what is difficult to relay is the manner whereby physical connections move a person and alter relations in the world. I

\(^1\) Throughout this dissertation the use of terms like system and structure reveal a rationale that must always pass through consciousness to work. For example, capitalism is at once a system and structure, but does not “work all by itself” (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992; p. 112). In every time and with each generation, systems and structures must be validated and accepted through beliefs and practices. Externally, a structure can impose on life, yet be rejected by individuals. However, structures are also invisible and can manifest as a common sense that dominate a person’s becoming/development/potential (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Thus, structure and systems manifest in a myriad of ways but must always be internalized and validated to be effective.
will not romanticize the connection aspect here, but as a Muslim growing up in the United States I experienced anti-Muslim racism. The older I became the more prominent my Muslimness to the world mattered. Teen-age fist fights became work-force discrimination. Childhood friends became racist neighbors. Indeed, I share an understanding with other Muslims about how anti-Muslim practices show up in the world. But, even still, none of my experiences compared to becoming a part of a crime scene.

Nothing could prepare me for the sheer display of force, the spectacle of police sirens, and a team of government agents sealing off a perimeter. Although I showed up moments after the arrest, I became part of the scene. An agent took a snap-shot of my driver’s license and inquired about my relation to the Muslim-suspect. He was a burly man in stature, which made the printed badge on his polo shirt prominent. His voice seemed trained in authoritative tones, but at least with me he was not offensive. His demeanor was civil, while the spectacle of the arrest and the seizure of the private office reflected an offensive display of force. A swarm of sanctioned activity buzzed around me. He informed me of the charges—for the sake of my participant’s privacy I will refrain from sharing details—and educated me on the bureaucracy of prisoner processing. The Muslim-suspect would be taken to a certain location for holding, then one for processing, then another for detainment, then to the court, and finally back to detainment to be processed once more before release. Each phase required hours of paper work and each transfer required the transmission of information that, if lost, could delay the prisoner’s release. Lawyers, a bondsman, media, and the state infiltrated this Muslim’s man life. His family was thrown into chaos.
I would come to learn that this was not the first time my participant was arrested, detained, or interrogated. Over the past 14 years, he experienced two arrests, dozens of airport detainments that caused him to miss flights and speaking engagements, and at least 4 interrogations conducted by either Homeland Security, the FBI, or local police. Yet, until now, he had never been charged formally or convicted of a crime. In each detainment, he was perceived to be guilty and, therefore, he could never walk away innocent. For him, the 6th amendment works in a vacuum. He is guilty until proven guilty. Through conditions such as these, this research entered spaces where human lives were forced to make sense of hardships that seemed beyond their control. In these spaces, I found my beginning and came to engage the current body of literature critically. This research topic began as a calling, but its significance only became truly known during an interview with this very participant months before his arrest.

His eyes remained fixated on mine; the heavy silence suggested that he was contemplating whether he could trust me enough to share his true feelings. He was a young, professional man. Only 38 years of age, but his face was worn by other factors than time. The weathered face could have stemmed from his profession and community activities that taxed his time and rest. But, could this Muslim man be known by law enforcement as a person of interest? The possible feeling of living in a “panoptic” bubble could be the cause of sleepless nights (Foucault [1977]1995). But all of this is just speculation. Whatever the reason(s), a mystery existed with this man.

I waited for his answer. The question was simple enough: what does it feel like being Muslim in America? On previous occasions, the question inspired some thoughtful replies, but never profound. Mostly, there were generic replies that say nothing, but are
still wordy enough to fill space and time. But this moment felt different. There was tension thick enough to make the air between us heavy. “You want to know how it feels. I get up in the morning, I drink my coffee, I kiss my kids, I tell my wife I love her and I grab my keys, and walk out the door and head to work. The only thing is that the whole time I’m doing these things, and I mean the same things every morning before I go to work, I’m thinking to myself, today I’m not coming home. This is what it feels like to be Muslim in America. It is to live with the feeling that the government fears, mistrusts, and maybe even hates you, not because of who I am but because of who I might be or might become.” As he exhaled the thought, his words paralyzed me.

I looked at this man, this devout Muslim, and I began to understand that this is where most research resides. Most research on Muslims reinforces this man’s feelings of not being known or appreciated. These studies deal with his place in American society, with how mainstream society perceives him, with all that is wrong with prejudices, and with how his pain is a product of system that neither views him as human or as a tolerable “subaltern” worthy of residence on society’s periphery (Spivak 1988). In these studies, he is a threat, a commodity, and an intolerable being. What is missing is not an understanding of his place in society, but rather how he struggles for the space to make a place in society. Both endeavors may deal with dignity, but only the latter deals with freedom; only the latter deals with agency and accountability.

I empathize with his words but also realize that I have found the beginning point of my study—the paradox of American modernity. I communicate my thoughts and tell him of this epiphany. He agrees and shares some thoughts. “When you asked me to talk with you and told me about your study, I thought to myself, who cares. I mean what it
means to be Muslim is a concern for Muslims; who cares about what others think of us. But, now I understand your purpose and I think it is important. We don’t need people to speak for us, what we need is for people to hear us.” Indeed, no matter how elucidating past studies appear, they fail to capture who this Muslim “being” is. Yes, past research can help explain why he feels fear, how his fear is the outcome of systemic practices designed to preserve privilege and expand hegemony throughout our social world (Beydoun 2017; Brown 2012; Cainkar 2009; Love 2017; Salaita 2006; Selod 2015). Past studies focus on his Muslimness as a necessary reference for delineating the sacred from the profane (Alba 2005; Brubaker 2012; Edgell et al. 2016). But, because he walks out that door, lives in the world, and has been arrested and charged with a crime he refutes, research must move beyond facts and claims of structural determinism in order to capture this drama. Those claims are already in the stocks of knowledge that academia privileges.

What is missing is not an account of his nightmare that has come to fruition, but rather how he remains steadfast as a Muslim, how he remains conscious of his environment, and therefore remains accountable for who he becomes. Empirically, he still stands, wakes, loves, prays, preaches and lives in America. But his existence is comprised of an entirely different logic than has been captured typically by past studies (Abdo 2006; Cesari 2013; Selod 2015; Haddad and Smith 2002). His story, experience, and spirituality demand that researchers be attentive. In his expression, and in the many expressions found in this study, insights can be gained about the human condition and how common experiences lead to a semblance of understanding Muslims in Miami. Relying on experiences and not on structural effects, causality, stories of pain, or coping strategies helps to ground agency in the world (Tuck and Yang 2014). In turn, when the
focus is on human agency, life is celebrated. The creative capacity can determine the
course of becoming, as well as negate determinism. In this paradox of creation and
negation, a methodological turn is presented. That turn is this chapter’s destination. As
the move is made from one paradox—American modernity—to another, the paradox of
agency, a simultaneous move is made from affirmations of structure and power to
accounts of space-creating, meaning-making, and empowerment.

The purpose of this maneuver is twofold. First, answers are opened to questions
about power. For example, one begins to grasp the limits of power. If the move takes
concern away from structural power and illustrates creative solutions to overcome
impositions, then the manner in which power is manifest is limited while praxis is
enhanced. More concertedly, the move is made from the one-dimensional existence
sanctioned by the state to the unbounded potential liberated in struggle (Gladwell 2013).
In the former, roles, hierarchies, and processes are given primacy, whereas in the latter
adaptivity, community, and courage are essential features.

The first experience breeds structure, the second love. Frankl (1959) can help to
substantiate this perspective. One person’s account of a lived experience so wretched,
inhumane, and void of everything life-affirming can help to shift the focus of research.
Upon reflection of his time in the Auschwitz concentration camp, he writes:

“A man who let himself decline because he could not see the future goal
found himself occupied with retrospective thoughts. In a different
connection, we have already spoke of the tendency there was took into the
past, to help make the present, with all its horrors, less real. But in robbing
the present of its reality their lay a certain danger. It became easy to
overlook the opportunities to make something positive of camp life,
opportunities which really did exist….Instead of taking the camp’s
difficulties as a test of their inner strength….they preferred to close their
eyes and live in the past. Life for such people became meaningless”
(Frankl 1959, p.71-72).
On the one hand, this quote demonstrates how power confines reality and potential to a world of walls and timelessness. But on the other hand, what is illustrated is how agency that is compromised even in the darkest of spaces destroys one’s humanity. Frankl is adamant here—persons are responsible for their being and becoming. There is no choice but choice itself.

The second purpose brings everything full circle, that is, back to the research and rigors of knowledge production and a defiant stance that is both rational and creative. Certainly, the maneuver from structural concerns and techniques to meaning-making empowerment can be vague. The hope is that some of this opaqueness can be mitigated by this work. From the first line, this reflexive statement represents a description of how knowledge is manifested, and that the purpose or significance of this research did not originate in a classroom or a book, but rather in the world. As the methods will show, this trek began with a focus group that helped orient the project. But the significance of this project was not apparent until the moment when interaction showed what was missing—specifically, how misinterpretation happens and what needs to be understood. The point is that prior researchers have not quite understood how Muslims, living in hostile environments, work through, persevere, and utilize their Muslimness not as objects but praxis. Therefore, the goal of this project is not to understand why the invisible Muslim cowers or why the visible Muslim defies (Diouf 2002; Marvasti 2006), but rather how in both conditions Muslims use their identity to affirm their humanity.

To move from the paradox of modernity to the paradox of agency requires that both are unpacked. Accordingly, the following chapters have this aim. The initial issue at hand pertains to the paradox of humanity.
Paradox of Modernity

In the beginning of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl (1959) provides the general principles used to survive the concentration camps. The main imperative in Auschwitz was to look fit for work. As soon as prisoners appeared unfit, sick, injured, or unstable, they were condemned to the gas chambers. Recalling one of his first mornings at Auschwitz, when a more experienced prisoner snuck into his shelter to share survival tips, Frankl (1959, p. 19) writes:

“‘But one thing I beg of you;’ he continued, ‘shave daily, if at all possible, even if you have to use a piece of glass to do it….even if you have to give your last piece of bread for it. You will look younger and the scraping will make your cheeks look ruddier. If you want to stay alive, there is only one way to look: look fit for work. If you even limp, because, let us say, you have a small blister on your heel, and an SS man spots this, he will wave you aside and the next day you are sure to be gassed. Do you know what we mean by a Moslem? A man who looks miserable, down and out, sick and emaciated, and who cannot manage hard physical labor any longer….that is a Moslem. Sooner or later, usually sooner, every Moslem goes to the gas chambers.’”

Frankl’s recollection captures the dire issues at hand for Jewish prisoners. At every instant, their mortality was on the line. The prisoners learned not only to appear fit for work, but also to exaggerate their well-being to avoid being marked for death. Agency is evident. The prisoners employed innovative ways to navigate appearance. But what is more telling than the lucidity of agency is the venom of modernity that seeped into Jewish expressions of being. Even among the prisoners of a death camp, the meanings associated with the word ‘Moslem’ describe a semi-human object.

Heidegger (1971, p.60) maintains that “truth comes to shine forth is the nearness of that which is not simply a being, but the being that is most of all”(italics added for emphasis). On the surface, the stigma of a Moslem signifies damnation; one is condemned to the gas chambers. But if we take Heidegger’s words to heart, then the
stigma associated with the Moslem typifies a specific type of being who carries definitive characteristics that make this person most deviant. Here is the irony found in Auschwitz among the Jewish prisoners: The dehumanized Jewish captives engaged in dehumanizing others. This outcome reveals how the Western modern-man seems almost obliged to construct an antithesis as a point of reference, as praxis whereby superiority becomes substantiated as a lens for rationalizing genocidal irrationality (Dussel 1993).

Being a starved Jew reduced to labor power, stripped of all worldly possessions, and living in a world where Jews were deemed worthy of total extermination, the need existed to engage in acts of dehumanization. By employing a derogatory representation of “Moslems,” the illusion enables the imprisoned, yet enduring Jew, to maintain a sense of power and humanity. For, rather than the Jew, the “Moslem” stands as the lowest form of human and the closest thing to an animal. In Auschwitz, the “Moslem” is not merely a mythical construct essentialized to the lowest degree, but more profoundly an ontological embodiment of the most wretched form of being among a society of damaged bodies. There is nothing redeemable about a “Moslem.” Every “Moslem” ends up in the gas chambers.

If this were a post-1948 phenomenon, then perhaps one could attribute this consciousness as an expression of animosity between Israeli and Arab cultures. But it is not. The mythological construction of the “Moslem” reflects the consciousness of the European Jew, and therefore one must consider the roots of this consciousness as a possible product of European rationalization. An edict from Foucault (1972) helps to guide the analysis of the paradox at hand. One must look to the foundations that give rise to distorted discourses to understand this issue.
It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to show how the history of ideas, as they relate to Muslims, reveals layers of Orientalism; nonetheless, how modernity and anti-Muslim sentiments correlate must be appreciated (Said 1979). If anything, the representation of Muslims throughout European consciousness, histories, and cultures shows a “discursive consistency” that has led not only to the creation of the modern being—one distinctively contingent on constructing the “other” as a means for self-affirmation—but also to an anathema juxtaposed against the “being that is most of all.” (Heidegger 1971, p.60; Said 1979, 271-273). How logic of progress can coincide with logic of genocide (Dussel 1993; Salaita 2006; Wolfe 2006) is difficult to reconcile but essential to the story of Muslims in the West.

The interchangeable use of West, Western, Eurocentric, American or Euro-American rationalization to characterize modernity assumes standardization (Schlesinger 1998). According to Foucault ([1994]2000, see pages 406-409), the idea of the state operates within a unique and self-affirming logic. The principle of “governance” represents an internal struggle between state and citizen, whereby the state, as designated overseer of society at large, seeks continuity between the economy of people, their morality, and state politics (Foucault [1994]2000, p.206). And, thus, mediations between these domains fall to the state. The state becomes responsible for creating a sense of nationalism whereby a homogeneous morality becomes coded into citizenry.

However, because these concerns, or politics, exist in a space alongside other states, which may become allies or foes, pressure is also applied to homogenize the world through political and other forms of domination. Throughout history this homogenization required the colonization of interests, bodies, and lands. Furthermore, the internal and
external colonization are often cloaked in the illusion of progress and salvation. Fanon recognizes this imperative when he writes, “in this framework of peaceful coexistence, therefore, every colony is destined to disappear” (Fanon 1963, 39). Fanon understands modernity as a process whereby form becomes uniform. One can begin to appreciate the manner in which cultural and physical genocide create the West. On the one hand, peoples and territories are conquered for land, on the other the subjugated acquiesce to a way of life that erases diversity or opposition (Memmi 1965).

The aim is not to reframe genocidal colonization. Doing so would be to dismiss the Native American, the African, the Jew of the Holocaust, the Palestinian, and others. One does, however, find the colonization of interests at the heart of modernity. Through symbolic violence, the migrant, the colonized, and the subjugated abandon their culture for the promise of acceptance (Murphy et al, 1994). This myth turns the Jew into a Moslem and is at the essence of what preserves nationalism, nativism, and racism. The state, as a form of Western rationalization, creates the citizen, first, before embarking on outside missions. But, in both cases, the art of governance strives to transform and destroy one form so that another emerges.

Foucault claims that the state draws on three fundamental forms of governance to manage society. First, there is the art of governing the individual according to morality. Second, there is the art of social governance that revolves around the economy. And, third, there is the art of governance itself, which belongs to the realm of politics. Morality, economic, and politics emerge as fields of knowledge that discipline society and serve the state. Whether Foucault drew from Max Scheler’s sociology is unknown, but there is a striking resemblance to Scheler’s view of technological, economical, and
religious knowledge (Scheler 1980; see also Stark [1958] 1991, p.117). In any case, what becomes evident is that the Western world is formed through a trinity of rationalization. One sees the manner in which control, desire, and salvation become intertwined into a particular mode of existence. Thus, the state seeks to homogenize through complicity with what, depending on perspective, modern scholars have called capitalism, the technological rationale, assimilation, symbolic violence or one-dimensionality (Bourdieu 1983; Davis 2016; Ellul 1964; Marcuse 1964; Wallerstein 2006). In this context, however, cultural genocide seems most appropriate.

Some scholars argue the last component in this trinity, religious morality, has been diminished during modernity, but this view is a shortsighted, if not negligent. In fact, salvation/religious morality enables the other two components to cultivate cultural genocide. By couching economy and technology in salvation, the poor, the worker, the meek, the strong and the rich rationalize their condition as predestination—a concept soon clarified. The praxis of salvation facilitates the bond between militant capitalist/modernists and missionary liberals/modernists, and thus enables physical and cultural genocide to operate as currency. For example, a Western rationale predicated on predestination has taken the form of a world-system, market, logic, values, norms, culture, and science. The standard and the standardization of reason, thus, becomes the overarching ideology to justify progress. For some, like Wallerstein (2006), the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 epitomizes this move towards a unified European ego. For others, like Dussel (1993, 2000) and Grosfouguel (2006, 2010), this unified ego stems from two relative events occurring in the same year, under the same banner, in two distinct areas.

See Peter Berger’s *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*
In 1492, the Reconquering of Spain by Christian forces—an event that would ultimately lead to the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of more than 500,000 Jews and Muslims from modern day Spain (Kamen 2014)—coupled with Columbus’s landing in the West, represents the birth of modernity. According the Dussel (1993, 2000) and Grosfouguel (2006), these two events standardized the state, military, and economic interests and created a distinct worldview. The conquered territories and people, the rise of a united Spain under a common religious culture, and the focal shift from trade routes in the East to virgin routes in the West accompanied modern rationalization. In this regard, Grosfouguel (2006, 2010) interprets the Spanish reformation as the coming of age of racial consciousness. However, the Reformation—as well as the crusades—provides evidence that an anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim praxis existed well before a racialized social system rooted in the West (Wolfe 2006). Regardless of form, the Jew, Muslim, and all people of color would come to experience physical and cultural genocide. The alleged uncivilized nature of these “others” provides a sense of superiority for the European, as well as a sense of duty to “purge” or “civilize” the savages. The violence and missionary acts sanctioned by Modernity articulate homogeneity in such a way that the colonized come to represent both the means and end of rationalization (Bhabha 1990).

To summarize, there is a fundamental compulsion towards homogeneity—as colonizer and colonized (Fanon 1963; Memmi 1965). This compulsion drives the modern-Eurocentric-Euro-American consciousness and brings about the paradox found in modernity—modernity is at once rational and irrational, creative and genocidal, and affirming and negating. What is important here, besides the recognition of this paradox, is the connection between cultural genocide and assimilation. Especially relevant in this
dissertation is that the social sciences have distorted the Muslim by relying on techniques perfected by a rationalization designed to mitigate difference and cultivate homogeneity (Bhabha 1990; Spivak 1988). If research acquires coherence from Western rationalization, and entails the act of producing rather than discovering knowledge, then the knowledge produced is mediated by Western rationalization. Consequently, systems of hierarchy and causality frame existence and come to represent the means by which knowledge becomes established. Agency is compromised and relegated to spheres of conflict, functionality, and criticisms.

This maneuver must be understood to grasp the dehumanization of Muslims. An example illustrates how the concept of assimilation distorts social existence. The assimilation perspective takes into account the historical, social, and political context of Muslim migration into the United States. Naber (2000) identifies three distinct waves—pre 1945, post 1945, and post 1960—while members of only the first two assimilated fully into American society. She describes the successfully assimilated waves as opportunistic and predominantly Christian. Conversely, the post 1960 population entered the United States after intense political and social upheaval forced an exodus from their respective homelands.

This third wave, an undifferentiated Muslim group possessing affinities for their motherland, entered the U.S. with preconceived judgements about American imperialism and a commitment to preserving their ethnic roots. They formed ethnic enclaves and preserved cultural markers such as intragroup marriages, prescribed gender roles and native foods, and languages and religious practices. In line with Portes and Zhou’s (1993) typology, segmented assimilation characterizes the post-1960 wave. After 9/11, however,
a dramatic shift occurs. Boundaries between Muslim-Americans and mainstream society not only become more salient (Alba 2005; Edgell 2006, 2016), but identity crises among 2nd generation Muslim-Americans become difficult to interpret (Hermansen 2003; Peek 2005). For example, Hermansen (2003) perceives the emergent Muslimness of the younger generation as a threat to modernity.

Hermansen’s (2003) uses the metaphor of a genie to represent the nascent conservative nature of the Muslim youth in a post 9/11 America. The genie, accordingly, must be put back in the bottle, due to its destructive nature. She identifies the youth with “identity Islam,” or the otherizing of non-Muslims. Identity Islam is hateful, irrational, and laden with superiority complexes relative to non-Muslims. According to Hermansen (2003), not only does identity Islam inhibit progress, but stands as the root cause of American prejudices against Muslims. What is evident is the manner in which Hermansen’s call for cultural genocide resonates. Beyond the reification of Muslim youths as an unhinged lot whose irrationality requires containment and expressions of identity threaten the civility of western life, and beyond the obvious Orientalism associated with “genie,” lies the fundamental tactic deployed throughout history against Muslims. Simply, Islam needs reforming because Muslims are irrational fatalists. This axiom works in conjunction with another: The West needs protecting because Muslims are irrational fatalists. Thus, the Muslim subject becomes an object consistent with Western rationalization: destroy one form to create another.

Assimilationist discourse, in its embodied rational form, imbeds the “non-native” in power narratives. The “other” is examined from an ivory tower and is expected to repress their values, beliefs, and principles for the sake of acceptance (Murphy et al.
Hermansen’s (2003) assumption presumes America functions as an accommodating entity whereby a civilized Muslim is provided to space to live free. But Hermansen’s (2003) logic is skewed by modernity’s conditioning. For her, freedom demands the conformity that provides freedom. The manifested irrationality illustrates how tolerance serves as an instrument of governmentality that “does not resolve but rather manages…inequalities and exclusions” (Brown 2012, p. 7). In the functionality found in assimilation, conflict defines the basic character ontology of Muslims and operates with an idiom of mandated conformity.

**The Paradox’s Praxis: Conflict’s Functionality and Functional Conflict**

At the onset of this examination of Western-Eurocentric-American modernity, the interchangeability between signifiers of space and place was assumed. A generalization was made between European and American worldviews and couched in terms like modernity and Western consciousness. On this matter, two points are important. The first centers on this assumption: Europe and America operate on the same irrational logic. At times, this irrationality is manifested differently in each place, but the rationalizations that constitute modernity share the “coordinates of knowledge” that condition this general outlook (Foucault 1980, p. 196).

James Baldwin helps elucidate this idea. While in the Netherlands in 1981, Baldwin provided this comment during an interview: “America comes out of Europe….I come from Harlem, I was born in Harlem. You have a Harlem in the Netherlands and a Harlem in New York….You have a Brooklyn Bridge here…YOU are still connected” (IKON 1981). This connection Baldwin emphasizes is an attempt to illustrate the similar forms of racial inequalities throughout the West. Whether in Holland, England, Europe or
America, the “patterns of chaos” reflect shared assumptions (Said 1983, p. 231). Indeed, American history does not begin with its first colonialists; rather, this narrative is intertwined with European history and consciousness. There is a common origin and materiality that connects these places. This connection revolves around the idea of progress, and its subsequent products, as well as a belief that God designed Western rationalization as both a beginning and end (O’Connor 2008, p. 179-195).

Western rationalization is a fantasy that imagines “all the societies of the past, irrespective of geography or time, lived and died for the sake of, and in preparation for, modern Europe” (Hallaq drawing from Hegel 2013, p. 17). The idea of modernity and subsequent practices are the summation of trial and error by which all of history operates “for the service of [Western] enlightenment” (Stark [1958] 1991, p. 133 pulled from Voltaire). For example, the Western, self-actualized, Christian being is what constitutes Hegel’s free spirit, Nietzsche’s will-to-power, Marx’s binary, Weber’s Protestant Ethic, Foucault’s Bio-power, and Heidegger’s technology. This outcome is, again, the manifest paradox of modernity. In each case, progress is marked by destruction—the assimilation of everything to a higher, more advanced principle.

In this light, Auschwitz 1942 is Spain 1492. In both places and with both the conqueror and conquered, the praxis “gathered together the instrumental, technological, and bureaucratic constituents of Western modernity” in order to construct a reality, however irrational, in its image (Wolfe 2006, p.393). The Spanish and Nazis had their ideals and the Auschwitz prisoners possessed theirs. Each reflected the same coordinates of knowledge that enabled a free spirit entrenched in genocidal rationalities to self-actualize.
Death in both cases was seen from a distance that distorted the humanity of the participants. In the Reformation, death was a means to cleanse the homeland of a perceived disease. The Jews and Muslims infected Spanish culture and lands. Their death and exodus affirmed Western life. In Auschwitz, the Nazis operated with the same logic found in 1492. Moreover, this rationalization mutated into the minds of the people whose very extinction was unfolding. The death by gas chamber happened to beings whose ethnicity, religion, and humanity were no longer in question. Some Europeans became Jews; some Jews became “Moslems.” The idea is that these illusions of identity transform various modes of existence into “lifeless atoms” (Said 1983, p.231).

The second point expands the first. Western rationalization, while indeed generalized and irrational, does not merely confine the space necessary for agency to affirm one’s humanity, but also distorts one’s purpose. If this sounds like Marx’s alienation, that is because the process of rationalization embodies alienation. However, progress has made the paradox of modernity an enigma. So, for the sake of clarity, these abstractions must be clarified.

This enigma is the outer dimension of modernity’s paradox, and represents where critics of Western rationalization can arise without ever changing the essence of the Eurocentric rationale. Let us take Marx’s prognostication of a revolution as an example. The embodied, awoken proletariat does not necessarily ensure that the “other” ceases to be, or assures their liberation occurs alongside the proletariat (Davis 2016). If anything, Auschwitz helps illustrate this fact. But even more telling is the manner in which critics of modernity possess the wherewithal to employ terms such revolution and rational ethic
while espousing deeply hypocritical positions against others, and specifically Muslims (Marx 1854; Weber [1930]2005).

A reading of Grosfoguel (2010) guided this speculation into both Marx and Weber’s positions on Muslims. With Marx, an 1854 article written for the New York Herald Tribune provides insight into his attitudes about Muslims. The following passage shows that, indeed, the potential for Marx’s ideal to become reality does not translate into liberation for all. Marx writes:

“The Koran and the Mussulman legislation emanating from it reduce the geography and ethnography of the various people to the simple and convenient distinction of two nations and of two countries: those of the Faithful and of the Infidels. The Infidel is “harby,” i.e. the enemy. Islamism proscribes the nation of the Infidels, constituting a state of permanent hostility between the Mussulman and the unbeliever….How, then, is the existence of Christian subjects of the Porte to be reconciled with the Koran” (approximately 3rd page).

Two issues are at hand: (1) Marx reflects Eurocentric consciousness and (2) the audacity of his hypocrisy. Marx’s disdain for religion emanates from its capacity to nurture complacency. Complacency enables alienation, exploitation, and the bourgeoisie class to operate with impunity. However, with Islam and by extension with Muslims, something else is revealed. Specifically, Muslims harbor a worldview that identifies two categories of humanity: believers and unbelievers. The believers engage in disingenuous actions against the other, while the unbelievers are an enduring threat and, therefore, must be kept at bay, treated unfairly, and relegated to a condition that requires reconciliation.

In general, his understanding of the West overdetermined his perspective of Muslims. Marx portrays the Muslim as an irrational, privileged, deceitful hoard whose culture divides the world into two spheres. He indicts Islam, and by extension Muslims, as essentializing xenophobes, yet uses the very same rationale, i.e. the construction of
binaries, to formulate his own theory of the world. Thus, the call for a revolution can only be a uniquely Western obligation. Western-rationalization allows for conflict to be functional and for the functional to be manifested as conflict. The unified Ego, as paradox, is perpetuated and the survival of Muslims remains always in question. Muslims must endeavor to forget themselves in order to become tolerable (Brown 2012; Mamdani 2002). They must become Western.

With Weber, there is no ambiguity; Islam is/was/and will always be the polar opposite of Protestantism (Sukidi 2006). The salient divide is again a mythological binary—Predestination vs Predetermination—constituted by an ontology that obscures the lived experience. For the Protestant, the idea of predestination provides the justification for capitalism, wealth differentials, and a rational gauge to assess God’s pleasure (Sukidi 2006). Predestination serves as a religious sanction to rationalize the actions of humans. Success in business, for example, reifies a divine power. Additionally, through predestination and the Protestant work ethic, capitalism is transformed into a world-system (Wallerstein 2006). But in the case of Islam something less favorable occurs.

Muslims believe every life from birth to death is guided by predetermination. Weber interprets this belief as fatalistic, apathetic, sadistic, and unabating. The contrast between faiths leads Weber to conclude: “In consequence, the most important thing, the proof of the believer in predestination, played no part in Islam. Thus only the fearlessness of the warrior…could result, but there were no consequences for rationalization of life; there was no religious sanction for them…. [Unlike] all the great men of Puritanism ([who] in the broadest sense) took their departure from [predestination]” (Weber
The irrational Muslim is unlike the rational Christian. One is ferocious and primitive and the other great and progressive. Weber’s depictions of the Muslims still resonate today at the expense of their freedom and humanity.

To summarize, the epistemological foundations of Western thought, as exemplified by Marx and Weber—two pillars of the social sciences—demonstrate the manner in which modernity may assume different ontological forms without altering its praxis. Marx’s perspective on the Muslim is based in conflict, but when a broad perspective is taken, one that includes the proletariat and bourgeoisie, only the Western world appears salvageable. Yet, according to Weber’s interpretation, Muslim fatalism produces the counter-effect. In Weber, one can find the foundations of Bernard Lewis’s (1990, 2002) *The Roots of Muslim Rage* and *What Went Wrong*, as well as Huntington’s (1993) *Clash of Civilization* thesis. That is, Weber holds Islam to be the fundamental opposite of the Christian West (Sukidi 2006). The predetermined Muslim is not functional in a West predicated on predestination. Functionality is not a matter of presence in one sphere and absence in another, but rather the basic premise of conflict. Muslim functionality lacks the purpose the Christian-West possesses. This dichotomy frames Muslims as a threat to any rational society. Indeed, the irredeemable Muslim was there in the beginning of modernity, in the Enlightenment, during industrialization, at Auschwitz, and here now. Nothing has changed.

*Perpetuating the Paradox*

It is 2012 and a renowned physicist, Neil Degrasse Tyson, takes the stage at a graduation commencement. He is the key note speaker at a university known for its sciences. In spite of science’s determinism, and reliance on causality as means to arrive at
pristine knowledge and discover truth, Tyson’s speech revolves around critical thinking.

One can argue that this speech comes a little late in the college experience. After initial pleasantries, Tyson expresses a concern to his audience: the ability to critically think is becoming obsolete. He explains:

“One day I ask my younger sister, ‘so Lynn where do you wanna go have lunch today’...And she says, ‘well what are my choices?’ It was odd, because I didn’t realize until that moment that she was not yet capable of coming up with a fresh idea. Why? Because she has spent her whole life taking multiple choice tests! So I ask her a question and she wants choices to pick from. This would continue her whole life. And I would test this with other people and found that people want choices. And I realized maybe it’s hard to think originally and come up with a fresh thought….Because somehow in our society we are hell bent on the answer, the right answer….when it is the right answer, it is the right answer and when it is the wrong answer it is the wrong answer. Consider this following example. Imagine you have a spelling bee…and you have to spell the word CAT. So, one student spells the word C-A-T. Person got it right. The next person spells it K-A-T. That’s wrong…. A third person spells it X-Q-W. Do you realize that this marked equally as wrong as with the K-A-T? You can argue that the K-A-T is a better spelling for cat than C-A-T. Dictionaries know this because that’s how they spell it phonetically. So, we have built a system for ourselves where there is an answer and everything else is not the answer even when some of the answers as better than others” (Tyson’s University of New England Commencement Speech 2012).

Tyson cautions his audience about a horrifying realization. Most people have lost their minds. Of course, this expression does not imply mental illness or insanity, but reflects the effects of modernity. Implicitly, Tyson indict society’s institutions—the givers of multiple choices, the regulators of right and wrong, the limiters of critical thinking and the socializers of mindless beings. Modernity is at fault for the perennial production of people dependent on choices for resolution, and more important for meaning. Modernity has created a system that has destroyed creativity by repressing and oppressing alternative ways of thinking (Baudrillard [1988] 2001). There is only one best way (Ellul,
1964). And this way translates across all aspects of living; all deviations are regulated or buried.

The ideal is the imperative of rationalization. Herein lies the irony and illusion of Hegel’s *Fee Spirit* or Weber’s *Predestination*. The epistemologies driving the ontology of modernity, as well as the patterns of normativity that indicate progress, bind the mind, body, and spirit to uniformity (Barrett 1986; Ellul 1964; Goethe [1883]2005; Marcuse 1964). These ideals secure a universal fate, such as capitalism, and reify economic value (Said 1983). Human endeavors become subjected to state and economy for meaning. For example, the status found in cultural symbols, such ethnic or racial traits, exist on a similar fetishized plane as material objects (Marcuse 1964). Color, hue, shape, brand, and form are value-laden meanings linked to human and object equally.

Therefore, when Tyson declares a system has been created that banishes critical thinking, he echoes the same concerns expressed by Kierkegaard (1980) in the early 19th century. Kierkegaard claims that persons have surrendered to a system that tells everyone when to think, how to look, and what to feel. Furthermore, fear and dependency have come to define modernity by allowing this predatory rationale to shape the world. With regard to Muslims, social science has given primacy to structural effects, and in doing so obscured the “will to human relations” that is the essence of social life (Buber 1970, p.70). Power has replaced spirit. Indeed, when the dominate frame used to analyze Muslims begins with a premise that gives primacy to a racialized social system, there is much to be gained but also much to lose.

The racialization literature, made popular by Bonilla-Silva (1997) and Omi and Winant (1994), has become the preferred lens of choice to analyze the growing anti-
Muslim phenomena. Racialization entails the categorization of a group previously undefined in order to position that group within a racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Omi and Winant 1994). A group’s position along with a racial hierarchy not only shapes social interaction with others, but also determines the likelihood of mobility and success. Applied to Muslim-Americans, these theories perpetuate their reification.

The themes common to most analyses on the racialized Muslim indicate Imperial designs evident following the Cold War that intensified after 9/11, thus causing an inward/outward colonial gaze. In the classic works by Huntington (1993) and Lewis (2002), the Muslim menace was rationalized as the last impediment to Western progressiveness. Portrayed as a clash of values, Muslims were presented as the anathema to the Christian-West’s values—ala Weber. Thus, a biological and cultural essentialism of a Muslim threat followed, and created the context for polices and behaviors that either undermined Muslim-American citizenship or sanctioned violence against these persons (Beydoun 2017; Jamal 2008; Selod 2015). There is little doubt Muslim-Americans suffered essentialist reductions through various institutional activities which, in turn, bled into the social psyche of the general public—especially when tethered to national security (Kumar 2014; Silva 2016).

Rationalized Muslim purposelessness acquires value in a genocidal logic. According to the U.C. Berkeley Center of Race and Gender Studies, nearly a quarter of a billion dollars is fed annually into institutional networks espousing anti-Muslim narratives (Ali et al., 2011). Some of the leaders of these organizations are literally the offspring of former officers who headed think tanks during the Cold War. After all, modernity is self-perpetuating.
When most persons think of Muslims, thoughts of violence mostly occupy the mind (Grosfoguel 2016). Certainly, Peek (2006) thinks that violence is the impetus for understanding the relegated status of Muslims in America. For her, September 11, 2001 was the driving force behind not only the essentialization of Muslims in America, but also of their position in the social order. Likewise, Cainkar (2008, 2011) correlates the violence directed towards Muslims with American political and economic interests in the world. Specifically, violence provides a means to maximize America’s economic interests abroad—interests specifically tied to energy and commodity flows—which necessitate the control of potential sources of disorder. But unlike Peek, Cainkar (2009) identifies the racialized Muslim as a construction established well before 9/11. She understands the mythological Muslim enemy to be a phenomenon interwoven with geopolitical strategies.

This tapestry of American interests in the Middle East is a complex paradox that reveals an unwavering allegiance to the most ardent Muslim regime, Saudi Arabia, and coincides with an unwavering allegiance to a notorious enemy of many Muslims, that is, Israel. In these two relationships, both the economic and geo-political interests intersect. Energy and defense, oil and weapons, capitalism and technology, end up using the Muslim radical as a means to legitimize military and other activities in the region, a strategy perfected in the cold war (Stokes and Raphael 2010).

During the Cold War, Harvard Professor, Richard Pipes headed a group of military, political and professional personnel called TEAM B. This team’s main objective centered on producing narratives of an imminent Communist threat to legitimize
increases of defense budgets, and create a symbiosis between the economy, military, and politics. Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, and General Daniel Graham were some of the names affiliated with this group. These actors have been pivotal in the expansion of not only the military-industrial complex, but also the terror-industrial complex (Rana 2016). In regards to the latter phenomena, Daniel Pipes—son of Richard—is an instrumental player.

Daniel heads one of the largest anti-Muslim groups in the United States, The Middle East Forum. He receives millions of dollars of funding from various foundations. According to a Berkeley Study (Ali et al., 2011), Pipes receives well over 7 million dollars annually from donors. In turn, Pipes’s Middle East Forum provides funding to others in the network. For example, Frank Gaffney, head of the Center for Security, receives funding from Pipes, as does Steve Emerson who heads Investigative Project on Terrorisms Fund. Accordingly, Gaffney has formed TEAM B-2, whose members include the former director of Central intelligence, retired Army generals and Navy Admirals, Department of Defense members, former Ambassadors, and Chief U.S. Attorneys (The Center of Security Policy 2010). In all, these groups either constitute the personalities of the media or feed a fear-laden script to media networks (Kumar 2014) that helps kindle a nationalistic zeal against Muslim-Americans (Selod 2015).

At stake is a 600 billion dollar defense budget that must be justified and, at the very least, maintained (Pramuk 2017). Aside from the industry and dependency created by modernity’s paradox, this budget constitutes over half of all discretionary spending of the American government. Yet, despite knowing all these facts, and all the documentation of how the system operates, manipulates, protects privileges, exploits,
categorizes, punishes, and frames events, the identity of the essentialized Muslim remains intact for most persons. Under a racialized lens, the Muslim-American begins marginalized and ends marginalized.

In the majority of research the outcome is predictable. Research is caught in a cyclical rationalization whereby the work performed abides by the structural parameters established by modernity and, thus, remains confined to a world of objects (Arendt 1958, see pages 139-144). What is prefabricated at the onset of the study, specifically the social and cultural structure that restricts Muslim identity, is ultimately reinforced by most research. Profound knowledge about the structure’s architecture is produced, but in order for change to occur, in order to disrupt redundancy and the very rationale that supports these systems, attention must be given to the human spirit.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, modernity’s paradox has several elements. First, the Western-system is fluid, enduring and treated as universal. Said (1979) calls this “discursive consistency.” Second, the system reifies all things into a binary logic that can easily marginalize select persons, such as Muslims. And third, based on the first two assumptions, an epistemological and ontological ideal becomes evident—one that deforms race, gender, class, religion, and other mediations of identity. With respect to studying Muslims, the traditional aim has been to understand the impact of this distortion, instead of grasping how Muslims create realities.

In the end, past research has served to standardize the Muslim experience, and thus a false image of a detached collection of objects is produced. Similar conclusions have been found in Said (1979), Dussel (1993, 2000), Salaita (2006), Wolfe (2006) and
Dabashi (2011). The point is that Western rationalization and all its effects are not secrets. How the system emerged, how its ordering imperatives operate, and how these imperatives accrue advantages for select groups are well documented (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2006; Feagin 2013; Omi and Winant 1994). But what has been obscured in past studies is Muslim agency and how this action mediates the experiences of these persons in the United States.

The next chapter addresses how agency’s paradox—the power to create and negate—can be properly understood. What is modernity but a fabrication produced by human hands. Therefore, a methodology must be designed that takes into account this creative process. The paradox of modernity must be met with the paradox of agency that can, under the proper conditions, lead to mutual understanding. After all, in view of what Nietzsche has to say, nothing that humans create is thoroughly foreign to others. Nonetheless, a thoughtful methodology must be designed to overcome the illusions produced by Western rationalization.
Chapter Two positioned this dissertation at the margins. The review of the literature attempted to emphasize a crucial point: When people employ the same rationalization used to violate to challenge or change the immoralties of the violators, self-deception occurs (Barnes 1959; Sartre [1957] 1985; Heidegger [1976]2004). Similarly, the dominate paradigms utilized by social scientists to determine meaning in the social world provides the violators/oppressors with opportunities to create more sophisticated deliveries of rationalized oppressions (see Bobo et al. 1997; Bonilla-Silva et al. 2004: Davis [1998]2013). Any change is merely a temporary condition that transitions from one oppressive form to another. The self-deception perpetuated by embracing Western rationalization hinders the agency required to achieve change (Illich 1971). This hindrance is not because change is undesired—as with research conducted on behalf of the violated—but because liberation is unattainable using the “Master’s tools” (Lorde 1984, p.110-114). Thus, endeavors seeking to validate human experiences must pursue an alternative paradigm.

New approaches must employ intersubjective engagements between researchers and those who are being violated to mitigate the West’s dominate interpretation of the world. A turn away from a Western gaze more inclined to fix the subject as a thing to be noted, observed, manipulated, or probed, unburdens the researcher from waiting for predetermined traits to emerge (Buber [1947]2004). One does not merely wait for the subject to express coping strategies, incidents of victimization, or other power dynamics that fit a pre-established research question. Nor does someone search for meaning about
lived experiences by becoming detached from life or world. Rather, “only participation in the being of present life discloses the meaning in the ground of one's own being” (Buber 1945, 316). The task, then, is to eschew realist/positivist/post-positivist paradigms that either privilege an unattainable, objective reality or emphasize the inherent fallibility of humans (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Popper [1959]2004). Each of these positons assumes that an objective, empirical reality awaits discovery by an impartial investigator. But such a reality cannot exist without the dualism that is suspect according to recent intellectual shifts. One does not examine reality in this case but a representation of it.

While this has indeed provided benefit to the world, it cannot, under any condition, stand as a substitute for the human experience. To understand meaningfulness is to understand the un-generalizability of the multitude. Indeed, the banality of evil exists alongside the banality of good, of love, of deceit, of greed and generosity (Arendt 1958). If one seeks to move beyond identifying/testing the “principals of connection” and towards understanding webs-of-meaning that make these connections to the social world meaningful, one must engage the concrete experiences that have left an indelible impact on life (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). For example, as a parent the objective connection to my children is biological and civically mandated, but as a father my experience as a parent is meaningful through love, caring, and presence. Both aspects of parenting provide understanding, but the latter captures the essence of being a father. Becoming aware of such phenomena can only be grasped through/in/by dialogue. Language is not merely the house of being, it is the connection to time past, at hand, and forthcoming (Mishce 2009). The source of reality, then, will be those who have lived the phenomena
under investigation, which ultimately can only be recollected and interpreted (Schutz 1962).

The acceptance of interpreted realities aligns with constructivism—which is still capable of appreciating the contributions made by different paradigms. Nonetheless, the concern amplified in the previous chapter expresses defiance against enlightenment’s rationalization. When instrumentality subsumes mutuality, the world of relations is reduced to a world of commodities (Buber [1952]2016). Being Muslim in a post-9/11 America is not merely an essentialized condition in that framework, but, as the history of Western knowledge has shown, is indicative of a decontextualized reification by an enduring, self-perpetuating Western prejudice (Said 1979). This study eschews what exploits, manipulates, and abstracts, and is concerned with life, specifically Muslim-life.

Because the focus of this study is what Muslims find meaningful in their lives, a paradigm focused on entering worlds through dialogical relations\(^3\) becomes necessary. When the researcher and subject enter into a relational space where both become aware of each other, meaning is not merely uncovered but constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Buber [1952]2016; Freire 2000). There is an important distinction that needs to be made here. Constructivism reveals spatial matters. The productions created by social engagement, and the subsequent fusion of interpreted realities between peoples, transform spaces. These spaces become cultural places. In a class based society such as the United States, places are often reified as location. Hence, the terms “bottom-up,”

\(^3\) Drawing from Freire and Buber, dialogical relations represent a methodological praxis. The premise relies on a mutual, relational turn by both researcher and participants. Grounded in presence, sincerity, and openness, each person(s) includes the other’s perspective to arrive at meaningfulness. The intent of remembering, noting, or observing is revealed in this connection. Only the manner in which I affect the other and the other affects me matters. This connection is what Buber refers to as mutuality, or an I:THOU relation. If connections are indeed based in mutuality, the experience studied becomes rendered as-is. Social facts are grasped, felt, and worked through “between” participants engaged in dialogue.
“subaltern,” “Proletariat,” “colonized,” or “marginalized” are used regularly as metaphors for these spatially-embodied realities.

Unlike dualist paradigms that abstract these spaces in models, constructivists focus on the relations that hold these spaces together. Each approach may search for meaning, but only constructivism finds it directly in the world (Husserl 1970). To be clear, meaning is everywhere and always present in the world, whereas meaningfulness is based on personal or collective experiences. Everything that exists has meaning, but meaningfulness emerges from how persons relate to a situation. Human agency, therefore, makes behavior or events meaningful.

To understand this principle is to understand why constructivists accept dualism as an interpretation of the world and, yet, still oppose its philosophical assumptions. Constructivism is non-dualistic. The point of this perspective is to not remove the human element from research and achieve objectivity, but to understand how persons invent their lives, including the worlds they create with others. Thus, world entry is a crucial point of any method or research strategy based on constructivism.

Constructivists emphasize the “predilection for alternatives” (Said 1983, p. 247). How one sees the world depends on perspective, experience, and location (Todes 2001). To illustrate, consider this question: What is marginality if not a reality imposed by a dominant group with the capacity to impose meaning and legitimacy through some illusion? From the perspective of the marginalized, however, marginality can mean opportunity (Gladwell 2013). The marginalized persons or groups that refuse or reject dominant, structural impositions, create what bell hooks ([1994]2006) calls sites of resistance. Therefore marginality can be manifested as spaces of oppression and
oppressed bodies, as well as resistance. The marginality manifested as oppression is characterized by an exogenous force that weighs on reality and impinges on life. In the spaces of resistance, however, oppositional force comes from within and, in fact, impedes the intentions of the oppressors. Fanon ([1952]2008, p.95) illustrates how resistance impedes on exogenous intentions: “I made up my mind, since it was impossible to rid myself of an innate complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the Other was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: to make myself known.”

But another important point must be made: Marginality is experienced on multiple levels—economically, socially, and politically to name a few—but the manner in which marginality is expressed cannot be fully grasped empirically, divorced from experience. Marginalization is profoundly felt (Fanon [1952]2008; Lorde 1984; Memmi 1965). One does not merely grasp suffering, strength, or resolve; one experiences these realities. During the course of this research, the attempt was made to experience these sentiments with the participants. By trying to enter their worlds, I was moved by the ensuing dialogue. What is important is that dialogical relations make the essence of a phenomenon evident. This essence can be heard, felt, witnessed, and manifested in some complex of the three. What is clear is that meaningfulness is a qualitative/sensual experience (Schwandt 1998). Meaningfulness speaks to the primary goal of this research: Engage in dialogical relations to grasp the Muslim experience in a post-9/11 Miami.

To get at meaningfulness, Participatory Action Research (PAR) is utilized as methodological praxis. PAR has long been recognized as a decolonizing praxis (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991; Smith [1999]2006; Tuck 2013). For example, Smith ([1999]2006) defines decolonizing as a process by which a person or people reclaim their
spatial-agency, recover their history, and restore their humanity. PAR, thus, is simultaneously reflexive and action based, and facilitates the demystification and realization of power. When power is no longer seen as an exclusively exogenous force, self-reliance begins to empower action. In this sense, PAR fosters relations otherwise manipulated.

This dissertation’s defiance finds direction in PAR’s potential. The goal is to allow what is to be, and to liberate what has been covered by theory, practice, and complicity. Accordingly, the chapter is divided into a series of questions that helps elucidate the benefits of and concerns with this approach. The last questions deal directly with how PAR enabled a unique Muslim epistemology to become evident. The questions are as follows: (1) What is PAR; (2) How does PAR differ from Western Paradigms, if at all? (3) What are its strengths and weakness? (4) How did PAR facilitate a methodology suitable to study being Muslim?

**What is PAR?**

Participatory Action Research attempts to disrupt the connections between the Western colonizer and the colonized. Established at the grassroots level by social activists in Latin America and Asia during the latter part of the 20th century, PAR transitioned slowly from loose theoretical principles—credited to José Ortega Y Gasset—to a pedagogical methodology for the oppressed (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991). The primary goal of PAR is to establish the social connections necessary for accessing local knowledge that will help facilitate remedies to social ills. The assumption is that only those who experience oppressive environments have the capacity to understand what is needed to alleviate these situations. When the capacity to access knowledge and solve
problems at sites of marginality is mastered, “people-power” transforms these conditions into embodied, political power. Being at the margins is no longer a condition without recourse but is firmly rooted in agency. By demystifying the power of the oppressor, power is achieved (Fals-Borda 1982). The essential goal of PAR—knowledge is power—remains a vital achievement for the oppressed. Without knowledge, oppression is displaced energy (Gasset 1930). For clarity, the term oppressed must be interpreted.

The oppressed is a term emphasized by scholars such as Fals-Borda (1982) and Paulo Freire (2000) to implicate an oppressor. As a relational condition, the intent is to indict the oppressor and incite the oppressed. The term encapsulates populations who identify as being colonized, classed, raced, gendered, or subalternized. But is it advantageous to utilize a term that may legitimize domination? Memmi (1965) suggests that breaking from this relationship may be more important. Indeed, Memmi is correct. There can be no break from Western rationalization until this knowledge system is delegitimized. The thrust of PAR is to elevate local knowledge in importance and allow those who are socially situated to have a central role in a research project.

PAR encourages the bottom up movement necessary for individuals or communities to recover and reclaim their humanity that relies on a subject-subject connection. This bond indicates that community members have the opportunity to participate in their emancipation (Kemmis 2006). Whether participation translates as voicing experience, volunteering a skill set, performing a cultural reclamation project or some other form of participation, the disparities created by education, income, and gender become mitigated by a socially-democratic consciousness (Gaventa 1991). Everyone’s contribution is unique and, therefore, valued. For example, an uneducated mother of three
may possess valuable knowledge on how to budget money for food, necessities, and shelter, as well as an experiential acumen for multi-tasking. The reverence given to educational status becomes mitigated by her capacity to make valuable insights on discretionary budgets or her resourceful ability to handle multi-faceted projects. Such local knowledge, in the context of PAR, prioritizes insights that are obscured when these experiences are ignored or marginalized in research.

PAR relies on a dialectical relationship between participants to achieve empowerment. Dialogue is the only way to access knowledge derived from lived experiences (Shor and Freire 1987). This knowledge represents the crux of PAR’s praxis. To paraphrase Gasset (1930), action without knowledge is raw energy. There is nothing wrong with raw energy if one is discussing commodities, but when humans are portrayed in this way such a depiction is not very illuminating. This metaphor conjures an image of a social reality replete with aimlessness and chaos that forecloses agency. Through PAR, the aim of dialogue becomes clear: When lived experience is ascertained, actions can be viewed as meaningful. Dialogue, as agency, helps determine what counts as knowledge and validates life-experiences; everyday voices become viewed as legitimate sources of reality (Tuck and Yang 2014). PAR helps create the knowledge necessary for action, because this information flows from human agency (Nyoni 1991).

By no means should this chain reaction be construed as linear. PAR is anything but linear. A metaphor more suitable would be a web of connections, activities, and decentralizations. Exactly how PAR has been utilized will be discussed in the coming pages. For now, the idea of linearity must be discarded. Participants are engaged in dialogue to establish the knowledge necessary for change. Change will always be the
goal, but through the connections and bonds facilitated by PAR is how local knowledge becomes an ineluctable force.

Nonetheless, solutions involve trial and error, and therefore require constant acts of verification and modification (Carr and Kemmis 2005, see pgs.305-307). But in the end, PAR is a methodology that leads to local culture. In this regard, all solutions and meaning are contextually bound. PAR and agency are bound together in an attempt to enable individuals and communities to speak in their own terms. The moral principle that is operative relates to allowing these people to tell their stories, begin to take pride in their narratives, and gradually resists efforts to delegitimize these sentiments.

**Par and Western Paradigms**

Concluding the last section by relating PAR to morality may seem as a relapse into Western rationalization. After all, the common belief is that morality must rest on absolutes that override experience. For example, gods, natural law, and first causes are often invoked to legitimize morality. At the heart of PAR, however, another approach to morality is offered. Specifically, Buber’s I:THOU entails a dialogical relation that enables the self to become aware of a community that encompasses everyone. Unlike an abstract moral foundation, this reality is attainable and necessary for countering an alienated existence. These ideas may seem somewhat esoteric, even un-relatable to PAR’s methodology. But as this passage illustrates, Buber’s ([1923]1967, p.22) thinking parallels the principles of PAR:

“When He is a member of a people that leads a secure, free, and full life on its own soil, individual man need never speculate about his relationship to that people. For, whether not he is conscious of it, he belongs to his people, as a matter of course and inviolably, by his natural participation in its activities and its thinking, its language and its customs. But where people of devoid of so free and full life, the situation is different: the
individual is not situated within a community from very onset; he must instead find his own niche. His sense of belonging will only gradually lead him to a genuine belonging, to participation, in the life and labor of the community. This process will become intensified as he penetrates more deeply into his personal individuality, into the secret of his uniqueness; simultaneously, he will discover what he and no only else is called upon to contribute to his people.”

For Buber, this experiential reality is a quintessential aspect of authentic/un-alienated being.

The principles underlying PARs methodology are almost a verbatim replica of Buber’s philosophy on being and religion. Through participation, a sense of belonging is achieved, one in which personal individuality flourishes and fills a communal need. Similarly, Lahbabi argues that only through social intercourse, interpersonal experience, and collective endeavors is a sense of community realized (Fakhry 2004). Accordingly, both Buber and Lahbabi reject dualism’s metaphysical detachments from the world, and espouse an understanding where mutuality authenticates existence.

In his endeavor to devise a research method more apt to understand Indigenous life, to make his people known to the world, in their proper context, Wilson (2008) discovered that the indigenous retain their “systems of knowledge” via relationships. Very similar to Buber’s I:THOU connection, these relationships with fellow tribe-members, nature, and the cosmos represent a foundational accomplishment. Reverence, respect, and responsibility are common-sense moralities ingrained in the associations that constitute a local world. But these indigenous systems of knowledge extend beyond interpersonal relationships to include intrapersonal connections with nature and ancestors. Knowledge, according to Wilson (2004), is communal but shared with all living and non-
living beings. A story about how knowledge of native plants was transferred from a 94 year-old elder to a student illustrates this “relational knowledge.”

“She was pointing out all the different medicines right around us, even at our feed. And she could distinguish the different kinds of grass and weeds that had different properties….I asked her: ‘How did our ancestors know that his plant could do this?’….‘It came from above.’ They were faced with certain conditions and problems that they needed solutions to, and they went an prayed for an answer, and received an answer and got direction. And that was her answer. That it came from up there. They didn’t have to run trials; they didn’t have to experiment, which is the scientific method of trying to make discoveries. They had their own methods” (Wilson 2008, p.111).

This passage reflects indigenous culture but also illustrates PARs utility in several ways. First, one must engage in dialogical relations to understand what knowledge is to people(s). The student’s story was shared between steering-committee members, which convened regularly and discussed different expressions of indigenous knowledge. What emerged was not only a folklore, which connected earth, ancestor, teacher, and student, but also a reclamation of being. The student whose existence is imbued with colonialized consciousness represents someone oppressed. As Freire (2000, p.48) finds with other oppressed persons, this student who engaged the elder is “at one and the same time [herself] and the oppressor whose consciousness [she] has internalized.” In the elder’s response, intersubjective engagement and self-reflection liberates time and being. The student begins her journey by reclaiming her past and emphasizing her uniqueness. And second, validated knowledge empowers the affected with the capacity to organize activities that resist negation and affirm existence. The revival of a culture, as a communal endeavor, inspires a sense of community that may unleash a range of personal and collective identities. Clearly, PAR facilitates this aim.
PAR represents a coherent methodology that provides access to the beliefs, character, and cares of communities who struggle to affirm their existence and resist negation. Moreover, when one engages the epistemology of those at the margins, methodology becomes far more than procedures for collecting data. A methodology such as PAR reveals how local knowledge can liberate communities. Engaging locals to participate throughout a research project not only enhances the quality of information, but offers them the opportunity to grow and become active agents of change.

Before moving on to how PAR has been utilized in past research, there is one more point to be made about who benefits from PAR. This point concerns the burdens placed on the oppressed and connects back to the end of Chapter Two, where the reader was asked to turn away from modernity’s paradox. The paradox at hand, made mostly through implicit arguments in this chapter, involves agency. The oppressed do not employ agency in the same way as their oppressors. That is, they do not affirm to negate or negate to affirm their humanity. For them, both affirmation and negation happen at once (Fromm). Because the colonization involves a symbolic violence that, as Murphy et al. (1994) note, operates from the inside-out, the oppressed must affirm and negate to regain their humanity. When “awoken” by dialogical relations, the affirmation of self occurs alongside the negation of the colonized self. Still, this dimension is only one facet of the paradox found in the praxis of the oppressed. The burden placed on the oppressed is one of total liberation.

Of course, this liberation begins with the self, the community, and extends to historical reclamations and recuperation of folklores. But the liberation of the oppressed also includes the burden of liberating the oppressor. On the surface this burden seems
cruel and foolish—since the possibility of the colonizer’s reemergence remains—but total liberation is a risk worth taking if a new social character entails recognizing the humanity of everyone. When Fanon is read as a humanist, this goal is evident. The oppressed who liberate themselves also liberate the oppressor from the demands of their oppression. Freire (2000, p.56) reasons, “As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressor’s power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors their humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors.” In a similar vein, yet still tempered by the cruel irony of this phenomenon, Fanon (1963, p.178) writes at the conclusion of The Wretched of the Earth, “This struggle, which aims at a fundamental redistribution of relations between men, cannot leave intact either the form or substance of the people’s culture. After the struggle is over, there is not only the demise of colonialism, but also the demise of the colonized.” At last, the deeper task of liberation is revealed: The oppressed unshackle humanity from a history of oppression, and, in doing so, liberate the future from repetition. The future belongs to all. Lorde’s (1990, p. 287) final vision of a world with possibility resonates in her poem titled, Outlines:

We have chosen each other
and the edge of each other’s battles
the war is the same
if we lose
someday women’s blood will congeal
upon a dead planed
if we win
there is no telling
we seek beyond history
for a new and more possible meeting.
The goal of PAR as a methodology of the oppressed involves liberation. That much is undeniable. However, the endeavor towards liberation comes with an imagined structural change created by a new social character—one where people are mindful of each other’s commitments, concerned about social justice, and wise enough to understand that somethings are better left unspoken. The challenge, then, is to see these visions and actions manifested in the world.

The next two pages share a reflection about PAR in which an internalized debate attempted to sort out the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology. A key concern has always been twofold: (1) the sustainability and (2) effectiveness of PAR in a world where persons prefer their alienation and fear their liberation (Baudrillard [1988]2001; Gane 2000). The issues are worth sharing, because I brought this method to the participants. I informed them of its worth and how it valued their experiences as valid sources of knowledge. To resolve these concerns, I wrote two letters to myself, the first as a PAR skeptic and the second as an advocate. This statement has been conceptualized as bracketing for phenomenologists and reflexivity for ethnographers (Alexander 2008; Holstein and Gubrium 2008). In this case, this exercise was neither. I was not attempting to expose my bias, or confess my relation to PAR. I was merely seeking clarity.

**The Critic’s Corner—Strengths and Weaknesses of PAR**

Dear PAR Advocate,

Your words strike me as naively utopian. Have you failed to take into account PARs futility over the years? If you are an optimist, which judging by your words you seem to be, then look to the Caribbean and Central and South Americas, as well as Asia and the Middle East. Change has been minimal if at all in these places (Hooley 2015).
What was once a glorious grassroots movement in Cuba is now a model example of a vanguard run amuck? The participatory action principles enacted in the Arab Spring ebbed and flowed, until finally regressing back to authoritarian rule (Morozov 2014). Look now at the world. Do you notice the trend back towards nativism? Have hegemonic powers waned because of PARs effectiveness, or have these states strengthened their sense of superiority over others (Bacevich 2005; Kraska 2007)? Tell me of Palestinian struggle, how is BDS proving its worth in the world? You seem too blind and caught in this academic mentality to notice that extreme nationalism and jingoism have militarized the world (Goldberg 2016). Please, allow me to educate you on how material advantage leads to colonization.

The United States possesses over 1700 military bases across the world (Giroux 2008). Allow this fact to resonate for a second, 1700 bases across the world! Now, combine this phenomenon with global corporatism. Can you grasp this picture? The idea that you call America is no longer confined to boundaries or what was once called sovereign territory (Giroux 2008). America is everywhere and belongs to a political and economic reality you long to eschew; it belongs to the realm of corporate interest. And thus, oppressive structures and prejudiced systems of knowledge are everywhere as well. This finding does not compel one toward PAR, but rather forces one to rethink genocide. You were right on that one. The civil term for contemporary genocide is assimilation. Indeed, assimilation can no longer be understood as the immigrant’s adoption of a host society, but resembles early colonialism (Blauner 1969; Brown 2012). Malcom X had the right idea about the absurdity of this concept. To paraphrase Malcom, assimilation is not merely the immigrant landing on Plymouth Rock; for those of us not white, not Christian,
not them, Plymouth Rock has landed on us, on our land, and demanded that we surrender/assimilate! Please understand, I think PAR has merit, but just not in the way you envision this method.

PAR has potential as a revolutionary praxis, one where solidarity leads to mobilization. PAR is the glue that will make sacrifice an expression of love. After all, is not freedom won? I will speak for you, here. It is! As such, talks of relational turns, of I:THOU, and of liberating the oppressors through self-emancipation, is fine for the confines of academia. But for the real world, the one where indigenous children are called terrorists and mothers and fathers are transformed into widows and widowers, there is no room for a THOU connection. Leaders must lead, and soldiers must soldier. That is the only way. I will say it once more so you will understand real, revolutionary talk: Freedom is won.

*The Advocate’s Rebuttal*

Dear Friend,

Everything you say is true. Freedom has to be won, sacrifice has to be made, the opponent is formidable, and our struggle seems to be as much a physical endeavor as it is a psychological one. I hear you and feel the immense burden placed in front of you. I sense the heaviness of your struggle, our struggle. But what will you have us become is my concern. Once you lead us to freedom, what becomes of you? Of us? These are the bigger matters at hand. You cite Cuba, the Arab Spring, and the coopted outcomes of each. Yet, you have positioned us to become vulnerable to the same fate. I ask you to rethink PAR not as a means to establish rank and file or zealousness, but as a creative process.
I apologize if the words that emphasized restoration and reclamation of self, history, and culture, concealed the creativity of PAR. Understand, comrade, my goal here is not to produce some naive ART or self-indulgent scholarship, but to help re-create a community. I thank you for your thoughts, wish you well, and invite you to one of our gatherings to share your ideas. Know that your words have resonated with me and I hope to reciprocate the favor with borrowed words from Freire (2000, p. 44): “In order for this struggle to have meaning the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.”

**Conclusion: PAR’s Muslim Orientation**

This unorthodox exercise is an attempt to acknowledge the failures of past liberation movements. Some failed to launch, others launched and fizzled-out, and others liberated only to assume the role of oppressor. This caveat is not an indictment on PAR, or humanistic endeavors. PAR remains a viable option for the restoration of humanity, even if it is in some remote village in Ecuador (Murphy 2012), some off-the-map town in Columbia (Fals-Borda 1987), or in Native American territories (Wilson 2004). PAR can be transformative.

My endeavor is the liberation of knowledge grounded in a Muslim community. Muslims are connected as much by love, history, blood, and friendship as they are by faith and practices. PAR helps make these connections known. Additionally, this method helps recover the histories and folklores that tie Muslims together and emphasize their distinctiveness (Fals-Borda 1996). In doing so, PAR can help individuals reclaim ownership over what matters in their world.
A researcher is burdened and privileged with the task of creating knowledge. Therefore, intention means everything! Being cognizant of experiential differences represents a starting point in PAR. Every participant in this study offers a unique interpretation on this subject matter. These differences make them experts on the reality of being Muslim in a post 9/11 society (Martin 2008). However, these differences can pose a challenge when trying to identify, prioritize, and resolve the problems, concerns, and cares of a Muslim base living in Miami.

But previous research on Muslims has not dealt with them fairly, despite any good intentions that may have existed. The point of PAR is to gain access to the Muslim experience, rather than speaking for these persons. As Ivan Illich (1968) says, the point is to avoid becoming a “mission vacationer:” Mission vacations entail a privileged person’s descent from ivory towers to visit the frontlines of oppressed struggles, only to impose a pretentious worldview. Using typical voice-over tactics, a mission would be self-serving, detached, and a replicate of oppressive practices.

In any case, the challenge of this research was to not only communicate humility and self-awareness, but to avoid co-opting their experiences. Rather than use their voice, be their voice, or to speak for Muslims, a participatory research project desires to: speak with Muslims, echo their experiences, co-produce knowledge, and leverage resources as a researcher that may advance community autonomy (Wilson 2008; indegionous.org 2014).

The Muslim identity has been colonized and entrapped through essentialized tactics. Muslims tend to be understood categorically or within a specific interpretation. In either case, dehumanization becomes the basis from which to understand being Muslim.
Even when intentions are good, being Muslim cannot be understood when diversity is stripped of human qualities to create a variable categorization; one that is essentialized to create a homogenous group consistent with the narrator’s agenda (see Edgell et al., 2016; Jamal 2008; Said [1981]1997).

The task in this project was to co-create a rendering of different Muslim experiences that has yet to exist (Freire [1998]2001). Turning towards Muslims as an accomplice necessitated a turn away from the Western gaze that recognized Muslims as antithesis, as mission work, or as victims. An accomplice opens spaces and redirects resources to affirm diversity within a particular community.

In the following chapter, methods are used to ascertain the meanings that underlie being Muslim in Miami. This section is ordered as follows: (1) an introduction to the principles of PAR and why experiences matter, (2) the reasoning behind a steering committee and its variations throughout the project, and (3) the elements of the study. The latter entails participant and collection details, as well as the tactics and strategies used to develop knowledge. The main point in this chapter is that by employing PAR, a break from Western rationalization is enabled.

*The Road to Local Knowledge*

PAR is a political choice that rejects detached, value-free, objective knowledge. PAR can be seen as the antithesis of dualism, but this strategy is just as vulnerable to reification and power mystifications as any positivist/realist/post-positivists paradigms (Conchelos and Kassam 1981). Thus, just because PAR is involved as a method does not necessarily mean that the experiences of the oppressed are prioritized. Because life is a set of complex and layered experiences, the experiences of Muslims in Miami may vary
considerably. How a Black-Muslim experiences oppression, for example, is dramatically different from an Egyptian-Muslim. The former may experience criminalization based on race, while the latter may experience only minimal racism. Additionally, as Selod (2015) shows, Muslim women experience oppression differently than men.

Thus, when applying PAR, one must be cognizant of varying dimensions of being human. Without an awareness of such differences, PAR can act as tool that will reify certain relations in the world and quite possibly widen the differences between genders, classes, and races (Maguire 1987). A true PAR-based strategy is based on important theoretical principles that are often overlooked. Making this omission clear in this section emphasizes how PAR is at once a method and praxis. There can be no distinction between method and theory. Any approach that makes a distinction is not engaged in a humanistic sociology (Wicks, Reason, and Bradbury 2008).

But as a researcher and accomplice to the oppressed, a critical-doubt must be employed at every point of the research endeavor. This constant is an added dimension to the grounded axiom established over the past three chapters: Participants must be involved in every aspect of the research project. Now, with the addition of this element, critical doubt and participant engagement exist together. So what is critical doubt?

Freire ([1998]2001) refers to critical doubt as epistemological curiosity. Fromm (1971) and Illich (1971) provide the name radical questioning or radical doubt. In any case, and by any name, experience, dialogue, and reflection must exist within a certain relational environment that allows for the challenging of assumptions and assertions to be manifested as a constructive process rather than exploitation. In previous chapters, Buber’s I:THOU dyad was invoked to illustrate an openness to the other. Critical doubt
requires an I:THOU relationship, so that a dialectic that challenges and augments lived experience can work. To be clear, critical doubt holds the researcher and participants accountable to each other. But as Scott (1986) cautions, the powerless often echo the colonizer either because of social-desirability—expressing claims the participant perceives as desired by the researcher—or symbolic violence. When an I:THOU relationship is entered, critical doubt is able to challenge complicit assertions and inspire more profound reflection.

While experience is still the source of reality, critical probes ensure that knowledge is not treated as an essentialized experience. That is, “their knowledge” is not reified to reflect singularity where one dominant discourse is replaced by another (Cornwall et al. 1993). Basically, PAR should not be used to generalize a condition, but to understand the complexity associated with oppression/marginality. Critical doubt occurs as conversation and is a more accurate reflection of the world where people engage one another with language-flows that act more like common-sense and intuitive expressions, instead of the calculated, methodical deliveries found in typical qualitative studies. Technicity is eschewed so that authentic connections can be made. According to Fals Borda (1985), face-to-face engagements occurring as conversational exchanges among the oppressed is crucial to PAR’s ultimate goal, that is, transformative change. Based on a review of the literature, four essential accomplishments are attained through PAR’s focus on natural dialogue.

1. When dialogue occurs in an I:THOU condition and critical doubt builds on experience, a break from the dominate culture begins to occur. That is, collective research develops out of conversations and commitments. The
information scrutinized and collected via “field trips,” meetings, conversations, and socio-dramas stand not only as verified knowledge authenticated through dialogue, but also as antithetical praxis against traditional knowledge practices. In short, specialized individuals do not control the knowledge process (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991).

2. When a collective is engaged in dialogue and critical doubt, differences are recognized, acknowledged, and counted as knowledge production. Critical doubt, occurring in a collective, allows for issues of race, gender, class, and religion to be brought to the table (Freire [1998]2001, see pages 35-45). Experiences of the oppressed are considered in their totality. This openness allows for a more creative process to unfold.

3. Rather than inventiveness or originality, creativity in PAR represents meaningfulness manifested from the full and active participation of researcher, participants, and communities throughout the research process. In fact, the creative process possesses no real fixed position (Reid and Frisby, 2008). That is, the researcher and participant shift between learners and knowers. Decentralized authority and non-linear power flows enable a more diverse community to take full advantage of participant knowledge/experiences. PAR helps preserve all differences, respect their desires to fragment at times and crystalize at others. The point is that the creative process in PAR does not categorize or segment life but aims to allow the full range of differences found in a community to be exposed (Marglin 1990; Swantz 2008).
4. The recognition of differences and the space provided for collective expansions and contractions reveal core values and essential skills to achieve change. Muslims differ, but how have these differences defined Muslim spaces? Core values and skills exist in every collective and PAR helps a community become cognizant of these attributes.

In closing, PAR endeavors begin with the belief that the marginalized, oppressed, and alienated suffer from a lack of agency and control over the knowledge process (Maguire 1987). PAR attempts to reclaim that which has been lost through the elevation of liberating praxis in importance.

*What is Bottom-Up Movement When there is No Bottom?*

PAR is a bottom-up endeavor. But the question at hand is this, what is the bottom? Is it only a ghetto-like place where scarcity abounds? Or, can the bottom be an identity crisis, such as with Palestinians who, for the most part, exist displaced throughout the world?

Displaced Palestinians offer a unique dilemma. For example, displaced Palestinians are neither here nor there; thus, do they occupy a typical bottom? This question is relevant to the issues of being Muslim in Miami, since a thriving Palestinian community exists. According to the Arab Institute Foundation (2011), there are approximately 300,000 Arabs that live in Florida. The argument taking shape here is that “bottom” can mean a relative location that is both ambiguous and characteristically inconsistent with what Fals-Borda and Freire call oppressed. Most Muslims in Miami are middle-class, educated, employed, and have the means to seek out healthcare.
Some perspective is provided by Illich’s (1971) study on Puerto Ricans. Described as not foreigners, yet foreign, Illich traces the disconnect with Anglo-normality that most, late 20th century Puerto Ricans experienced when they tried to adapt to American life in New York. Their experiences parallel the Palestinians in that both endure a limbo-like status that may not reflect a typical bottom, nonetheless, a colonized mentality of un-belonging and disorientation is presented (Illich 1971). In this case bottom and outside reflect a similar imposition created by those who occupy the top. The main point is that oppression is not a simple place that can be identified by physical characteristics or spatial boundaries. Employing PAR principles require that a community be viewed as more than a location or context. Participation, likewise, must entail significantly more than involvement in an interview or partaking in a meeting. This challenge poses an interesting dilemma since committee participation provided the basis of every aspect of this research. A community in this instance did not reference a specific area in Miami—one defined by salient boundaries and neighborhoods—and was not indicative of shared culture or hardships. As Krijestorac (2015, p. 33) notes in his study on the genealogy of Muslims in Miami: “Muslims are still preoccupied by their own struggles to establish themselves as individuals and as a community.” While Krijestorac takes the perspective that commitments to an identity can exist outside the social, this study considers the Muslim community as both one and many: differentiated centers of consciousness within interconnected spaces (Heron 1998).

Instead of shared physical spaces, the Muslim community in Miami reflected a connection to faith and the practices of that faith in a common area, broader than a typical community. The local knowledge here is seen more as being Muslim in Miami relative to
all non-Muslims. The space Muslims occupy should not be interpreted as a binary—Muslim/Non-Muslim—but rather as a “field” that, for the most part, exists outside the mainstream (Bourdieu 1990). The community in this sense possesses a local knowledge that can be tapped into, reflected upon, and interpreted.

In order to gain entrée to this illusive yet very real position in society, a steering committee was used. But like any group, this committee was mercurial. At time, participants fulfilled certain commitments and chose to forego others. For example, the first steering committee met to help orient the study. Eight people agreed to meet and discuss the issues relevant to Miami Muslims. After the initial meeting, only 3 members committed to future participation. The other 5 cited social discomfort, schedule conflicts, and a lack of desire to partake in more discussion. As disengagements occurred, a core emerged that expressed interest in the study’s outcome. Yet, in times of crisis, provoked by events, some of those who disengaged reappeared as concerned Muslims.

When a participant was arrested during the study, solidarity quickly manifested among the different places occupied by Muslims. People came together to discuss options for the Muslim man incarcerated, as well as to deliberate over strategies for defense, and a plan of action that the greater Muslim community could initiate on behalf of this person. Lifestyles, conflicts, and anxieties became secondary to community needs. The main point is that like all groups, the steering committee expanded and contracted, splintered and crystalized, and reflected how human interactions occur in everyday life. Stability and linearity were never constant in this project.

This realization is relevant to the method at hand because the findings and interpretations of this research project could never stand as generalized knowledge. The
meanings co-created by this project offer only a rendering of the Muslim experience. These meanings are at once intuitive, sensual, factual, and emotional and reflect the values made salient within a specific time and place. What this project achieves is not a snap shot of life but a direct account of life experiences that clear a way for thinking about being Muslim in 2017 Miami. Humanist or community-based sociology recognizes nothing exists out of context but also that this frame is never fixed (Stark [1958]1991). Meaning, context, biographies, and life in general can never be fully grasped, only worked-through socially. PAR works through meanings socially.

**Community Entrée: A discussion the steering committee**

The primary imperative of this methodology is that participants help design every aspect of the study/project/activity. The logic behind PAR is that “local knowledge is essential to achieving a process that will be meaningful locally” (Martin 2008, p.397). This study began with a steering committee in order to grasp an orientation about what kind of themes are not only relevant to Muslims in Miami, but also to evaluate my initial assumptions about the misconceptions of Muslim experiences in academe.

The original committee was comprised of Muslims either personally known by the author or friends of people he knew. For example, a relative, a friend from Florida International University, and an undergraduate student from the University of Miami were the first members recruited. They, in turn, helped enlist participation from their personal relations with fellow Muslims. The initial meeting took place at a facility co-owned by two members of the steering committee.

Eight of us gathered in a professional co-working space equipped with conference rooms, smart boards, markers, notepads, and pens. The notepads and pens served two
purposes: they (1) allowed for people to make notes as others talked, while (2) the more introverted could share their ideas with members, without having to endure the discomfort of speaking-out. Six men and two women, constituted by a range of ethnic cultures (see Table 1 for initial steering committee descriptives), convened around a conference table—more oval than square—and discussed the parameters of the project. At that point, there was only a broad view, an interest in filling a scholarly gap in studying Muslims. I shared with them the ideas of PAR and the tendencies of Muslim studies to distance themselves from Muslim voices. I used voice-over metaphors to describe how these voices were muted and not seen as valid sources of knowledge. And then, I turned to the gathering for orientation. What were the issues that needed to be addressed?

Being Muslim in a post-9/11 Miami has inspired a strategic, social face for Muslims. Although most of us knew one another, through close degrees of separation (e.g. a friend of a friend), comfort and trust were missing. Anxiety and suspicion did not provide the ideal mood for dialogue. That is, if anyone asks a “visible” Muslim about their opinions on living in America or about being Muslims in post-9/11 Miami, general answers should be expected. And this insight was evident from the start, as statements such as the following were common:

“Here you have the freedom to explore yourself”
“It’s the land of opportunity and diversity.”
“You can be what you want here.”

As this pattern continued, and these words fell on the ears of fellow Muslims in the room, a shift occurred. Everyone recognized the mundane quality of what was being expressed. Nothing was being advanced. Finally, there came a point when some Muslims
in the room decided to take ownership over the knowledge provided. A Moroccan health professional spoke out and offered the first glimpse of true reflection: “Being Muslim in America means that you have access to the Mosque 24/7.”

The Mosque theme continued, as an Egyptian real estate agent in Miami offered: “Muslims are different in America, because we do not blend-in like we would back home, we are forced to be a community that takes care of each other. Our community keeps us from straying off our path as Muslims. I intervene and ask Mr. M why he thinks Muslims always refer to their former countries as back home? “Americans have already prejudged me by my look,” he said, “I always feel like I am just a guest here. I have never felt at home.” The discussion flourished from that point. Stories were shared and debates ensued about assimilation, permissibility, and obligations. I left this first meeting with three insights that helped orient this research:

1) First, pressure to assimilate to Western culture stems from relative spatial distance to Mosques and other Muslims. Miami is a very diverse city and blending in for Muslims is possible. However, blending in might also blur the lines about what Muslims find permissible and what is seen as normal in American culture (e.g. alcohol consumption, gambling, pre-marital sex, eating pork, etc.). Thus, the farther away one is from the Mosque or from other Muslims the more susceptible one is to assimilation pressures.

2) Being Muslim is a social proclamation and entails public performances that make invisibility impossible (Quran).

3) The affinity one feels toward one’s Muslim community shapes the social form one assumes.
By utilizing PAR principles, I walked away with a Muslim-designed, research paradigm. After a series of interviews, modifications were made by using key insights from other participants. To avoid voice-overs, however, a sub-committee of the steering committee was reconvened to discuss the idea of community and social performance of being Muslim in Miami, specifically how the ties between community and God are distinct aspects of connections to the world. The Muslim epistemology created in this sub-committee would guide the interviews and foster entrée to the world of the interviewees.

This paradigm would be operational throughout this project and would always be in need of verification and reformulation. What is paramount here is that the steering committee did not provide a specific interpretation on what was meaningful to all Muslims nor why meaningfulness manifested in the world. Rather, the committee oriented the research so that a clear way of thinking about what makes being Muslim salient or a concern evident. Meaningfulness and reasoning were still left to be determined, compared, contrasted, and organized. Indeed, the steering committee represented a co-operative between Muslims who shared relevant experiences and knowledge to develop an action plan for understanding being Muslim in Miami.

This cooperative served as action evaluators, and reflected a conscious awakening about their own experiences within a community that was neither defined by space, participation, nor culture (Muller et al 1998). As a researcher, my responsibility was to ensure that these voices of the studied were accurately rendered, and thus the verification process was on-going. How the steering committee responded to my “field” reports
determined what themes mattered and needed development, as well as what themes were set aside.

**TABLE 1: INITIAL STEERING COMMITTEE DESCRIPTIVES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ancestry</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Religious Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Palestinian</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sir Lankan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>Real-Estate</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Accomplices/Participants: Sampling and Recruitment**

The steering committee helped orient this study, guide its practices and foci, and attain verifiable knowledge. But everything achieved from the steering committee would have been accomplished in vain if not for the members’ help in reaching willing participants to partake in the study and engage in conversation about their experiences as Muslims. At this point, an important distinction must be made about “being Muslim” so as to not replicate reifying narratives. Yes, the focal point of this study is about being Muslim. Nonetheless, the Muslim identity emphasized in this project is not a classification in the classical sense. That is, to be Muslim represents an endeavor rather than some categorical box that is checked. Being Muslim emphasizes the *being* aspect (Lee 2015). This performance evolves idiosyncratically and, therefore, is impossible to generalize, but can “travel,” as Said (1983) states. Given the proper conditions,
sentiments, and possibilities, an identity can be widely accepted \(^4\) (Sassen 2006, see pages 281-283). In any case, the steering committee’s diverse make up—gender, age, orientations, and ancestry—ensured that the application of snowball sampling would preserve PAR’s call to acknowledge diverse experiences, which, theoretically, lead to “dynamic moments where unique social knowledge of an interactional quality can be fruitfully generated” (Noy 2008, p. 328).

Ensuring the diversity of experiences was a relatively easy task. After the initial gathering with the steering committee—the source that began the snowball sample—I sent out emails that offered a summary of the meeting. This email was individualized and personalized. At the conclusion of the email, I asked for help in recruiting participants. From this request, I received 4 names, phone numbers, and email addresses of people who may be willing to participate. I emailed these participants, briefly outlining the goals of the research. Included was a brief account of how their name emerged as a potential accomplice in the study. In short, attached to the email were as follows: the proposal of the study, a consent form, and contacts numbers to my committee chair and the University of Miami IRB offices, and phone numbers to a couple of references within the Muslim community that could vouch for my sincerity. All four agreed to be interviewed. From these initial conversations, I attained a sample size of 24 participants. Every participant was recruited by snowball sampling.

The strategy behind snowball sampling aligns with PAR’s intent to empower the oppressed. By co-creating the space where active engagement in every facet of the study reflected co-ownership over the project’s development, each member possessed the

\(^4\) This idea of a widely accepted identity is a loose translation of Sassen’s work on citizenship and nationality. The idea of citizenship belongs to what Sassen refers to as a “national dimension.” The idea here is that identity can resonate as a differentiated, yet common status.
opportunity to become an active evaluator of the study (Martin 2008). Moreover, snowball sampling—as a method that attains participation through the contacts and referrals of those who either have participated in the study or remain active participants of the study—ensures that relevant knowledge is located (Hendricks, Blanken, and Adriaans 1992).

This principle is especially important with communities that have cause to hide their identities, or at the very least safeguard their beliefs by minimal engagement with strangers (Noy 2008). In a post-9/11 society, Muslims are hesitant to express their ideology and experiences to researchers (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). To be a critical Muslim is not considered safe, and thus snowball sampling ensures some level of trust exists between researcher and participants (Noy 2008). All the messages to participants made my intentions clear: I was an accomplice that was interested in not only clearing up the misunderstandings of Muslim representations in academe, but more important a gatekeeper of their identity. Their anonymity would be at the forefront of this project. Only if a participant demanded that their identity be known, or implied, would I even consider naming fellow participants. Nonetheless, snowball sampling allowed for entrée into a community and, in most instances, my connections with their friends helped disarm reservations about engaging in critical reflection. Table 2 offers an example how a lone steering member’s contacts helped recruit 9 participants—who were not only diverse politically, but socially, religiously, and culturally. These participants’ ages ranged from 19 to 64.

This snowball-tree is not hierarchical in nature. Although some studies have suggested that snowball sampling indicates some implicit positionality within the social
networks, this assertion operates as an ambiguous and ungrounded claim that leads to reification rather than appreciation for how members of a community are cognizant about their own diversity (McLean and Campbell 2003). For example, accomplice 1 and 2 shared connections within their social circles that were dramatically different in their worldviews about not only being Muslim but about the world in general. From accomplice 1, I entered the worlds of religious leaders who expressed contrasting interpretations of the Muslim community— one that extends from the

Table 2: Snowball Stem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steering Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplice 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

local to the global—and the role of the Mosque in American society. On the study’s behalf, accomplice 1 facilitated diverse connections that enabled entry into the complexities and conflicts emanating from key institutional sites within the Muslim community.

Accomplice 2 produced connections to women’s experiences. Again, these connections reflected an explicit attempt to enable different realities to be evident in the study. Each woman offered dramatically different experiences and interpretations of what being Muslim in Miami means. From the resolute Muslim woman whose identity and aspirations are interwoven into her religious identity to the insecure Muslim woman who
struggles to overcome her anxieties associated with being Muslim, these contrasts were incorporated into the stories of being Muslim. The point is that any discussion of positionality and embeddedness into networks reifies the relationships that people share (Said 1983).

Positionality should not be confused with decentralized structures. In this study, positionality indicated decentralized authorities, material disparities, and ideological malleability that had the capacity to travel and assume variations (Said 1983). For example, in this study, an educated, Jordanian doctor seemed to experience more oppression than a female Muslim, IT specialist. Likewise, an American-born, white, female convert who’s Marxists political views intersected with her religious beliefs voiced more oppression in her everyday life than a visible white, Muslim professor who attained political asylum.

Traits and Size

Including the 8 members of the steering committee, there were 24 accomplices in total that participated in the study. With each accomplice, a focused conversation about being Muslim occurred (Belgrave, Zablotsky, and Guadagno 2002). Comprised of 10 females and 14 males, 42% held degrees higher than a Bachelor and 100% completed high school or attended at least some college. Approximately 38% were self-employed, business owners. Four accomplices served as Imam’s of a Mosque in the Miami area. Interestingly, over 80% of the accomplices self-identified as non-white, despite the common American practice of collapsing Middle-Easterners into whiteness. The ages ranged from 19 to 65, and there were varying degrees of religiosity and political activism.
Six of the 24 accomplices were extremely active in politics, either serving as lobbyists, campaign managers, or as members of a civil rights organization.

Identified ancestry reveals a broad range of cultural ties that included the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast and Southwest Asia, as well as the Caribbean Islands and Latin America. Table 3 describes the ancestry/ethnicity of each of the participants. In all, there was a diverse representation of Muslim experiences represented by variance in ages, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, and socially relevant attainments (education, wealth, status, etc.).

**TABLE 3: ACCOMPLICE’S ANCESTRY DESCRIPTIVES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ancestry</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Palestinian</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Palestinian/Russian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jordanian</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bosnian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Guyanese</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Syrian</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>40s</td>
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<td>Female</td>
</tr>
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<td>Egyptian</td>
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<td>16</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Palestinian</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Palestinian</td>
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</tr>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Guyanese</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Moroccan</td>
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<td>Male</td>
</tr>
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<td>Libyan</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Ecuadorian</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>SE Asian</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Conversations Not Interviews

The 24 conversations that occurred varied in context—setting, time of day, materials used, duration, and intensity. Of the 24 conversations that took place, 6 were not audio recorded. These 6 accomplices refused to be recorded but allowed for note-taking during our discussion. Of the 6, three were religious leaders and three others were female participants. The three religious leaders were interviewed at their Mosques, while the three female participants were interviewed either over google-talk or cell-phone calls.

Note-taking impeded the research in two distinct ways. First, the interruptions prohibited the natural flows indicative of story-telling and critical engagement—this was more evident in the Mosque than over the phone. As Charmaz (2002) notes, stories possess order and movement, and, thus, when stories become interrupted because of note-taking they lose flow. Indeed, the formality of note-taking assumes a central aspect of the interaction. In each of the three conversations that occurred at the Mosque, the participants were keenly aware of what was being jotted down.

This point leads to the second imposition: An I:THOU relationship becomes impossible to achieve when notetaking is involved. Because of the interest over what was noted by each accomplice, social desirability became a concern. The conversations transformed from co-created knowledge to a formalized and typical encounter between researcher and subject (Toulmin 1996). Cognizant of this condition, note taking in subsequent interview was limited, although some meanings were lost in the aftermath of recollecting. A sense remained but an accurate or exact phrase that may have captured a key insight disappeared. With the female interviews, note-taking was not an impediment because the accomplices were out of sight—the interviews took place via audio connections and not video feeds. This absence allowed for the occasional I:THOU
relationship to occur. But the ability to engage in critical dialogue suffered. Notetaking sometimes distracted from what was being said, since being out-of-sight did not give the accomplice any insight into when I was actively listening or busy writing notes. Connection was not as authentic or free flowing as when the recorder was allowed.

The average time of the interviews ranged from 90 minutes to 3 hours. On a few occasions, some participants were revisited to either clarify a statement or conduct another interview. To be clear, there were 24 accomplices, who were interviewed, but the number of conversations that took place with these accomplices were two or three times this number. These conversations always took place at the location chosen by the accomplice. Some took place in work places, at homes, or at coffee shops. In every conversation, regardless of site or conditions, there were a few constant questions to help reveal similarities and differences between experiences. For example, every accomplice was asked the following questions:

- What does being Muslim mean to you?
- So what does community mean to you?
- So when you hear Muslim-American does that mean anything to you?
- How have you ever felt out of place? Can you describe this experience and the actions you took to deal with it?
- Can you describe the difference between the different spaces that you navigate? For example, airport, grocery store, the university, work, mosque, home, or any travel destinations?
• Are there any differences between the way the Muslim community treats gender, race, and class when compared to how mainstream society treats these things? Please give reasoning behind your answer.

• What would you like to see more of in the Muslim community?

• Are there any questions that you think might be relevant to understanding Muslims in Miami that I did not ask? Are there any questions that you felt were irrelevant?

The last question, in particular, made each accomplice an active contributor in the research process, as both an evaluator and formulator of knowledge.

The important takeaway is this: Although there was a semi-structured interview imbedded into the conversation, a spontaneous and natural dialogue unfolded. The movement of these stories and the critical engagement where both of us oscillated between critical doubter, knower, and learner, created an ongoing analysis that added a dimension to study’s orientation. For example, when the subject of Muslims in the military came up, the ideas of nation-states, citizenship, gender, and sexual orientation became an underlying frame of analysis that some accomplices fleshed-out. These unconcealed dimensions inspired accomplices to insist on probing these issues in future conversations. In short, each conversation expanded domains of interest.

Strategy of Analysis

Because PAR assumes oppressors control the knowledge processes, findings must reflect an intersubjective engagement between accomplices. Simply stated, meanings were co-constructed through critical interactions and dialogue (Creswell and Maietta 2002). The use of affirmation-centered language, attention to activities that reflected and
defined places, and a concerted effort to account for differences throughout the data collection phase, enabled a critical analysis of being Muslim to occur. The findings reflect the collective aspirations of a Muslim collective whose relative knowledge helped realize what it means to be Muslim in a post-9/11 Miami.

Notes were organized and interviews were transcribed by the author. The author reviewed the transcriptions and compiled a preliminary set of themes derived from a comparative method across the different conversations (Charmaz 2006). These themes were revised, reconstructed, and revisited over a series of steering committee meetings (typically comprised of 5 members, including the author). Because of work schedule conflicts and unexpected events, the steering committee was constituted by different members at different times. Only three accomplices were present in every meeting. This hindered progress at times but also allowed for more critical engagement.

During these meetings, themes were justified by passages from the transcriptions or by notes taken during conversations. Each committee member made notes, voiced concerns, or verified the proposed themes. Despite agreement, we always left the themes open to modification or reconceptualization (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). An important point needs emphasis: At no point during the deliberations did committee members attempt to speak for the interviewed accomplices. Interpretation of the experience does not suggest voice over.

As members read the transcripts, a critical analysis entailed surveying the dialogue for moments when being Muslim resonated as meaningful. These experiences were then given themes (e.g. stressors, affirmations, negations, performances, etc.). This study’s results section presents the thematic similarities and differentiations as paramount
understanding of being Muslim in Miami. The final phase of critical engagement among the committee member occurred when deliberations advance from thematic constructs to theoretical conclusions. That is, the committee moved from asking what is meaningful to why these experiences are meaningful? What do these themes say about being Muslim? The reader will find the conclusions of these negotiations in the discussion section of this study. Indeed, embedded in this practice is the idea that accomplices are creating knowledge outside the typical research process. Allowing participants to be moved by stories and to weave them together in a meaningful, co-constructed way ensures that worlds are not closed off (Wilson 2008). The work affirms the knowing!

Once completed, these themes helped tell the story of what it means to be Muslim in Miami. A results section was outlined and given to each committee member so that a clear story could be imagined. Themes were reviewed for a final time and minor revisions were made. The last meeting concluded with each of committee member sharing thoughts about the research process. This reflection helped each member appreciate the process of knowledge creation and reinforce how PAR helped facilitate greater self-knowledge, as well as community needs and empowerment. A 20 page report was promised to each member upon competition of the dissertation.

Conclusion

Most research on Muslims treats the diversity of experiences as fundamentally homogeneous and incapable of being viewed as valid sources of reality (Alimahomed 2011; Edgell et al. 2006, 2016; Cainkar 2008; Creighton and Jamal 2015; Hermansen 2003; Jamal 2008). As mentioned in previous chapters, Western rationales contribute to this misunderstanding. To help mitigate these misunderstandings, an alternative approach
is needed. In this chapter, an argument is made for why PAR helps facilitate local knowledge while simultaneously eschewing dualism.

Knowledge, experience, and participation are intricately interwoven to construct reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967). There can be no distinction between knowing and being human. Rather than espouse an objective reality that is unattainable by human experience and only grasped, however narrowly, by experts, PAR recognizes the importance of socially relevant knowledge. That is, only those who experience a phenomenon have the capacity to understand its complexities and what is, and is not, meaningful. The methods employed in this project helped make sense of the Muslim experience. In short, Muslims co-constructed a basis of knowledge for what Muslims find meaningful and relevant.
CHAPTER 5
BEING MUSLIM: THE CRISES OF COMMUNITY AND INVISIBLE BECOMINGS

As stated in Chapter 4, the findings of this study reflect the actions of a Muslim collective with relative knowledge on what it means to be Muslim in a post 9/11 society. Relative, in this case, is not merely a point of reference or comparative, but a reminder that every participant and steering committee member embodied a unique set of experiences that revolved around being Muslim in America. This relative knowledge reflected distinctive beliefs, interests, and commitments, as well as the expertise to speak meaningfully about Muslim life and community. The fundamental core of this project attempted to advance experience over science, unpredictability over universal claims, and connection over authority. The question of being Muslim in hostile environments began with getting close to the Muslim experience.

In determining an analytical strategy, the steering committee chose to focus on experiences related to both the Muslim participant and community. This participatory research study intended to capture what Muslims found meaningful to help those who contributed to the Muslim community in Miami make sense of the lives and concerns of its members. Communities are not determined, but founded on understanding and sincerity, and built on devotion and fluidity.

*Experiencing PAR*

During deliberations, the importance of PAR resonated. The theoretical applications presented at the onset of this dissertation justified the project’s methodological approach. Focus groups, participants, and steering committee members were active throughout all phases of the research. Nothing about this project was a
personal endeavor. The shared vision of the project was affirmed and reaffirmed at the onset and conclusion of every meeting. To be clear, to think of co-ownership as shared burden is one thing, but to think of co-ownership as a lightened burden would be a mistake. PAR demanded greater accountability as the project progressed. That reality is not found in books, theories, or reports. Relative to traditional research endeavors, the level of commitment and emotional energy necessary for a PAR project should not be equated to methodological rigor. The rigor in PAR was found in deliberations over meanings, and struggles with interpretations. Frames and fits mattered little. Accountability to the project and the community superseded rationalizations and efficiency. Because the researcher’s skill was only one aspect of the expertise found in the committee, every member at the table possessed authority. And no authority was greater than the next.

Any individual assumption made or action taken became meaningless until verified through a process of communal dialogue, reflection, and agreement. In some cases, a complete reconceptualization of a theme occurred. The method was beautiful and maddening, but always inspiring, always advancing knowledge that, at times, seemed just beyond reach, but always attainable. The participants’ stories lived. They were voices that answered the questions we debated into existence. Needless to say, as a researcher trained to synthesize and connect to theory/literature, this process was, at times, frustrating. One has to experience PAR to understand the benefits and limits of social science. Life and relations provided answers academe overlooked or took for granted. On issues of being Muslim, academe was guilty of both errors.
To illustrate a personal lesson, in the early stages of interpreting the results, an analytical strategy that could help make sense of the coding was needed. To break-through this roadblock, I presented the committee a strategy for analysis. This suggestion involved grouping the participants by fields to capture the relations between experiences, ways of being, and meaningful struggles, as well as locating the participants and community within the context of “America.” Fields consist of pre-constituted values and relations determined by and through historical struggles between people, groups, and positions “anchored in certain forms of power” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993, p.16). Echoing Bourdieu, I stated social fields possessed a unique culture that either required legitimation, and thus, the preservation of forms, habits, and values, or the struggle to redefine boundaries and relations. Grouping participants according to fields could provide dimensional comparisons within and between groups. The analytical strategy proposed grouped Muslims in categories of gatekeepers (imams, civil rights Attorneys, and professors), millennials (participants in their 20s, activists, students) and working professionals (doctors, office managers, business owners, nurses, and mental health professionals).

The spatial positioning by skill, occupations, and status among Muslims, I argued, did not impede analysis of differentiated experiences according to race and sex. Both race and sex represented overarching phenomena. Racism and sexism could never be decontextualized; but emblematic performances were typical. Racism in a hospital and racism in a business possessed different contexts but retained the same essence—an irrational disdain of another’s appearance5. In addition, this spatial strategy made analysis

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5 See Bonilla Silva’s (2006) *Racism without Racists* where racism’s pliability enables racism to travel across context and social spaces. The irrationality behind rabid racism remains concealed within
of class and power feasible. This strategy seemed logical, was grounded in theory, and relevant to the lives of Muslim participants. Although appreciated, the committee rejected the strategy, and with it, several days of coding and drafting “pilot” interpretations.

The committee reasoned that categories contradicted the very essence argued in the literature review. The goal was not to juxtapose or debunk categorical distortions of Muslims with categories of our own. Furthermore, participant experiences overlapped. One civil rights attorney was a prison imam. A doctor owned businesses. An imam owned a drycleaners. A director of a civil rights organization moonlighted as a deputy sheriff. Why diminish these connections between experiences with complex binaries? As one member stated, “let’s tell the story that’s here (pointing to the papers) and not here (pointing to her head).”

This process defied the training protocols of academe and disregarded the subject/object divide. Indeed, the onus involved remaining committed to PAR’s process, as well as to accept the participants as the only valid sources of knowledge. My role, as the researcher, was to ensure a dialectic tension between committee members remained.

We searched, pieced together, and discovered the stories everyone felt as meaningful to the individual and community at large. Indeed, the stories constructed from the data spoke to us through feeling the Muslim experience rather than how this information appeared on a transcript. Sometimes a reading was not felt to be meaningful until articulated by another participant. The main point is that a method existed without well-defined protocols. This fluidity was the beauty experienced in PAR and also, the ideological frames. These modalities of contemporary racism operate in codes, policies, and narratives. Essentially, the aversion dispensed through evolved practices retains the same character as the overt style found in slavery and Jim Crow. Thus, being excluded in the workplace based on fabricated criteria and being stalked by a store clerk when shopping express the same irrational ideology.
flaw amplified by social scientists (Argyris and Schon 1989). PAR recognizes
consciousness as the primary source of reality. Social pathologies, regardless of how
seemingly imbedded in the objective world, are always validated by/through/from/in
social consciousness. In this regard, we were undetermined. The voices obtain the space
to resonate without reconstitutions or interruption. Muslims spoke, listened, and defined
their reality.

Accordingly, the following section presents the struggles for meaning in a hostile,
post 9/11 society. Divided into two primary themes and 7 subthemes (see Table 4),
Muslims provided an insider’s account to the burdens, honors, and responsibilities of
being a part of a “breaking” Muslim community in Miami. From looking Muslim and
feeling the pressures of embodiment to the violence and empowerment realized through
Muslim bodies, the struggle for meaning represented a struggle for survival and
community, as much as a struggle of faith.

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<th>Primary Themes</th>
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1. EXPERIENCING COMMUNITY

When the committee examined the hundreds of pages amassed during the
interview phase, five aspects of the community became evident: (1) locating community
(2) relating the social to the Mosque, (3) breaking community, (4) structural violence, and
(5) Muslim anomie. While the five phases captured dimensions of the Muslim community, most participants viewed the Mosque as the epicenter of Muslim activity. However, an important distinction was made between a Mosque rooted in homogeneity and exclusivity versus a Mosque as it ought to be. In the case of the latter, the Mosque represented an unfulfilled potential. That is, everything about being Muslim and a Muslim community represented an outgrowth that moved from an internalized actualization to an external materialization. To become Muslim was to be Muslim. To be Muslim was to become Muslim. Accordingly, the first aspect of being Muslim related experiences with the community.

**Locating Community**

Expressions about community reflected connection. Community was perceived relationally and intra-worldly; yet participant statements emphasized either an imaginary community that was “out there,” or a more tangible connection realized by presence (Buber 1970). The “out there experience,” camouflaged the idea of local community, and specifically of Muslims who lived in Miami. For example, a Sudanese college student who migrated to Miami when she was seven understood the Muslim community as a spiritual connection between other Muslims. She revealed a concern for the unknown Muslim, the unknown world, and, thus, located her Muslim kinship anywhere.

“It’s how I see Islam. We address each other as Brothers and Sisters across the world without borders. I think of my Muslims from anywhere as my brothers and sisters because we share a common faith. So I have my friends and family, but I recognize strangers as a part of a community or a bigger community that we know and acknowledge” (Participant 7).

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*Ought to be represents the disposition necessary to connect with a person, place, or thing. The phrase captures aspects from Buber (1970), Davis (2016), and Fanon (1963) in that acceptance, dignity, and devotion create the dispositions/conditions necessary for connection.*
The idea of a world without borders was common among participants who were first generation immigrants. Many young Muslims rejected the notion of nationalism. Participant 7’s affinity for the Ummah—an imagined global Muslim community—may have emanated from her connection to political refugees seeking asylum in various parts of the Middle East and Europe. Having migrated to Miami from Sudan, this participant was familiar with the plight of refugees. In any case, her connection to the Miami community was not explicitly clear. For her, a community possessed the potential to occur between any two Muslims, at any time, and in anyplace\(^7\). Only the “anywhere” was the place she chose to locate her community. As empathetic as she was, the community expressed by this participant lacked the tangible interactions necessary to create community (Anderson 2006). The Muslim could be felt, the community could be imagined, but without shared meanings or context, no community could be sustained. This Participant would later emphasize form as part of her connection to the social, and thus recognize the importance of presence and interpretations.

Another passage indicated an intra-worldly connection to community. A civil rights attorney who self-identified as a Hispanic-Muslim spoke about the American Muslim as having an untold story and an unrealized power in the world. Born in Puerto Rico, Participant 13 converted to Islam more than a decade ago. His statement bypassed the local context altogether.

\(^7\) Alphonso Lingis’s (Idiana University Press:2004) *A community of those who have nothing in common*, talks of a community that is without place, and thus relegated to a domain of otherness. Trapped in limbo, between a decontextualized identity and a bounded, geographical body, the other can go nowhere but is not of any place.
“I have a broader sense of community. I think of the national Muslims and this reflects my institutional commitments. We always put forward the American-Muslim issue. Because at the end of the day there is an American Muslim culture that has its own history and issues. We are heard globally. We sit in the most powerful nation in the world. Our voice resonates. We have influence and what happens to us here and what we achieve reverberates all over the world” (Participant 13).

The “national Muslims” for this participant remained uniquely tethered to boundaries, even amid his emphasis for a broader sense. Simply, the common reference point conveyed by a man deeply entrenched in constitutional law was a sense of idealistic nationalism. American culture and institutional commitments shaped his sense of Muslim community. For Participant 13, the body politic of American-Muslims represented the “constituency” that he served, was a part of, and to which he remained committed. Those who located the Muslim community as “out-there” imagined the local Muslim as connected to a homogeneous political body. Power was an instrumental element for “out-there” communities. Either as a connection to empathetic resistance of borders or through positionality, the Muslim community existed within the realm of political domination/authority8.

Other connections to community were more local in nature. Participants who localized the community found meaning in the everyday activities of the Mosque. As a Palestinian Imam stated:

“My community is the Muslim people. But for me, the community is my Mosque. It is where I am most at peace. I feel happy only when I am in the Mosque. It’s my safe place. I get support from people who will be there for me, fight for my freedom, and spread the news of any harassment. My community is a part of my existence and my struggle. We are there for each other. It is the place where we build honor by giving honor to each other. It is an honor to be Muslim. We remind each other of that” (Participant 19).

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8 For more on how violence inhibits the relations between people and nations see Merleau-Ponty (Routledge: [1969]2017), Humanism and Terror
For this imam, the mosque stands as a symbol of worship where a public call to prayer gathers Muslims around a common location, and thus represents the site where a community is manifested. Once gathered, the community becomes a social phenomenon. A local community finds its contours, character, and purpose from presence\textsuperscript{9}. The Mosque does not bring Muslimness into existence; rather it provides Muslims a locality, a defined place where being Muslim can find support, comfort, and honor in hostile times.

This potential was the distinction between those imagining community and those partaking in building community. The imaginaries connected to an “objective spirit” unbounded by an actual experience. These participants were able to provide a conceptual understanding of what the Muslim community meant. In short, the Muslim community belonged to a realm without location. The Ummah is “out-there,” ambiguous, and capable of penetrating the lives of local Muslims in a variety of ways. From relating culture to typifying the plight of refugees, the imaginary Muslim community makes every Muslim’s struggles salient. Conversely, participants who localized community by relating community to gatherings at the Mosque emphasized the interrelationships associated with presence. There, in those spaces where honor is produced and instilled in members, being Muslim is reinforced as a lifestyle. In sum, community is located in broad political realms and intimate settings. Community was the imagined and realized strength of Muslims, as well as the global plight of Muslims everywhere.

\textsuperscript{9} For more information on how community empowerment mediates institutional power see Young (Oxford University Press:2000), \textit{Inclusion and Democracy}
Relating and Transforming the Social

The community represented the place where pressures caused by alienation were mitigated (Seeman 1959). Being in hostile environments involved navigating a social world with predisposed inclinations about Islam, and, specifically, Muslims. “American” suspicions triggered by Muslim presence in mainstream spaces imposed a burden on the lives of participants. Every single participant disclosed some form of alienation from mainstream society. Indeed, varying degrees of alienation existed, but the reality of being Muslim in Miami was a social paradox: Muslims felt alienated from some mainstream spaces but, nonetheless, struggled willingly as the other. To be Muslim was to become Muslim.

The Mosque represented a reprieve from the social anxiety found in mainstream society and constituted a place where one found communion and honor. This place is where people like Participant 6, a first generation American and business owner, could affirm a sense of belonging.

The mosque is a part of my identity. It is a comfortable place where I forget about everything. It’s a safe space. We get together and do different activities and do stuff around here and I feel connected. I have a group of guys that I am close with and we interact on a regular basis” (Participant 6).

The Mosque is a site where security and comradery alleviated the pressures of mainstream society.

For others, like Participant 24, a first generation American and IT specialist, the Mosque represented a welcomed invisibility. Participant 24 wore the hijab and was considered a visible Muslim (Marvasti 2006). She spends most of her days hidden from clients in order ensure a positive customer experience. As she states, “face to face
customer interaction is not something management wants from me, so they tend to assign me to more behind the scenes projects. So my hijab makes me more a pronounced Muslim.” In the workplace her visibility warranted concealment. Although not revealed explicitly, the experience of being tucked out of sight is humiliating. The Mosque produced a different effect for her.

“Yes. The Mosque is where I can breathe. I don’t worry about being the focal point. I can just take a deep breath” (Participant 24).

The Mosque symbolized a place where her visibility could recede into being. She could hide in plain sight without feeling ashamed, without being conscious of her difference and of “their” discomfort. At the Mosque, she could just breathe and that was enough. These external pressures were echoed consistently by first generation immigrants. As noted by this passage from a professor at one of the state universities,

“At the mosque I am relieved of this pressure to be perfect. I am trying to be helpful in the Mosque, trying to contribute” (Participant 5).

In short, the connection to the Mosque signified safety, comfort, and relief. The social aspect of the Mosque is a place where unity and support came to life and where Muslim kinship lived\textsuperscript{10}. The concepts of spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood were repeatedly expressed through acts of kindness and love that were not necessarily performed for the sole benefit of Muslims. A few selected excerpts captured these sentiments.

“I think people in need provide the community a reason to gather around and come together for a common good. Like sending food to someone’s house that just had a baby, pooling money to help a family cover expenses, coming together when a loved one is lost. I think these are the forces that hold us together as a community and the Mosque helps facilitate that” (Participant 20).

\textsuperscript{10} For more on how kinship helps shapes place and influences a sense of self see James Faubion (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers:2001) *Ethics of Kinship*
“Even in the rough neighborhoods in Brooklyn, or wherever, they know if they are hungry, they can get a meal at a mosque” (Participant 3).

“So even if you are not practicing the religion on a level that you should, the Mosque can still offer a sense of community, protection, and comfort. Look, some of these brothers are the most beloved people in my life. I would not be a doctor today if it were not for a Pakistani cardiologist who paid my bills in Medical School. I mean who would do that for a stranger? And he never wanted me to pay him back. So I was blessed to have someone from another culture show love for me, love for Allah, and perform an act of kindness independent of anyone or anything” (Participant 8).

The related social connection to the Mosque symbolized a location where people who shared a sense of identity “tried to be helpful” to each other (Participant 12). The unfortunate reality about the sociality expressed in these sentiments is that the Mosque, despite the positive benefits garnered through gatherings, is not a place conducive to community growth. In fact, even participants who received benefits from the relationships forged at a Mosque conveyed a concern for the cultural hegemony being perpetuated by groups in control of the financial, cultural, and spiritual direction of Mosques in South Florida. The Mosque as one participant expressed is becoming an obsolete space.

**Breaking the Community**

To be communal, to be grounded in identity, to live as a Muslim, requires familiarity with the values and expectations associated with Islam (Hallaq 2012). Being Muslim is a public disclosure that was often interpreted into social existence through a political lens. As one participant stated, “And know that the Muslim being is the most political being in the world” (Participant 11). In the same sense, however, the Muslim being is also the most social.
Everything about Islam is public proclamation that announces to the world one’s identity/belief/acceptance, and serves as a standing, social call to act Muslim. Islam’s five pillars are all social performances: (1) the literal and public proclamation of one God, (2) the answer to five public calls to worship, (3) the obligation to perform charity, as well as (4) the observance of the holy month of Ramadan which calls for all Muslims to fast, and (5) the call to pilgrimage if one is able\textsuperscript{11}. Thus, to live isolated from the Muslim community is to resist the religious tenets Islam inculcates. A Muslim community begins with personal identification, but develops outwardly.

“We are on the periphery, we are a subculture. When I read about what Allah says about what it’s supposed to be and in the infancy of my coming into the faith and how everything is new, I experienced it. I tasted it. I saw Muslims from all parts of the World in Philly. I tasted the potential, because I know what the world was like as a non-Muslim and as a Muslim, and you hold onto the potential of what I already witnessed in the real sense. Once Muslims start dwelling on that, beginning with a connection to the religion, and then dwelling on the brotherhood, the community, then great things will happen. But Muslims must make the effort to connect” (Participant 8).

Everything about a Muslim community grows from the inside-out, even if the community exists on the periphery of mainstream culture. An outward growth will eventually transform the periphery into a center. The essence of being Muslim and a Muslim community is always relative to the space occupied. That is, to be Muslim was to become Muslim. Gradually, over time, Muslim communities stopped growing. Muslims stopped feeling Muslim in these spaces and instead started feeling the same pressures experienced in mainstream society. Gradually, the community started breaking.

\textsuperscript{11} The five pillars of Islam are reinforced throughout the Quran but are made explicitly clear in the Hadith of Gabriel, which for Muslims, is one of, if not, the most important testimonies of Islam.
The concerns of the community were found not in the gatherings or the social, but in the efforts to connect. That is, the Mosque reflected a hierarchy that was not religious or spiritual in nature but capitalistic. As an epicenter of the Muslim community, the Mosque ceased to grow outwardly. Growth had become stagnant. The crises associated with being Muslim in Miami was felt as a crisis of community. Unlike Frankl’s (1959) man search for meaning who sought to fulfill individual potential through struggle, the Muslim’s search for meaning is a public struggle to fulfill the potential of the community. A Muslim geography student offers her perspective on how Muslims have been transformed into materially-focused Westerners:

“Well, I think when you come to America from a country that has been or is colonized by Western power, than you develop this anti-white, anti-western mentality, but then when you move into these spaces and have to feed your family, become caught up in the activities, you have to adopt certain practices and meanings in order to keep up and get a piece of that mythical dream. So yeah, just go to the Mosques, they tend to be homogenous. Look at the board and Imam and usually you get a good sense of the congregation. So yeah, there’s definitely a race problem in the Muslim community and a gender problem, a class problem and a sexuality problem. The Mosque has become a reflection of the outside culture that surrounds it” (Participant 10).

Breaking the community emerged without focused or critical probes into community shortcomings. If participants expressed negative sentiments towards the Muslim community, or Mosques, the issue was explored. The concern about a community in crises related to the meaningfulness of social solidarity, or the lack-thereof. These concerns revealed a broad range of issues. To both an undergraduate-American-Muslim-convert seeking cultural connections in mainstream spaces and a first

12 Shawn Wilson’s (2008) Research In Ceremony discovered similar concerns with the Indigenous American communities. Relationships and accountability for those bonds were found to be the cornerstone of Indigenous communities/epistemology
13 For more on the concept of solidarity see Joan Martin’s (1993) article “The notion of difference for emerging womanist ethics: The writings of Audre Lorde and bell hooks”
generation immigrant acclimating to Muslim life in the West, the community in Miami felt closed and severed.

These anxieties emanated from an emergent Muslim, “power elite” who not only reinforced ethnocentrism within the Mosque, but ran their places of worship like businesses (Mills 1956). Lost in the objectification of space was the organic potential. As noted by Participant 5:

“The Muslim community is an awkward group of people, disjointed, disorganized, and disloyal. There is no commitment. A group of people gather symbolically but have little sense of community. The Mosque means nothing in Miami. Look, a brother from Syria was here and was popular. He meshed, mingled and knew so many people, but when he got arrested for some false charge and eventually acquitted, no one came to his aid. No one. There are Muslims in Miami who have too much at stake to lose, they are petty capitalists. Also, there are some Muslims, who like the petty capitalists control the Mosques, have a lot at stake and need to create an image and space that frames Muslims in a Western form, having a private faith. And let me tell you what is happening because of this, the Mosque is becoming an obsolete space. You hear me. They are pushing the Muslim into shadows. They don’t understand that being Muslim is a public expression; it cannot be secularized or made religiously invisible. Muslims are visible. One way or the other, they must be visible.”

A racial component was added to the practices responsible for turning the community into a commodity, as well as to the reasons, why cultural hegemony is rooted in these modalities. This explanation comes from Participant 8, a self-identified Black-Muslim and doctor:

“We still need to know where our religion and community are rooted. It’s not easy, we have to learn the religion properly, become sincere with it and act accordingly. Then, when we come across things that are dealing with politics and desires, we can deal with them. Remember, when it comes to the Masjid (mosque), the financial component makes it run like a business and those in charge will appeal to wherever the money comes

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14 To understand the concept of hegemony the beginning point must always be Gramsci’s (Columbia University Press:1971:1992) The Prison Notebooks. However, when combined with a culturist reading of Bourdieu, spaces become domains where power and position are outcomes of struggles, and thus grant the victors the ability to determine meaning/values/norms/standards/capital in social realms.
from. The key thing here is that African Americans and Latinos will continue to be marginalized because financially you will not find enough rich Blacks and Latinos. It’s a microcosm of how this country operates.”

A community involved in self-reification and cultural exclusion will inevitably become isolated from other Muslim communities. Indeed, the findings and field work done over the course of this project attest to the fragmented and relatively uncooperative relations among Muslim Mosques and community members.

A scholar-activist who, since birth, has been mired in the political rights of the oppressed throughout the world echoed these sentiments. Her father, a political refugee from Palestine, and her mother, a political refugee from Russia, have instilled a humanist morality infused with Islam. She sees the Mosque as a place where male-dominated interests have superseded those of the community.

“Our leaders tend to be Men, tend to be self-sufficient and wealthy professionals, and organizations that have board members with large bank accounts rather than concerned community members. So, there is no bridge, no connection between each community. The leaders represent themselves. They push people away—especially people that are my age. When you are weak politically it’s easier to forget those at the bottom even if you are among the very population. So what I mean is that our leaders are looking for a seat at the table rather than true empowerment. And this empowerment comes only from the Muslim-American community and not their leaders. These leaders are seeking acceptance as American because they are not secure in their identity” (Participant 2).

The dominant sentiments expressed in these passages relate contempt for Muslim leaders. Instead of embodying the tenets of Islam and representing the interests of the people, intentions have become corrupted by delusions of wealth and power. In turn, a disconnect has occurred between Muslims, as well as between Muslim communities. This isolation enables a new form of Muslim to emerge: The Capitalist-Muslim.

Lost was the sense of community that harbored honor, strength, and good-will for Muslims. Lost, at least temporarily, was the potential outgrowth of the Muslim
community. Participants identified an emerging despot of elite Muslims. Yet, this recognition came from community members whose critique of Mosque-practices carries little weight. Local Imams, in contrast, occupy positions of authority and guidance over a population. Imams who criticize the reformist platform become entrapped by multiple fronts. All elites have to do is call an imam a radical and a barrage of assaults will be unleashed. Indeed, all Muslims know to be cast a radical represents an implicit warrant for government harassment and surveillance. One Imam shared this reality.

“The big thing is how Muslims impact Muslims. There is a growing problem of Muslims calling other Muslims radical because some refuse to adopt an American interpretation to being Muslim. I am unwilling to hide who I am. Am I radical because I do not accept alcohol, interest on purchases, pre-marital sex, Hollywood propaganda, and so on? Or am I Muslim? Why should I hide that? I have a right to believe and practice my faith; I am not forcing anyone to believe what I believe. So I am radical? Just by calling me that they put everyone I know in jeopardy. Did you know that 11 Imams have been interrogated because of knowing me? That is the power of “radical” (Participant 4).

But not all the blame was placed on reformist/capitalist. Some participants placed blame on asymmetrical cultural knowledge between conservative Muslims and youths reared in the West.

“So some leaders are too extreme. They approach people with Islam the wrong way. Because a lot of the people who are involved in these committees are the older generation, they don’t really know how to approach people with cultural knowledge. They don’t know what it means to be American. They have these extreme views and it clashes with the culture we are embedded in, a culture that cherishes freedom, equality and so on. Like if you bring up Gay or Lesbian and everyone jumps to condemn, then there is no room for compassion towards Gays and Lesbians. For me, that is between you and God it’s not up to me to judge them” (Participant 16).
“A lot of the people that tend my Mosque are Pakistani. So, I’ve heard from non-Pakistani that they feel ignored, invisible, and not heard” (Participant 24).

“The Media portrays Islam as extremists on a completely fabricated or exaggerated level but the real extremism going with Islam in Miami is the nexus between class and race in the Masjids. Some are trying so hard to assimilate and portray Islam as the opposite of the propaganda—almost to a fault. And then there are those who are so strict and turn everyone off because you can’t do this or that and really, both are wrong” (Participant 18).

These statements convey an existent pathology rooted at the epicenter of Muslim life. The promise of Islam, as a public purpose and call to gather for the sake of connection and communion, was dissipating. A community diluted by taboos solidified more in culture than religion, by profit, racism and sexism, and by a secular fixation at the expense of religious integrity, had disenchanted the next generation of Muslims. The disenchantment was the crisis! The Muslim community lacks the appropriate heirs adept at dealing with the increasing hostility against Muslims in the world. The compounded effect of a weakened community and stifled potential enabled structural violence—government surveillance, essentialization of Muslims in the Media, and organized assaults on Muslims by an active Islamophobia industry—to launch slanderous campaigns against Muslims with little to no resistance.

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15 The disenchantment among Muslims with Mosque leaders parallels the bitterness among Arabs with Arab elitists/intellectuals/opportunists in the latter part of the 20th century. See Said’s (1991) *The Intellectuals and the War*
**Structural Violence**

Structural violence\(^{16}\) reflected a concerted attack on Muslim life. This impairment did not limit one’s ability to make a living, but, rather, had impact on a way of living. Just being Muslim invited structural violence. The economic, political, and cultural institutions prominent in the activities of mainstream Miami served as the sites where structural violence normalized negative images of Muslims to prevent any communal, social, or political potential from ever being realized. Muslims were cast as primitives, savages, misogynists, gluttonies, and terrorists (Said 1981).

Although structural violence was communicated implicitly (e.g. the media, government power, secret agenda, industry, etc.), there were three prominent sites/articulations that epitomized this type of violence imposed against Muslims in Miami. First, public and private institutions with access to policy makers and elite interests utilized structural violence to normalize images of Muslims as terrorists and primitives. The more visible a Muslim appeared in traditionally white-Euro-American-Christian places, the greater the chances of an institutional campaign designed to delegitimize the Muslim presence in these privileged spaces happened. The main focus of structural violence was to suspend Muslim potential by keeping the Muslim excluded/foreign.

Second, the barrage of negative propaganda diffused over the last two decades against Muslims has caused many in Miami to internalize their Muslimness as

\(^{16}\) For more on structural violence see Paul Farmer (2009). Structural violence captures how social structures such as media, political parties, government agencies, and the like work to prevent individuals or groups from maximizing and realizing their full potential. Structural violence can be a physical or symbolic manifestation in society. For example, in the case of the latter, an essentialized image of Muslims produces a range of negative feelings towards this population in the U.S. and thus, the potential for members of this group to be known or realized becomes hindered.
deviance. The pervasive hate-campaign against Muslims combined with a desire to co-exist, produced vicarious (im)mobility with some Muslims. Participants were either inspired to mobilize against hate-campaigns or were overwhelmed by social paralysis.

Third, in relation to breaking community, structural violence created a perceived Muslim anomie (Murphy 2012). Muslims were in disarray, dislocated, and disjointed. No bridges existed between communities and everything Muslim seemed lost in ethnocentric translations. As an aftershock of 9/11, public consciousness toward Muslim, in general, has always been accompanied with a degree of hostility (Cainkar 2009). Depending on context and place, these hostile environments reverberated with the same spirit and reactions against Muslims. Each imposed a structural violence that was unique in each field, but also a byproduct of the saturated negativity surrounding the Muslim body.

The common perception is that Muslims are racialized according to physical traits associated with the Middle Eastern male menace, essentially the Bin Laden stereotype or the covered female caricature. The findings in this study rebuff these claims. What mattered was not how Muslims appeared but the spaces into which they ventured. In what follows are excerpts from three different participants who experienced structural violence. Their stories follow the excerpts.

Experience 1: I remember I was working to fight against this discriminatory bill that was targeting the Muslim community at the State level, the State legislator, and I remember needing a mentor to connect me with someone they knew, because that person could help me sway the voting. But we also live in the age of digital media so my mentor had reached out to someone and told them about the issue and tried to set up a coffee, and like everyone the person I was trying to connect with looked me up on google and found bloggers who wrote about me. And these racist websites had a headline that connected me with jihadist and

17 Bourdieu’s symbolic violence discusses how the oppressed become complicit in their own oppression. In the case of Muslims, the internalization of deviance can be viewed as an effect of symbolic power.
terrorism and involved me with terrorist organizations, and it’s exhausting, and you have to deal with institutions and organization whose sole purpose is to demonize you and discredit you. And so they create this stigma that prevents people from knowing me, from hearing communal concerns, from improving society, and it gets to you at a very human level because who knows how many opportunities have been lost. But I recognize that at the same time I have been privileged by an amazing amount of opportunities because I am Muslim, because I am Arab, I am Russian, and American. But it’s those moments where you are totally dismissed and reduced to this thing and it hurts.

Experience 2: I went to a town hall where Allan West was riling up this hatred and he was preaching about how Muslims are taught to hate and conquer….So I go to this town hall and I’ve always been an imposing person because of my size but this is the first time I ever went into a room and was shaking. And I go to this room filled with about 400 people and I step up to the mike with a Quran in my hand and I say, you keep telling people that the Quran tells Muslims to kill the innocent, and I ask, can you show me….And when I said that, the faces of the crowd and people transformed. The hate resonated. The feeling of hate filled the room it was unreal. I went and sat down and a couple of things started happening. Besides the yelling, people were seeing me as a foreigner, telling me to go back to my country. Here I am, more American than or just as American as anyone there! I was transformed to a foreigner to a non-human and it hit me, this is bad.

Experience 3: Let me tell you about something that happened to me a few months ago. I was coming home from the Casino where a friend was celebrating a birthday; I was driving home in my BMW. I live in a nice area. You should know this because even with the car and the house and everything that normally suggests the American dream, my Muslim identity is what jumped out. So, I’m on my home and a cop car zooms up behind me at the same time I’m turning into my driveway. The cop lights come on. And as I’m getting out, this white cop starts yelling freeze, don’t move, stay where you are and keep your hands visible at all times! I tell him that I live here and he’s like I don’t give a shit! Turn around, put your hands in the air and walk back to me slowly! He puts me in handcuffs. My neighbor from across the street sees and hears the commotion and starts yelling at the cop. Telling him I live there and work twenty hours a day and so on. He turns to the lady and says if you don’t shut up, you’re gonna be arrested for obstructing a police officer! She shuts up. My wife comes
out. He starts asking me where I was, if I drank anything, if I have weapons in the car. I tell him I don’t drink but I do have a pistol in the car and it’s registered. He does his thing. Meantime another cop car pulls up. I see that the white cop who is giving me all the problems has a confederate flag tattooed on his arm. He tells me to blow into a breathalyzer. I refuse. He does a field test, I pass. Then, he tells me to count backwards and I do. He tells me I skipped a number and I say I didn’t. And we go back and forth and he’s like well I’m gonna have to arrest you since you won’t take a breathalyzer and you failed the field test! My wife starts yelling. I get booked and I get an attorney, and within a couple of weeks the case gets thrown out. And that’s Muslim in America. We are inconvenienced; we are burdened with other peoples’ insecurity at the expense of our own well-being.

The first experience involved Participant 2, a young scholar-activist-media personality who embraced her Islam more in spirit than form. Yet, even without the hijab, even while dressed in western attire, and with her styled hair, make-up, cultural awareness, and everything else that screamed cosmopolitan, her affiliation with Muslim civil liberties made her a political liability. To paraphrase, knowing or understanding a person is not a concern when they are Muslims. The Muslim body remains the most political body on the planet, yet nothing about this notoriety suggests anything human. Nonetheless, this participant did not assume the role of the victim. She affirmed her Muslim identity, even with stigma. For her, the struggle to be Muslim meant more than the struggle to be known by non-Muslims. To be Muslim was to become Muslim.

The second experience came from Participant 11, a South Florida Deputy Sherriff. As an American citizen who took an oath to protect and serve the community, he is respected. But when he announced his Muslimnees at a town hall meeting, he became ostracized, villainized, and de-Americanized. The deputy, born and bred in

18 Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought discusses the strategy behind stigma, specifically as a tool of white-patriarchy. In general, stigma is used to control the images of minorities. See Chapter 4, which discusses how controlling images proved an ideological justification for the dominant group.
America, was transformed into a foreign enemy. The internalization of deviance was so intense that the unimaginable became imaginable for this man. He was made to feel something he could never be, un-American. Yet, the violence imposed on his body and the mass contempt that defined his environment quarantined his Americanness, and left his Muslimness exposed. The experience did not break him. Today, he stands as one of the leading advocates for Muslim civil liberties. His resilience and resolve remain intact. The struggle to be Muslim created the space necessary for him to live as a Muslim.

The last experience came from a business owner, family man, and die-hard sports fan. He grew up in America and speaks with a Southern twang when uttering expressions such as “y’all,” “yes-ma’am,” and “fix’in.” Participant 17 coaches little league soccer and has been one of the few dedicated Miami Marlins fans over the years—primarily because he won a car during a raffle at a 2003 game. In any case, it would be difficult to find a person who loves being American more than this participant. Yet, on a drive home, he was made to realize an ugly truth. As a Muslim, America does not love him back. He was intruding into spaces that do not welcome his presence. Structural violence did not target form or appearance, but spatial boundaries and intrusions. The preservation of the terror-suspect remained a vital aspect of institutional agendas and policies in this country (Ali 2016).

A Muslim was not welcome in the state legislature, town-hall meetings, or posh-neighborhood. Politicians and authorities displayed an aversion to the Muslim body and felt the need to expel or close off the Muslim from certain spaces, from the fields where American life transpires. The Muslim is not merely rendered inhuman but was removed
from existence even as a thing. To illustrate this agenda, Participant 13 shared his experience with structural violence. He recalled:

“I have never been arrested once in my life. I put on the Navy Uniform twice in my life, once as a Jag and the other as a Reserve, I have served as a Chaplin, been an educator, and a lawyer and still, I am a suspect. The FBI has over 1700 documents on me. When you don’t have the means to commit the crime, the government provides the means to commit the crime. The modus operandi of the FBI is to create the radical as much as it is to prevent the radical. We are today’s domestic and international enemy.

The domestic and international enemy helps perpetuate a terror-industrial complex that concentrates interests from every aspect of American life (Rana 2016). Again, from a structural sense, the Muslim remains the most political body in the world, without ever possessing his/her body or ever possessing the space to make a place in society.

Some participants experienced structural violence vicariously. When violence was imposed on Muslims and witnessed from a proximal distance—whether as a bystander, patron, transit passenger, or through media etc.—some developed an empathetic connection to the other’s pain/humiliation/struggle. For some, this connection rendered them immobile, while others spurred into action. To become immobilized meant to internalize Western norms and values that required reverence or inspired complicit invisibility. Fear of disrupting the natural condition of cultural practices often overwhelmed Muslim onlookers and compelled them to stay hidden. On the contrary, vicarious mobilization prompted some Muslims to come out of concealment and reveal themselves amid the conflict and join the battle against the resonant violence. Muslims in Miami reflected a constant struggle with overt and underlying aggression. As before, three narratives are presented and followed by descriptions. The first two narratives epitomized vicarious immobility and the third captured vicarious mobility.
Vicarious Immobility 1: “I’ve watched Muslims at the airport get looks, disgusted, fear-infused looks. Now, I know, I walk and talk in a way that blends and doesn’t make others uncomfortable. So, just to look at their faces when they see a visible Muslim makes me feel uncomfortable for them. I notice the faces and I imagine the thoughts and I end up feeling the anxiety for them. When they get patted down, when they get treated with disrespect, when other passengers just pass by so quickly but the Muslims are stopped and frisked, and their money has to be felt, their bodies touched, their possessions disordered, you know. It makes me feel like its happening to me. The feeling stays with you and lingers through the day. I can’t describe the feeling to you because its never the same. Sometimes I’m nauseous, sometimes scared, and other times so angry that I want to jump, scream, kick and fight. It’s crazy.”

Me: Have you ever done anything crazy like that?

Participant 18: No. Never. I usually just stand there watching it all.

Vicarious Immobility 2: “One time I was in a store that I often shop with, and I think the cashier lady was from Iraq and her English wasn’t very good and she messed up this lady’s order. The lady was really upset and started yelling at her, insulting her, telling her to go back to her country, and stuff like that. I just watched, video recorded it on my phone, but I was in shock and maybe that’s why I didn’t say anything. Not say something or speaking out bothered me. It was only a couple of months ago but I still think about. I wish I would have said something. I think I need something like that to happen again so I can say something. That will be the only way, I think, to have some kind of closure with that” (Participant 4).

Vicarious Mobility 1: “I joined CAIR because I was listening to a narrative that Muslims need to speak out against terrorism and Muslims need to be more involved in the community so you have people like NZH who want to get involved and join the ranks of civil service and then you have people like Rosen**** who stands in front of the courthouse holding a sign that NZH is a terrorist. So I was like which way do you go? You say get involved then they say no, you can’t be a Sherriff, well which is it? So I applied to CAIR the next day and thankfully I got a job here” (Participant 15).

The paradox found here is that while Muslims are made to suffer, struggle, and find meaning amid hostility, the struggle was how they affirmed their need to remain steadfast
as Muslims. They embraced their Muslimness even in immobility, even in rejection, and arrest. Being Muslim was never in jeopardy during these ordeals, as well as in the aftermath, although the feeling of being American was lost.

Structural violence burdened each Participant in these excerpts, but their direct encounter with irrational hate/fear/insecurity led to meaningful (re)actions. From the affirmation of Muslimness to increased civic engagement to greater social awareness, Muslims found meaning and integrity in these hostile spaces. Although affirmation and empathy may have helped them to make sense of the world, connection remains impeded. Affirmation and empathy are not enough to fix a breaking community. Vicarious experiences confound the idea of community because often a de-contextualization remains at the heart involvement. The (im)mobility is determined by exogenous forces, and not the necessary internalization for inside-out growth. Indeed, narrowed perceptual experiences, expansive effects of violence, and the lack of access to decision-makers has contributed to breaking the community and increased the perception of a Muslim anomie.

**Muslim Anomie**

In general, two external forces (capitalism and structural violence) have wreaked havoc on Muslims and their community. The first exogenous impact on personal understanding and social relations involved the nexus between capitalism—and the constitutive performances such as racism, classism, ethnocentrism, sexism, etc.—and group position (Blumer 1958). The second, structural violence represents a focused assault on an essentialized Muslim body. Structural violence suspended Muslims from potential growth and understanding. The Muslim remained tethered to violence and primitiveness. From government harassment, slanderous depictions by the media, to
organized campaign financed by politically connected groups, structural violence was understood to be a strategic campaign designed to banish the Muslim form from the public arena (Galtung 1971). Both, capitalism and structural violence legitimated the stifling of Muslim potential. Instead of growth and connection, Muslims and their communities became isolated and fragmented.

Participant 2 noted that “Islam in America is the most multi ethnic religious group—blacks, Spanish, Persians, middle easterners, SW Asian, Africa, and wherever it may be—so we have a community that is seeking so many different things.” This understanding forms the basis of Muslim anomie (Peek 2011). Anomie was conceptualized as a massive disconnect among civilians through an abundance of claims, as well as through the incapacity to find solidarity among Muslims. Participant 2 indicated that ethnocentric claims inhibited communal connection.

This social pathology was expressed time and again by participants. For example, the Muslim community has failed to inspire a sense of commitment. Participant 11 explained,

“Muslims are not capable of uniting behind a lot of issues. From Iraq to Syria to Palestinian, from gender issues to sexual orientation issues, we are not untied on any front.”

Moreover, the anomie between communities curtailed the willingness to share authority. An old, traditional guard has been unwilling to share authority over religious spaces, even amid an increasingly tangible violence.

“Islamophobia is slowly becoming institutionalized and the people in the policies arena are adopting that. We have (American) leaders who are doing it and now a growing number of people are following in line. So now I have a triple front. I have to deal with non-Muslim attacks, Hispanic disdain over the increasing number of conversions taking place in that community, and within the Muslim community. The Hispanic move into
the Muslim leadership manifold has created a sense of threat against the traditional guard of predominately Middle Eastern overseers. Now, the Hispanic Imam is beginning to cater to a Muslim community and the more established leaders are struggling to maintain control” (Participant 13).

While a disjointed, disloyal, and disconnected community created a sense of crisis among Muslims, all was not hopeless. Muslims who perceived their community breaking retained hope.

The disenchanted speak of disconnection to inspire a call to action. Participant 5 insists that Muslims “need public forums that take away power from controlling groups who have taken over the Muslim spaces.” This call resonates.

The passion for Islam and being Muslim inspired a struggle for solidarity and the integrity of communal space. Some found the reformist movement appealing. Others staked their claim in conservativism. And either case, most participants respected the presence of both worldviews. They wanted only the space and freedom for differences to exist among Muslims. “We know that there is no compulsion in religion. Our own commandments say that we don’t force anyone” (Participant 8). The point is, despite the reputation of Muslims and Islam, cooperation was not only possible, but desired by Muslims. The crisis of community was to be solved. The community was breaking, but fixable. In the end, when Muslims affirmed being Muslim, community potential was allowed to just breathe.

2. FIXING COMMUNITY

This section reflects the ongoing struggle of Muslims to forge a space in society. For some, space was not an issue to be made as much as an issue to be found. That is, some Muslims sought to fit-in and become a part of the manifold. Others, however, sought only the space to make a place in society. This latter perspective reflected a return
to embodiment (Winchester 2008). This return was not an imagined return to Islamic
dominance in the world or a master plan to take over American culture; rather this
development indicated a desire to return to connection, from the inside-out. It was a
connection to faith, to brethren, and to others. The growth found in embodiment was
always predicated on knowledge and empowerment (Freire 2000). With those who
desired to integrate, power meant structural and institutional fortitude. To combat
structural violence, to solve communal anomie, the Muslim community in Miami needed
institutions. To combat the concentrated powers that reduced the Muslim body to a
decontextualized object, Muslims needed to occupy key positions in society. In short,
institutional power and positional authority were keys to acceptance and community.
Both strategies are described in this section.

**Creating Structure and Integrated Wholeness**

The cure to Muslim anomie for some resides in institutional power. Some
claimed, for example, that Muslims need corralling, information, and liberation from
immigrant thinking. To become accepted in American society, a new Muslim vanguard
needs to establish pathways for Muslims into American society, as American-Muslims.
As Participant 11 concluded, “Structures determine consciousness. We serve
organizationally.”

The institutionalization of Islamophobia created the need among structuralists to
create an agenda for all Muslims: (1) Increase immigrant awareness, (2) fortify Muslim
institutions, and (3) access key authority positons in society—such as doctors, lawyers,
politicians, law enforcement, campaign managers, military officers, and professorships.

Structuralists saw this three prong approach as an effective solution to Muslim anomie\(^{19}\).

First key to fixing the community involved transforming the immigrant from victim to citizen. Because “most immigrants Muslims come here with a victimized mentality and don’t understand their rights, they have difficulty exercising their rights and they give them up too easy; they come from a culture where boundaries are owned by the government institutions. Here, citizens have rights” (Participant 15). In this sense, structuralists view the immigrant’s desire to comply with Western norms as a site of struggle.

“The immigrant—wants to stay invisible. The people who come for opportunity or political asylum want to stay invisible. They just want to live free and live their life. While the well-funded political groups attacks the visible Muslim, the majority Immigrants hide their identity. A lot of them are conditioned not to speak out against the government. They fear speaking their mind because they have a victimhood built into their habits and way of thinking” (Participant 11).

Thus, institutions provide immigrant Muslims with knowledge about their rights as Americans, along with assurance that they will be protected. Immigrant awareness translates essentially as cultural awareness, one of the factors identified by young participants as the leading cause of a breaking community. Institutions reconcile the knowledge gap realized within the community.

Second, institutions safeguard Muslim spaces and individuals. Participant 13 expressed a passionate belief in institutional power as a means to fix a breaking community and a possible cure for Muslim de-contextualization.

“Struggle makes us stronger. We cannot be comfortable, first they won’t allow us. We must shift, at a quicker pace, from a reactionary mode to an

\(^{19}\) See Merton (ASR: 1938) “Social Structure and Anomie” for foundational connections between structure and anomie.
active movement. Look, we are taking care of our own, we have founded schools, we are suing in courts, these things are happening. We are not defenseless or poor. Now we can hit hard. By getting organized we can fight back because when the Islamophobia industry hits, they hit hard: link them to terrorism, discredit their leaders, and destroy their institutions. So growth can only come from the institutions that are strong and have a directive that opens and wards off these attacks. There are indigenous organizations for Muslims in America and this is a good thing. And today we are celebrating that Muslim organization are fully engaged in protecting the civil rights of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. We are becoming influential” (Participant 13).

The reflection here reveals a desire of assimilation\(^20\) and imagines a full Muslim integration as not only possible but already underway.

The last phase of the structuralist agenda is the integration into key authority positions. Again, the proponents of this approach are already engaged in organizing, campaigning, and struggling for Muslim rights. Organizations like CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) make a concerted effort to normalize the appearance of Muslims in vital spaces, as well as being one of the few Muslim-centered organizations that holds the government and law enforcement accountable. But the path of least resistance for structuralist involves a struggle of to gain access to realms of production and influence. As one CAIR member stated, Muslims live in America so they must be American. Put another way:

In the United States, if you chose to be a part of the U.S., then you need to analyze it. Look, your taxes go to the Military industry Complex, the prison complex, foreign countries that oppress Muslims, etc. So you are complicit no matter what you do. You fund these projects. And even though it may not be justified it is fact. So the only way to change the system is to be a part of it, to join its ranks, to pick up causes, to gain political capital. You have to get involved. Do something. We cannot change from outside. You change from within. That is how American works. The solution is integration. Take the Hollywood industry, you want to change it, what have you done to make your own movies, to fund

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\(^20\) For more on the nature of assimilation within a historical context see Alba (2005) ) “Bright vs. blurred boundaries: Second-generation assimilation and exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States”
your own projects, look this country will always have a strong military. This country depends on the economy and military they are coupled systems. That’s America. So, we, as Muslims, must integrate in both spaces. Influence comes by participating in the system” (Participant 13).

The call for integration has been heeded by some. Participant 9 was a 19 year old enrollee in one of the oldest military schools in the country. As the only hijab wearing Muslim in the school, her attendance has created as stir inside and outside the Muslim community. Some see her as a looming spy, while others view her as a traitor who unknowingly trains to kill Muslims. The pressure on this young lady has been astronomical. She is consumed by a pervasive pressure to be perfect. According to her, 10 eyes are always watching, waiting for me to mess up. When I asked her why she does this to herself, she answered:

“Muslims need non-Muslims to help us transition into spaces where Muslims are closed off from. We have to slowly integrate into these spaces so that we can change the image and deal with the fear. Part of the reason I joined the military is to join the team to protect the values of this country from threats. Threats like Russia, Isis, and terrorists in general. Look the main thing I want people to know is that as an American we Muslims are like you and really want, desire, and enjoy the same things. We love our family, stress about finals, enjoy companionship of our friends, and love our country. We have the same rights and can enter the same spaces as anyone called citizen. So you have to show yourself and contribute by putting yourself out there as a Muslim and as American. Make them understand that we are not trying to take over the world. All I am trying to do is to open spaces for them. I have to prove, more than others that I am dedicated to the military and I’m not there to harm them. I’m a Muslim and I’m an American and I can serve both communities.”

In sum, structuralists communicate a desire to make a deliberate move into the American system. They desired to identify the “key buttons that move this country,” in order to become a part of America. By organizing and slowly transitioning into key positons, the professionalization of the Muslim community will lead to solidarity, and most of all to a formidable Muslim community.
Embodying Muslim

While some Muslims gave primacy to increased institutionalization, others preferred a more localized and intimate struggle, one that reflected both the religious and communal aspects of being Muslim (Ali 2016). These participants appreciated organizations like CAIR, and some have even benefited from their assistance. However, as necessary as organizations like CAIR are, the essence of being Muslim will always remain communal. The Mosque, and not institutions, must remerge as the epicenter of the community.

“We need to help each other and figure out how to get together and the Masjid needs to be the center. I’m not talking about turning the Masjid into a reformist project. We have to stick to what the Prophet (PBUH) did, I’m not going against that but we are smart enough to put our heads together to come with solutions on how to get people together” (Participant 8).

“Sticking to what the Prophet (PBUH) did” indicated a return to embodiment as both an affirmation of Muslim being and a means for the outgrowth of spaces.

Embodying form, at its most basic understanding of being Muslim, is gendered (Selod 2015). Yet, in the context of a post-9/11 society to take the gendered form of a Muslim involves risk—risk of inciting emotional responses, being profiled, marginalized, or physical assault. When probed about form and look as aspects of being Muslim, three imams related “being” Muslim to issues of obligation and duty. Indeed, duty and obligation were important to the performance of faith, but these concepts appeared as answers to many questions. Instead, a Palestinian imam offered a more nuanced response about being Muslim. When asked, why does one have to look Muslim to be Muslim? His response was:
“For me, it’s always been about connection. I felt more connected to being Muslim when I started looking Muslim. The beard, the kufi, the thobe all mattered to my identity, to my conviction, to my public proclamation that I am Muslim. The look is important because it is a way that I am known to others and the way other Muslims are known to me” (Participant 19).

Form not only represented what appeared Muslim but the way Muslims appeared. The expressions “mattered to my identity, to my conviction, to my proclamation” reveal an internalized devotion as much as an outward proclamation. Looking Muslim is an essential aspect to his being. For example, embodiment discloses faith/affiliation/gender/commitment/community. From the internalized connection to the outward manifestation of community, the embodied Muslim relates to conviction. An excerpt from Participant 5, the professor, affirmed embodiment as conviction/devotion.

“This is how I understand the religion...a balance between substance and form. If you disregard the form and have only substance, I don’t think you have it. And if you focus on form only without addressing the substance, then, again, you don’t’ have it. The form is to have a beard and the substance is to believe. To have a beard by itself doesn’t make me a Muslim but to ignore the beard is also problematic for me. So I have to have that balance. The dress and look are a part of the devotion and faith because I consider what I do as acts of worship. (Participant 5).

The Muslim form must pass through consciousness (as devotion) for this act to matter in the world. Thus, one does not move into Islam to assume embodiment—that would result in form without substance—rather, Islam flows from religious internalization to devoted revelation to a potential performance that is articulated in the world. Expressed more pragmatically by Participant 13, an embodied Muslim is always Muslim, always public, and always in a state of devotion.

“As a convert, Islam is the most important decision I have ever made. I adopted it as my way of life. Everything that you do is an act of worship.

21 The construct utilized in this sentence comes from Samuel Todes (2001, p. 52). He writes, “I wish to distinguish sharply between what appears and the way it appears.” During a committee session, a member connected with this passage. We looked for excerpts that indicated some sensory connection to embodiment that was unmistakably concerned with form as expression.
In the Greco Roman faith, your work is not an act of worship, but in Islam eating, working, loving, abstaining, all these things are considered acts of worship. So yes, Islam is a religion but it is a way of life. So everything has to do with Islam because there is no distinction between me and my faith” (Participant 13).

The majority of participants who realized the integration of form and substance find this way of disclosing vital to mitigating the false narratives imposed on Muslims.

For example, one Imam noted:

“I believe being Muslim is a right way to be, so I want to express it, make myself known. I am Muslim. I was not going to be like other Muslims who walk around hiding. Why should I? I have a conviction that I want to share with others. If all Muslims would stop hiding then we could have strength, we could re-socialize others to see us for who we are. We could influence behaviors and ways of living. We could find strength in each other” (Participant 4).

Participant 4 not only disclosed a way of being known, but indicted the invisible Muslim (Diouf 2002). Essentially, the Muslim community remains weak because of its failure to disclose. The resocialization process, desired by this participant, consisted of non-Muslims interpreting his actions and deeds as sociable. Furthermore, embodied Muslims perceive themselves to be on the proverbial frontlines. They are not merely embodied Muslims but embodied text. Participant 5, the professor, equates his actions and deeds with a narrative that not only engages the mind but the heart.

“My goal is to create space by making people get used to people like me. Because I feel like public consciousness is a frontline. This is where the struggle lies, in the hearts and minds of people. But I just won’t go into hiding. Today, it requires more commitment to be Muslim” (Participant 5).

22 In Audrey Lorde’s, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, she describes the experience of opening the body to the world, from the inside-out. The body becomes a textual expression allowing the empowered self to illuminate action onto the world, to be read and known by others, and to become undetermined and receptive to human needs.
The narrative of resocialization, education, winning the hearts and minds of people emerged predominantly among males. The males in this study represented a range of ethnicities and races. There were several Middle-Easterners, one Guyanese, a Hispanic-American, an Eastern European, and a Black-Muslim. Race and ethnic origins had little effect on the perception of changed consciousness in others. Participant 8, a Black Muslim doctor echoed similar intentions as the imams, attorney, and professor.

“Having dealt with racism for so long, I’ve learned to stay in my lane for peace of mind and peace period. But, then, I like to elevate consciousness. Not that I don’t know that racism and Islamophobia don’t exist. But it’s better for everyone to see me being kind and curious to everybody. When they find out about me being Muslim, they are surprised because it may be that they had a bad opinion before, but now their prejudice is challenged by their like for me” (Participant 8).

While the intention of winning over hearts and minds parallels other Muslims, there are two points of difference. First, despite the devotion disclosed through embodiment, his Muslim form remained concealed by race. Indeed, the way of appearing shares the same intention with other participants but, still, their ways of appearing are a matter of fact. Their Muslimness stands at the forefront of their presence in any mainstream space. But, in this case, being Black camouflages the embodied Muslim. Even with his beard grown out, kind demeanor, and cooperative behaviors, skin color overwhelmed his being Muslim in social settings where blacks were a minority. Second, while the doctor’s intent was to change hearts or elevate consciousness, his concealment was a complicit act. He waited to be discovered as a Muslim before any challenge to prejudiced assumptions occurred. A different scenario emerged when the doctor entered black communities.
“Typically, the black communities are staunch Christians and they are the ones I have the most problems with. Because, it’s a very emotional thing. They don’t see the skin. It’s almost like they don’t understand and they don’t want to ask” (Participant 8).

The acknowledgement of “most problems” with the black community seems to be one that plagues the Muslim community. Blacks have an intimate relation to Islam that dates back to the first slaves. Moreover, the first Mosque in Miami was created by Black-Muslims. In any case, the black struggle is a unique struggle in American lore. The Muslim struggle is not. An unwillingness to engage in dialogue and bridge realities/histories between struggles is preferred over the potential to achieve new possibilities. In the expression: “because it’s an emotional thing. They don’t see the skin….they don’t understand and they don’t want to ask,” the reading of emotional, colorless, and silence was interpreted as a perceived betrayal of black consciousness by the doctor. Trading black history and black memory for religion was treasonous to the black cause. Islam concealed his blackness rather than disclosing Muslimness. That is, his blackness was erased by his Muslimness and his Muslim-being was muted by the unwillingness to speak to him, listen to him, or understand his purpose. That is why understanding was unattainable. The doctor was muted in every aspect of the word.

For the doctor his blackness conceals his Muslimness in white spaces, because, first and foremost, whites see blackness. In the black community, the doctor becomes uninterpretable due to his Muslimness and thus out of place. And last, in Muslim spaces the doctor experienced cultural hegemony enabled by class-consciousness, which limited his desire to partake in social/religious/cultural activities. His outside appearance hindered his potential to be known and felt in the world. The only time he was not black,
he was Muslim. Race showed up again in the experiences of Participant 10, a self-identified Progressive-White-Gay-Female-American-Muslim.

“I mean if I didn’t tell anyone I was Muslim and if I was more passive about my beliefs politically, socially, and religiously, then no one would know anything about me. That’s a direct result of my being white. Yes. Even with the Hijab. Muslims would think I’m a spy and white people thought I had cancer. So, I gave up on it quickly because my life is already difficult no matter what circle I’m in. So, yeah, with or without it I get read by my skin color” (Participant 10).

Participant 10, unlike the experiences of the Black-Muslim-doctor, possessed the ability to become invisible. In white spaces, even with the hijab not perfectly configured, she was perceived to be dying before the possibility of being Muslim. That is how far removed the potential is of a white female to be considered Muslim in the White-American mind. Death before Muslim! In the Muslim spaces, if she removed the hijab, the potential for her acceptance might increase. However, Participant 10, despite always having to conceal some aspect of her identity no matter what space she enters, is an exceptional case! To become Muslim is to be Muslim. Participant 10 is on this journey. But before committing, she admits, “my life is already too difficult.” Thus, she is working through more than her whiteness, Muslimness, or political views, as well as the social attitudes toward gender and sexual orientation.

Race was indeed found to be a relevant aspect of Muslim life and of the Muslim community (Jackson 2003). More specifically, this study revealed that racism is an overarching phenomenon that supersedes anti-Muslim structural violence. However, for Black and White Muslims, being Muslim helped navigate the pressures of race.

“Being Muslim makes the most sense to me. The practice is beneficial because it mandates discipline, gratitude, and humility every day. And these are all good for your life. Although there are progressive challenges
revolving around gender and sexuality, I feel like Muslims are more conscious, more aware about trade and policies and economic injustices. They tend to be more knowledgeable and these things tend to benefit my life” (Participant 10).

“But I’ve seen that when you walk into a Masjid, you see African Americans in one group, Pakistanis in one group, and so on. Every now and then you can find a Masjid where those barriers are broken down. I can tell you personally that I have never experienced anything negative because of my background. In part its personality and in part its education. So, yes I have seen racism in the Mosques but it is not an indictment on Islam it is an indictment on humanity. Islam and the teaching of Islam if followed correctly deals with racism definitively. I mean I’ve dealt with race before Islam. But when I studied what Allah said about race in the Quran, it was the first time that I saw the race issue authentically and definitively addressed” (Participant 8).

Unlike the male participants who imagine themselves on the frontlines of battling to win hearts and minds through kindness, steadfastness, and likability, Participant 1 expressed a different effect on the consciousness of others. Her embodiment had produced visceral reactions over the years. Although Participant 1 related stories about hostile verbal assaults over a 10 year span, the intensity of such experiences make time a potential non-factor. The outcomes of such experiences have left a different perspective on the struggle for the hearts and minds of others, as this exchange during the interview attests:

Participant 1: “The hijab stopped being a symbol. I used to get my mind ready for stares and comments. Now I could care less. I used to go out into a battle field. It was taxing to give these stares and comments authority over my life. I knew blending in was not an option, it was impossible. It was also impossible to control the outside world from a perpetual defensive positon. I was an object.

Me: That’s the irony. Before the hijab you were a sexual object, desired by some, and you put on the hijab to get away from that. But now you are a thing, a repulsive other.

Participant 1: “But I would rather the repulsive other than the sexual object. I would rather the disgust than the sexualized thing. Both are
beyond my control, but what is within my control is that the effect of
disgust comes from leading a life that I believe in and life that gives me
comfort. With the other where does the security and comfort come from?
The disgust means my life is mine.

The two discoveries extracted from this interaction are, (1) the metaphor of a
frontline has been abandoned for the sake of personal well-being, and (2) although the
hijab seems like a formidable obstacle for embodied Muslim women, relative to the way
embodied men appear in everyday life, there is a degree of empowerment not often
recognized by other studies (Abdul-Ghafur; Haddad 2007; Peek 2011; Selod 2015). The
hijab indicates repossession of the body as much as an expression of belief. Hiding or
concealment—such as with the covering of the head—speaks as much to making oneself
known as the overt narratives found with male embodiment. However, for some women,
the hijab is the epitome of realized potential. Spaces become Muslim when hijab wearing
women render others invisible (See Table 5).

This finding represents new space in the literature. The visible Muslim,
especially with hijab wearing women, possessed the power to render others invisible (See
excerpt from Participant 16). This maneuver transforms the struggle for meaning in
hostile environments by rendering the hostility impenetrable, and therefore the struggle
for space represents an evolved inside-out growth. Participant (20) provides another
aspect of hijab empowerment by relating how the embodiment makes her spaces Muslim.
This idea was not solidified until connected with participant 16, whose embodied form
rendered others invisible. Thus, community can be made (Berger and Luckmann 1967;
Davis 2016). Without the presence of structure, masculinity, and presence of a Mosque,

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Past studies have framed the hijab as a symbol of devotion, courage, and even an incitement to
unsolicited assaults—See Abdul-Ghafur; Haddad 2007; Peek 2011; Selod 2015. Moreover, the hijab
represents a repossession of the body, as much as an expression of faith. Rather than visibility seen as
social pressure, most participants in this study viewed the hijab as an expression of love, power, and
knowledge. This finding is expanded in the discussion section.
structural violence was emasculated. Even in overt hostile space such as a military school, the hijab facilitated connection to embodiment and empowerment (See Participants 1 and 9).

**Table 5: Meanings, Empowerment, and Spaces Revealed thorough the Hijab**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have been wearing the hijab for so long, I don’t really care what people think….I don’t care about other people’s thoughts (Participant 20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been so accustomed to the stares and glances it doesn’t faze me. I don’t feel that pressure because I expect stares (Participant 7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think ever since I started wearing hijab, I have always felt visible. The starring is common but since I put on the hijab people have become more invisible to me. I turn them off when I’m out. I’ve conditioned my mind to ignore them (Participant 16).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hijab has made me stronger. If you go against the grain long enough, you become strong and it helps make everyone (other Muslims) become stronger. Because female Muslims are the ones that get the backlash, I mean me going to college is an example. I’m the only hijabi in the whole military college that wears the hijab. It’s a part of my routine. I don’t even feel it anymore. It’s a part of me. (Participant 9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s how I look and understand the world around me. It’s the lens on how I view the world. It’s a place where I feel the most comfortable and it just how I see myself. It makes sense to me because it’s a culture that I live every day” (Participant 20).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the hijab, for example, that’s kind of my connection to Islam which for me is a lifelong search for meaning and knowledge. The more I learn the more I discover about myself, the world, and people. Islam is divine and it’s an honor to be Muslim (Participant 1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sum, the narrative of embodiment was manifested in different ways. On the surface these differences may seem a paradox. But when race and gender are considered, a deeper understanding of the embodied narrative can be attained. Most Muslim men strive to make themselves known as Muslims. Additionally, some men understand their
embodiment as an opportunity to challenge stereotypes by living an exemplary life. However, race and sex encode a different set of narratives that must first be reconciled before Muslim embodiment grows outwardly. A Black or White Muslim may find it more efficient to mitigate the prejudices associated with skin-color before disclosing Muslimness, even when both are self-evident. In the case of female embodiment, the narrative transformed from a proclamation of religiosity into empowered feminism. Through public concealment and reclaimed ownership over the body, a sense of humanity was affirmed, space was made, and community potential regained. In a stark manner, the essence of embodiment is revealed in the experiences of hijab-wearing women.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, two primary themes and 7 sub-themes were reported as general understandings of what it meant to be Muslim in Miami. Of course, 9 themes in total do not do justice to the lives encountered and can only provide a rendering of Muslim life in Miami. But what is presented is something that ought to be noted, especially for those persons fully engaged in Muslim life in Miami. That is, the community is at once in crisis and full of potential. To be Muslim, one struggled to become Muslim, and struggles against the pervasive ill-will that decontextualizes Muslims. Yet, to be Muslim also means the struggle for community. As the empowered women illustrate, building a community is far better than merely finding a place in society. The latter revolves around navigating pre-constituted interpretations and modalities of being, which may impose demands that comprise Muslim potential. However, the Muslim who seeks to make the space to build a community has rendered the powers that afflict violence on the Muslim
body invisible. The struggle to exist is as much communal as individual. The dimensions of this struggle are what the 9 themes have captured.
CHAPTER 6
ARTICULATING MUSLIM STRUGGLES: MOVING FROM DIALOGUE TO ACTION

This project set out to provide an account of the Muslim experience in America without giving primacy to victimization narratives or academic paradigms. Many projects have claimed to present the Muslim experience in America by emphasizing methodological rigor and sensitivity (Cainkar 2009; Cesari 2013; Hermansen 2003; Jamal 2008; Love 2017; McCloud 2008; Peek 2005, 2011; Silva 2016). However, instead of fulfilling the promise of resonance to the Muslim community by allowing their voices to speak free from distortion or voiceover, researchers have typically used the Muslim experience to enhance an academic perspective. This project set out to rectify these shortcomings.

Chapter 5 represents the first step towards fulfilling the promise of resonance. Voices, concerns, and meanings were articulated and synchronized. In this closing chapter, a brief summary of the findings is presented, and then followed by an analysis of the embodied empowerment women discovered through form (hijab). Last, a five point-initiative for Muslims involved in the struggle for community is proposed. This plan serves more as a launching point for “dialogical action” than a blueprint for fixing a community in crises (Freire 2012, see pages 167-183).

In some respects, Muslims must re-connect and build trust with each other, while other connections to non-Muslim communities must also be considered. Muslims will need to the work through differences to help salvage the potential of the greater community. Indeed, the commitment involved in bridging communities, with distinctive outlooks, is a challenge but necessary. These bridges fulfill the structuralist dream of
becoming a formidable community, while simultaneously preserving the right of different embodiments. By moving from a rendering of the Muslim experience to Muslim praxis, a movement from a struggle to find space to struggle to make space occurs. More important, the promise of resonance is fulfilled.

A Summary of the Findings

The struggle for meaning among Muslims involves community and faith. Everything about being Muslim and community, as it ought to be, reflects an internalization of faith that moves from revelation of spiritual being to the public manifestation of Muslimness. The relative center that begins with any individual Muslim becomes, subsequently, a part of the communal core of any Muslim community. Thus, to be Muslim is to become Muslim and to become Muslim can be reinterpreted as: To be an embodied Muslim is to become a Muslim community and to become a Muslim community is to be embodied Muslims. This rationale is at the heart of every statement by the research participants that spoke about the need for visibility.

Muslims aspiring for stronger institutions expressed the need for more visibility. Muslims who emphasized embodiment called on Muslims to stop “hiding” their Muslimness, and those who felt disenfranchised or disconnected from the Muslim community spoke of being Muslim as political disclosure. In sum, being Muslim meant occupying a visible socio-political position in the struggle against imperialism/colonialism/capitalism/sexism/racism/ethnocentrism, as well as an

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24 See Merquior, From Prague to Paris (London, 1986), pages 36-40. For our purposes, structuralists understand intellectual organization as the tie that binds different Muslim embodiments. This intellectualism emanates from cultural idealism whereby laws, meritocracy, and American values will, at the end of the day, vindicate Muslim Americans.
expression of faith and community. Embodiment was malleable but always a communal action.25

In regard to the findings, there were three sites of (dis)embodiment that exemplified the community and crises of community. They were: (1) the Mosque as a site for connection, (2) the Mosque as a site of corruption, and (3) the anywhere as the site of political domination. Based on these sites, struggles have the potential to transform a call to action into collective achievements.

**The Mosque and Connection**

The Mosque provided a place where being Muslim could be expressed without interruptions or misinterpretations. In this space, one found comfort, support, and potential. The Mosque represented a place where worship and comradery helped re-humanize being Muslim. Typically, Muslim experiences in mainstream society were characterized by symbolic violence, whereby one either internalized their deviation from mainstream society or felt alienated from others (Bourdieu 1991). Finding connection in the Mosque unburdened being Muslim and transformed feelings of shame and discomfort to a sense of kinship and presence.

To be clear, the connection embodied in the Mosque enabled disconnection. One did not enter Muslim spaces in order to disconnect, rather the internal connections forged in the Mosque rendered the outside/daily experiences invisible. Likewise, the Mosque was more than a safe space or sanctuary. A Muslim could find safety and sanctuary at a university, in a cubicle tucked away from sight, or at home. The Mosque provided these

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25 See Sherman Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican* (Oxford Press, 2003). Jackson discusses how Muslims embrace community and difference as not only a fact of life, but a divine plan. Muslims believe different races, cultures, and nations exist so that people may come to know each other. Co-existence and community represent acts of worship.
benefits, but also empowered Muslims with resolve. What mattered in interactions at a Mosque is the power found in the communal performances of being Muslim. Lifestyle was not a value judgement in the Mosque, but an affirmation of one’s being and purpose. A community was built on meaningful interactions that began and ended in connection.

People were helpful at the Mosque. Kinship required commitments to others, and thus people were known to each other. As some of the participants stated, the Mosque is a place where Muslims and non-Muslims can find someone who cares. Whether a needed a meal, help with finances, or friendship, the Mosque provided the space and means to have those needs fulfilled. In short, the Mosque is a place where Muslims gathered to celebrate being Muslim. Worship, community, and devotion harnessed the potentials in Islam.

The key findings can be summed as follows: The Mosque connected people to their faith, brethren, and potentials. A Mosque that operated as it ought to empowered the community with purpose and progress. Additionally, the connections found inside the Mosque render the effects of the external, mainstream society invisible (Winchester 2008). And despite being on the periphery, a center remains a relative point, as communal potential develops.

The Mosque Corrupted

Conversely, a corrupted Mosque is a reflection of mainstream social pathologies overwhelming the internal community. When outside pressures penetrate the Mosque and disrupt the potential to disconnect from mainstream objectification, the social pathologies found in mainstream culture become rooted in the Mosque. Hierarchies, power consolidation, and salient boundaries, corrupt the space and community. The Mosque is
transformed into an edifice, or a symbolic object (Winchester 2008). Good intentions are lost to ethnocentric expressions that pander to a majority or power elite (Mills 1956).

The deviance felt on the outside plagues some on the inside. Indeed, a corrupted Mosque has no potential for organic growth. Regardless of the external aesthetics and manicured grounds associated with Western-centric Mosques, the internal is disjointed and in disarray (Kriještorac 2016). The proverbial soul of a community is tainted by materialism and external fixations. Community goals become oriented towards fitting in or maximizing institutional position relative to other Mosques. Because internal needs are disregarded, congregations become the dominant image of Mosque gatherings. Lost is the call to community. Body counts and Mosque membership are reduced to measurables that corrupt space with a capitalistic mentality (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1991). The essence of being Muslim is lost.

To be Muslim is to worship and submit to God (Esposito 2011). This submission is the ultimate and indisputable essence of Islam and of being Muslim. But in the Muslim substratum that is the everyday world, the essence of being Muslim, as well as of the Muslim community, is the internalized flow that becomes manifested as public performances of faith. This directional becoming is also the mandate for being Muslim. Thus, when a Mosque gives primacy to external things over internal origins, potentials of community and humanity are lost. Form means nothing without substance. Personal embodiment and community cannot occur when flows of expression are disrupted (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).

In sum, a corrupted Mosque reflects mainstream pathologies rather than the tenets of Islam. Lost in this conflation between the mainstream and Muslim spaces are the
potentials of community and personal being. Without connections between the internal and external, a Muslim community cannot be realized. What is left in the void are symbolic objects that only appear Muslim.

**The Anywhere**

The “anywhere” is at once the most difficult and profound aspect of a Muslim community. The dimensions involved in the anywhere inspire future research. Nonetheless, in this study, the anywhere distorts the local community, yet, still, serves a purpose. As a communal imaginary, the anywhere calls on all Muslims to hold each other accountable to any Muslim in any place (Anderson 2006). The anywhere makes the Muslim plight a plight of all Muslims. What happens in Palestine, Iraq, and Syria, as well as with Rohingya, Bosnian, and Asian Muslims, matters to all Muslims. The Muslim is the most political and social being in the world, thus the anywhere is a site of struggle that seeks to contextualize the Muslim plight, and expose various state-sanctioned agendas that limit Muslim potential in the world (Kumar 2014).

By contextualizing the Muslim plight, the struggle to liberate Muslims from generalizations and reified spaces becomes localized. The battle over frames represents a battle for public consciousness. On the one hand, Muslims must be made aware of persecuted Muslims everywhere, since these events are reflections of institutional power and global initiatives. The more Muslims are framed as deviants, the more violence against Muslims is legitimated (Grosfoguel 2010, 2016). The more prevalent violence becomes against Muslims, the less legitimacy is required. Muslims are vulnerable not only because of de-contextualization, but the public desensitization normalized violence produces. As this study finds, the anywhere is the cause and effect of Muslim reification.
and seduces those struggling for Muslims into a tautological conundrum. That is, the anywhere is the mechanism that produces the decontextualized Muslim for market—a place where images are captured, defined, and consumed (Collins 2000). Thus, the liberation of Muslims in the anywhere is the liberation of Muslims nowhere. This idea warrants further discussion.

When putting assimilation and conflict aside and considering only the idea of humanness, or who counts as human, in American history, the Muslim conundrum in the anywhere becomes evident. On the one hand, Jews, Catholics, and to some degree Asians and Hispanics, have been able to move from reified status to acknowledged human beings. Yet, on the other hand, Blacks and Muslims have always existed on the periphery or, more important, as adversaries (Baldwin 1955, 1961; Fanon 1963; Huntington 1993; Said 1977). In the case of the Muslim adversary, the fall of communism and 9/11 were not antecedents to the current attitudes toward Muslims in the West, and specifically in America. The Muslims have always represented an inherent threat to Christendom and the West (Lewis 1954, 2002). Simply, no other religion has come close to threatening Christianity’s desire for dominion over the world than Islam. In the anywhere, Islam is the alternative global-brand to Christianity. If Christianity is the faith of compassion, salvation, glory, and righteousness, then its binary, is Islam. The Muslim, then, must represent hate, damnation, and wickedness. Those imbued meanings are why the Muslim can never attain freedom in the anywhere. The anywhere is, indeed, everywhere; but this domain is where superstructures—a complex plurality of dominant markets, politics, militaries, cultures, and religions of the world—give modernity/globalization/world systems their purpose and pathways (Mann 1986; Wallerstein 2006). Muslims cannot win
freedom in the domains of markets, power, and distorted ideological justifications. In short, liberation can only be achieved on the ground and through connection with others who reside in proximity, at the margins.

The anywhere is the site structuralists envision as a frontline in the struggle of consciousness. Indeed, the Muslim consumed in the anywhere makes Muslim life in the mainstream hard. Muslims are quarantined, monitored, and surveilled to the extent that their presence is not welcomed in exclusive “American” spaces. With only a sliver of space to be Muslim, to look Muslim, and act Muslim, they remain on the outside, often banned outright from mainstream participation. To mediate the effects of the anywhere, Muslims must not only confront frames and contextualize spaces, but also find access into spaces of authority.

Certainly, Muslims need Muslim-centered institutions as well as ascension into the ranks of power. But the problem associated with this position is the primacy given to the external. The outside is a realm pre-constituted by, and reliant on, Muslim vilification. The War on Terror, the Israeli Occupation, and the perpetual need of the Muslim radical is necessary for a Military-Terror-Prison-Complex governed by White-Male-Christian-centric owners who possess the “master tools” that trap Muslims everywhere (Chomsky 2011; Lorde 1982, p.112; Rana 2016). To enter the socio-political fray of the West, using only the “master’s tools”—laws, methods, rationales, and institutions—will only push Muslims to forfeit an already compromised position.

26 Hardt and Negri’s Empire (Cambridge, MA: 2000) illustrates the seductiveness of superstructures. Structural networks create an illusion of universal values, whereby ideals mask the imperatives of a global order more inclined towards self-maintenance and perpetuation than reconciling inequality. The belief here is that access to these spaces where power is determined and determining is attained through social and political appeals.
Therefore, Muslims must begin, first and foremost, with Muslim empowerment. Movement begins from the inside, and not a relative outside or bottom.

In sum, the anywhere is the site where public consciousness represents a site of struggle. In this space, structural violence produces the practices and performances that legitimize assaults on Muslim life. This site is also where Muslims connect to the global plight and persecutions of Muslims everywhere. The anywhere inspires some Muslims to become visible and seek institutional power. Although a necessity, the anywhere presents a danger to Muslim communities, since struggles against this domain’s narratives supersede the needs of a community. Sacrificed is the inside-out growth essential to not only being Muslim but community empowerment.

Position and commitment are at the heart of Muslim concerns. The breaking community does not signify a condition of despair or victimization but an urgency to act. The task for this community is to take ownership over the spaces that matter. This maneuver entails internalizing Islam and what it means to be Muslim, before seeking outside connections. One way or the other, being Muslim demands community (Table 6 offers a summary of the main findings presented in Chapter 5).

**TABLE 6: Summary of Results**

- Muslims must visibly and relationally disclose Muslimness
- Reclaim corrupted spaces by emphasizing embodied self and community (inside-out potentials).
- Sensitize the public consciousness without sacrificing being Muslim.
- Struggle for spaces in America as Muslim-Americans or Muslims living in America.
- Bring the disconnected, disenchanted, and disenfranchised back into the Muslim community manifold.
The Hijab as Space-Making, Muslim Affirming Embodiment

Inside-out growth has, in some capacity, linked the community constructed themes revealed in this study. With hijab wearing women, this idea was not only reinforced, but disclosed as a deliberate assertion in places ventured into by Muslims. This study discovered an aspect of feminism that runs counter to the idea of erotica as power (Lorde 1982), as well as adds a dimension to feminism not previously recognized (Bunting 2001; Collins 2000; Davis 2016; Haddad 2007). Simply, modesty can be empowering and express unyielding resistance to masculine hegemony.

Hijab wearing women are embodied Muslims who articulate their commitment to Islam, as well as to their relationship with God through modesty (hijab covering). Christian nuns and Orthodox Jews do the same. But unlike nuns and Orthodox Jews who illicit reverence and a sense of duty, the hijab inspires contempt in others. Thus, for the hijabi women, their embodiment is an assertion of empowerment and not the exemplar that wins-over the public or the hearts and minds of the individual27. The hijab, as an inside-out manifestation, produces achievements.

First, the hijab is a resource for women to repossess their body from male objectification. As opposed to feminists who seek to change male consciousness by exposing chauvinistic body-shaming, hijab women cover to reclaim themselves. That is, whether age, body type, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or uninhibited lifestyle, body shaming has always been conceptualized as a form of masculine hegemony (Collins

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27 Naber (2005) talks of Muslim women using the hijab as a symbol to transform gender inequality. Yet, the hijabi women in this study became empowered when the hijab had become a part of their being. The hijab ceased to be a symbol and therefore, the women ceased self-reifying practices. Peek (2011) dedicates a good amount of time to the hijab as a symbol of otherness, thereby locating Muslim women at a proverbial frontline of public thought. This narrative is echoed in Cainkar (New York: 2009) Homeland Insecurity, where the hijabi women discloses the archetypical Un-American.
1998, 2000; Lorde 1982). This power imposes on women ideal types and behaviors that suit a patriarchal society. The hijab should not be included in this typology, yet even among feminists the hijab represents a form of oppression (Haddad 2007). However, the participants revealed that the hijab discloses ownership over the body and, thus, displays strength. To wear the hijab, despite the pervasive hostilities and implicit rejections, is to impose a reality onto the consciousness of others. Hearts and minds are not won; space is. This articulation is forceful and informative.

Second, this honest and open assertion to the public does not seek permission or receptiveness, but demands the right to have the space to exist. Thus, a woman’s body discloses her presence in the world, regardless of attire, but the hijabi Muslim remains a special case. This mode of dress makes mainstream spaces accessible to Muslims, and enables connections between Muslims and others without a deliberate intent; organic connection, growth, and power are inspired. In doing so, women defend the right of access to these spaces for all female embodiments. The exclusion of this aspect from the feminist literature (Al-Hibri 1994; Duval 1998) is an error that this study resolves.

Third, the courage to be Muslim in these spaces and the reality of making these spaces accessible to Muslims renders others invisible. Mainstream society’s attitudes and manners of reception are irrelevant. Embodied hijabi women are their own source of power and, subsequently, become the center of a community, even if a community of only two. The space opened, unburdens potential. Put another way, embodied hijabi women open the space to make a place in society, rather than find their place in it.

These women are an instrumental aspect of the creativity and courage the Muslim community needs. This “courage to be” helps turn-back the animosity of a racist, bigoted
public (Tillich 1980; Tuck and Yang 2014). This public disclosure, even if it goes unnoticed by Muslim women, is noticed by others. In turn, the potential for personal reflection among the public exists, because the women reveal the irrationality of structural violence. What is fascinating about the hijabi wearing women is how anxiety is managed\(^{28}\). Over time, the hijab evolved from a public disclosure emanating from angst and conscious deviance to feelings of emboldened resistance and entitlement. Verbal assaults, slights, and visceral stares do not injure or maim physically, and so, the trauma experienced becomes rationalized by struggle. One must struggle to be Muslim; that is the reality of being a Muslim in America. Anxiety does not necessarily hinder being Muslim in public and, along with courage, helps make the disclosure an affirmation of faith and community (Gladwell 2013).

Embodied hijabi women impose a reality that opens spaces and minds to being Muslim, which make community possible. Also, the public disclosure, as an inside-out manifestation, refocuses commitment. The outside does not determine the existence of or possess the right to quarantine, a visible Muslim. For these women, disclosure affirms connection to their character, community, and empowerment.

The Muslim community would be wise to recognize the courage and significance of the embodied hijabi women. They are not soldiers on the frontlines, because they have exposed the false-consciousness that legitimizes the anywhere, as well as challenged so-called gatekeepers who claim authority over the conceptions of America and American (Baudrillard [1998]2001). These women have rendered boundaries and frontlines invisible.

\(^{28}\) For more on anxiety see Tillich (Yale Press:1980), *The Courage to Be*, pages 34-40.)
The hijabi revelation serves as an awakening for all Muslims. This enlightenment is the key to fixing the Muslim community. Everything creative and real flows from the inside out. What lies on the periphery today will always have the potential to become a center tomorrow, if growth is organic (Murphy 2014). The key is to connect, devote, and ensure the desire for diversity is articulated. The unrelated concerns are trivial matters rendered invisible by communal devotions. What does not benefit the community, and does not foster communal growth/connection/solidarity with others, is on the outside. The beginning point starts with being Muslim.

**Tentative Action Plan**

The steering committee listened to the overarching concerns expressed by Muslims in the community and understood these ideas as a call to action. Thus, a working plan was created to help facilitate solidarity. This conceptualization of a “working” plan indicates that work is required from the community. The impetus for these initiatives is to create the conditions necessary to receive input from the community, so the integrity of an inside-out movement occurs (Kretzman and McKnight 1993).

The voices resonant in this dissertation originate from the community, and thus reflect a collaborative effort to identify meaningful values and commitments of Muslims in Miami (Murphy 2014). The point here is that a top-down mandate is not operative by these five points. Rather, a proposal for action drafted by community members is offered to the community, and is still in need of validation. The steering committee understands that validation is not a mere plea for access to resources, but a call to the community to become the resources required to empower Muslim spaces (Freire 1980).
The five point initiative includes: (1) Rotating monthly forums at different Mosques, (2) Follow-through groups that assess a projects progress, (3) The creation of think-tanks comprised of various expertise, (4) Community outreach programs with non-Muslim fringe communities, and (5) a Welcoming Committee for new arrivals/immigrants. A brief summary of each point is presented.

**Rotating Monthly Forums**

The need for dialogue between communities was a point of concern for the participants. Besides the asymmetrical knowledge discovered between leadership and younger Muslims reared in the West, a main point of concern was that the Mosque needed to be more than a place where lectures and spirituality occurred. Indeed, relationships were forged, friendships built, and needs met, but the concern here deals with social work. In order for the Mosque to become as it ought to be and expand organically, this place must become a site where one can find social services specific to Muslim life. For example, some participants identified the lack of social resources for divorced women, some desired more infrastructure to help young people meet and mingle, and others wanted more health services, such as mental health facilities that help Muslims who experience a traumatic event—such as Islamophobia, racism, sexual assault, domestic violence, etc.—obtain the necessary help. Thus, public forums will help to pool resources, skills, and ideas.

The importance of a rotating forum will help bridge communities and allow for more diverse experiences and interactions (Lune 2010). In addition, the sharing of hosting duties will reinforce a sense of community among members who have little
interaction. The idea is to ensure that a community is experienced across as many dimensions as possible. By rotating hosting sites for these forums, community awareness increases that can provide a previously unknown community support. Whether supporting different Muslim owned businesses that benefit from these forums or recognizing the financial needs of some Mosques, rotating forums open communal potential and galvanize the greater Muslim community (Lune 2010).

**Follow-Through Committees**

These forums are meant to incite dialogue, in order to bring attention or awareness to the issues that matter to community members (Freire 1980). By creating the space for voices to be heard, cooperative resolutions become community initiatives. An action plan is either constructed or a committee is organized to investigate the issue and offer a course of action. The point is that communal problems become communal solutions in these forums. As Kretzman and McKnight (1993, p.5) note, a community possesses unique skills and insights “upon which to build its future.” Once a course of action is agreed on, a follow through committee becomes necessary.

Constituted by volunteers, or by selection, the committee must be comprised of diverse members of the community. The follow-up committee monitors the implementation and progression of agreed on actions. Tasked only with the job to observe and report, this group acts like a quality control unit rather than an oversight committee (Minkler 2005). Again, groups and committees engaged in a project’s success involve cooperatives and collaboration (Briggs 1989). Power within and between these groups is not magically vanquished, but the concept of power must also be re-conceptualized. There is power in these interactions but the power is communal, focused
collectively on increasing community trust, ownership, and success (Minkler 2005). The challenge is for the community, at large, to hold these committees accountable (Reed 2008).

The follow-up committee does not manage the projects at hand nor do they offer input. They do, however, submit their finding to the community in advance of forum meetings, detailing the status of the project and any noted concerns related to the project’s success and feasibility. Once the project is complete, the community, at large, may call on the committee to reconvene for further assessments. In short, the follow-up committee represents the community members by ensuring the initiative’s integrity is preserved.

**Community Think Tanks**

Think tanks perform multiple tasks and are meant to help bring the underappreciated, yet talented, youth into the fold. With a growing number of diverse Muslims, skilled professionals, academics, and knowledge bases derived from various fields/experiences/places, the Muslim community possesses untapped potential. The talent to find creative solutions to complex problems is available to the community. What is most important to these think tanks is the concerted effort to remain open to various forms of input and inclusion (Kaplan 1973). Community members must remain cognizant of potential inequities and conflicts when establishing an indigenous epistemology (Wilson 2008).

In regard to this study, the participants recognized two problems as critical in the community. First, lack of cultural awareness between leaders/elders and Western oriented

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29 See Kretzman and McKnight, *Building Communities From the Inside Out* (ACTA Publications:1993), on pooling community resources and knowledge
Muslims has deprived the youth of self-expression. Second, the community needs “bridges” to other Muslim communities in Miami. Think tanks can help resolve such issues by being tasked to create reports on the Muslim community in Miami. These reports can range from community needs, demographic reports in Mosques, issues of racism/sexism/ethnocentrism that alienate members, as well as identifying strategies for growth and opportunities with other communities (Gilroy 1990).

Some reports or articles may be intended for a non-Muslim audience, or media such as the local newspaper, while others may be exclusive property of the Muslim community. These articles, reports, or studies can be presented at forum meetings. The goal is to establish an epistemological foundation in the community (Murphy 2014). The only viable way this becomes possible is if inclusion and democracy are the cornerstone for fostering participants. Because community members should be stakeholders for the well-being of all Muslims, those relevant to the research project and residents of the environment most affected must be given priority in all phases of the project (Reed et al., 2007) Transparency is the key. The community must decide what is studied and for what purpose. Indeed, such transparency will also lead to greater reflection and critical thinking. Thus, a vibrant community with harnessed energy can rejuvenate the youth and provide them with a meaningful Muslim voice.

**Welcoming Committee**

The welcoming committee helps new arrivals/immigrants get situated. This committee, like all others, is controlled by the community. Volunteers for this committee are community driven. Whatever community serves as the “host” site of new arrivals must arrange the constitution of the welcoming committee. Certainly, some members of
the community might be more adept at handling person(s) in transition. If a Muslim community project is truly inclusive and transparent, individuals with the necessary skills will become willing partners of community initiatives (Reed 2008). Nonetheless, the goal of this committee is twofold. First, this committee ensures that all new arrivals possess the necessary knowledge needed to adapt to Miami life. Whether this knowledge entails information on schools, neighborhoods, or basic community resources, new arrivals will be able to make informed decisions. Second, in order to increase the desire to stay visible, immigrants will also be schooled on civil rights, mosque locations, and be assigned a cultural attaché to help navigate a new lifestyle (Fals-Borda 1980). In the case of mosque locations, new arrivals will have the opportunity to visit multiple mosques to find one that most fits their spiritual, cultural, and communal needs. The main purpose of this committee is to ensure that new arrivals are acknowledged, informed, and feel welcomed by their fellow Muslims. Another goal is to keep these new members visibly Muslim.

**Community Outreach Programs**

Community outreach programs represent a more advanced stage of community concretization\(^{30}\). The goal with these programs is to stay true to the inside-out articulations of a Muslim community. Once a community has proved sustainable and cooperative, outreach programs can help align communities on the periphery, as well as help fulfill the needs of others. For example, with the repeal of Obama Care, a large number of minorities will lose healthcare coverage\(^{31}\). Thus, by establishing a community health care center comprised of Muslim and non-Muslim doctors, and run by staff

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\(^{30}\) See John W. Murphy (2012), “A Community-Based Organization: The Las Mercedes Project,” on how transnational commitments and fund-raising tactics established a community health center in a remote province in Ecuador.

\(^{31}\) According to a New York Times article, an estimated 23 million people will lose health care under the new G.O.P Health Bill (Pear, 2007: “G.O.P. Health Bill Would Leave 23 Million More Uninsured in a Decade, C.B.O. Says”)
representative of the communities joined together, some health needs can be met, or at the very least, provided (Curran and Fleet 2005). The same logic can be extended to after school educational programs and cooperative gardens in food-deserts, as well as co-communal activities that range from barbeques to holiday celebrations. Muslims live in America and, as the participants expressed, they want to be valued for what their contributions to the community. A crucial part of being Muslim is concern for the community, poor, and orphans (Thibos and Gillespie 2011). Outreach programs align Muslim communities with non-Muslims and help mitigate the effects of structural violence on the public conscious.

In sum, the initial five point initiatives are meant to transform the dialogue presented in Chapter 5 into praxis. A reflective community—comprised of a focus group, steering committee, and individual participants—expressed concern, organized their activities, and found working solutions to help mitigate and fix a breaking community. The task now is to ensure that the community truly participates in the final plans related to these five points. The talking must be transformed into action, or else very little has been achieved by this dissertation.

Limitations

As a dissertation, this project was under time constraints, and therefore was limited in scope and breadth of analysis. Without such limitations, a broader analysis that includes, for example, more female participants of color, would have helped increase awareness about the challenges faced by embodied women in the study. Indeed, Hispanic women represent one of the fastest growing populations of Muslim converts in Miami (Wright 2012). A greater representation from this population could have added an
unrecognized dimension of women experiences. Additionally, their absence speaks to the definitional limitation afforded hijabi empowerment. The assumptions made about the embodied women are based solely on the experiences of the women in this study. As diverse as they were in age, race, ethnicity, education, and generational status as Americans, more participation from women of color could have influenced the committee’s analysis.

Another limitation was trust. The imams interviewed in the field (at their Mosques) felt uncomfortable with recordings. Thus, a good deal of data was lost during the conversations at these sites. Although consistent in relating their experiences, a good portion of the information provided by imams dealt more with religious tenets than the actual experience of being Muslim. When probed about the cultural disconnect experienced by youths, for instance, these imams passed judgement on the parents and seemed hesitant to acknowledge the voiced concerns of their respective communities. I wonder if this was a form of denial, and therefore affirms the cultural asymmetry expressed by participants, or a lack of trust (Luhmann 2017). More time in the field could have helped resolve this issue.

Last, Muslims in Miami are among a population where minorities represent the majority, thereby making it easier to blend in and navigate spaces undetected (Kriještorac 2016). Without venturing too far, a comparison between Miami and Tampa or Orlando Muslims could have helped solidify some of the interpretations, or, possibly, opened new dimensions to understanding being Muslim in post-9/11 societies. The same could be said for workplace conditions. Most of the Muslims in this study either worked in liberal, exclusively Muslim, or self-owned spaces. Only a few worked in jobs/professions where
being Muslim is an anomaly. To have more participants whose occupations call for more diverse interactions with the mainstream would have proved beneficial.

In the end, any study of this nature will be limited by the number of participants and the interconnectedness of being Muslim in diverse communities/spaces/areas. Nonetheless, the goal in this project is to let the voices resonate. Despite these limitations, their voices were heard.

**Future Directions of Research**

There are three aspects of this study that will be developed into future research projects—each being a direct extension of the five point initiatives. The first involves the implementation of revolving forums. The documentation and investigation of these forums is fundamentally important to the community. As a continuation of this PAR project, with specific focus on the challenges of organizing the forum as well as attention to the interrelations between diverse Muslim communities, this research will help determine the current feasibility of community solidarity. A particular point of interest involves the reactions among the “power elites.” Will they try to sabotage community concretization or will they become a part of the reconnect?

The second planned project entails the establishment of crucial health resources inside the community. Participants recognized a need for more mental-health facilities/professionals in the community. The irony here is that psychology has been stigmatized by Muslims populations all over the world as sacrilegious (Aloud and Rathur 2009). Thus, how will a cultural taboo fare in a community that identifies mental health solutions as a crucial need? The goal in this project is to facilitate pilot trials, organize workshops conducted by Muslim psychologists, and, quite possibly, establish mental
health offices at Mosques/community centers to provide the community access to mental health professional trained in trauma care (e.g. trauma from divorce, racism, sexual assault, cultural adaptations, etc.).

Last, the community outreach projects are not only the most challenging, but critical to changing public consciousness about Muslims. By building alliance with other marginalized communities, an emerging political force could help draw more awareness to community needs from mainstream spaces. Working with the one of the participants in this study, who self-identified as a Black Muslim, we hope to, someday, help establish a community health center that is jointly operated and represented by members in both communities. A pilot study may be necessary, but a successful health facility run by Pakistani doctors in an impoverished area of Miami has proven effective\textsuperscript{32}. This facility offers free health care and is attended by volunteer staff and doctors. To have more centers, such as this one, would facilitate community empowerment. At the very least, this project could help mitigate some of the health disparities created by mainstream politics\textsuperscript{33}.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Franz Fanon (1963, p. 239) closes The Wretched of the Earth with a profound statement. He writes, “If we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has place it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers.” What resonates in this statement is the “one step forward.” To become

\textsuperscript{32} See Wallerstein and Minkler’s (Wiley & Sons: 2011), \textit{Community Based Participatory Research for Health: From processes to outcomes}, for more on health clinic/related pilot studies.

\textsuperscript{33} See Lefkowitz (Rutgers Press, New Jersey: 2007), \textit{Community health centers: A movement and the people who made it happen}
innovators and pioneers and to become agents of change, only one step forward is required.

During the course of this study, it became evident that the Muslim community was in disarray. Members felt alienated. Their voices were not only being muted in the most sacred Muslim spaces, but in the anywhere. Whether by the media, political opportunists, capitalists, Evangelicals, Zionists, intellectuals, or imams within the community, Muslims were not afforded the spaces to either participate or to “just breathe.” This study set out with three specific goals to help remedy this condition and achieve that one step forward.

These three goals were: (1) To give Muslims the space to speak and the conditions that allow them to self-define their concerns; (2) To create a study by Muslims that would inform/serve/benefit the community by them as the only legitimate source of knowledge about their experiences; (3) and last, to humanize Muslims by hearing their voices. In the end, this project is as much theirs as it is my dissertation. Where we go from here is entirely up to us.
REFERENCES


