

DISSERTATION

CONSTRUCTING THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF BEING ARAB AMERICAN IN  
POST-9/11 AMERICA

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### CONSTRUCTING THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF BEING ARAB AMERICAN IN POST-9/11 AMERICA

The events of September 11, 2001 dramatically changed the lives of Arab Americans. Some lost loved ones in the attacks while others Arab Americans became targets of discrimination and differential treatment because they had names and faces similar to the hijackers or they shared the same religion. Arab Americans defended themselves against accusations of being sympathetic to the hijackers and experienced treatment that indicated Arab citizens were not completely American. Like all Americans, those of Arab descent experienced fear, anger and grief in response to the attacks. Unlike other Americans, Arab Americans experienced fear that blame for the attacks would be place on them and shame that other Arabs committed such atrocities. America came together after the attacks and united as a people. Unfortunately, this unification process seemed to exclude Arab and Muslim Americans. Reports of hate crimes, discrimination and differential treatment climbed sharply and public opinion of Arabs declined steadily.

This study examined the experience of navigating post-9/11 America as an Arab American. Findings confirmed that Arab Americans experience differential treatment on a regular basis and that there are commonalities in how the othering occurs. A collective story of the Arab American experience in post-9/11 America was constructed. The findings affirm existing studies regarding the collective experience and treatment of non-dominant groups who exist in America's margins.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. James Banning, who guided me every step of the way. He nudged me when necessary and most importantly, he never gave up on my project. Dr. Banning's humor and plethora of great stories validated my belief that sharing stories is one of the most valuable tools educators can use.

I am indebted to Dr. Ellyn Dickmann who stayed with me on my dissertation journey even after she departed from the university. Dr. Dickmann spent countless hours reviewing my work and giving me invaluable feedback from a thousand miles away. When I think of people I aspire to be like, Drs. Dickmann and Banning always come to mind.

Most importantly, I want to thank my family. Thanks to my parents who, in the words of Edward Said, invented me and gave me my story and thanks to my wonderful husband, Odis, who took care of everything so I could write and study. I also extend thanks (and a punch in the arm) to my big brother, Joe, who unintentionally started me on this journey years ago when he nicknamed me "Dokter Loozar."

Any acknowledgement of my wonderful support system would be incomplete if I did not mention Dr. Bill Jones (AKA White Kitty). He is currently eighteen years of age and has assisted me on this project for a full third of his life. His contributions included sitting in front of my computer monitor, defacing many books and papers with hairballs and even making some additions to the text when he sat on the keyboard. His devotion to the project was unwavering. If I was sitting at the computer, so was he. Even when the dogs gave up and stole my spot in the bed, Jones stayed with me working into the wee hours.

Finally, I wish to give thanks for all the love, support and encouragement I received from so many people. I could not have done this without them. I hope to one day have the opportunity to pay it forward.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my father, Jadallah. It was through his love and stories that I grew up connected to my Arab heritage. I also dedicate this study to my amazing mother, Bennie, who gave me the other half of my history.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background**

### **Personal Narrative**

In November of 2005, I was teaching at a high school in my hometown. I attended this same high school as a student and I taught there for more than a decade with many teachers who taught in the school when I was a student. One day, upon entering the faculty restroom, I found a picture of me at age seven dressed in Arab garb. Scribbled across the photocopy of the picture that had been published in the University of Wyoming's 1971 yearbook were the words "Pigs of the World," and "Shoot on Sight .

For two years I did not know how this nearly 40-year-old photo, which did not include my family name, surfaced or which one of my colleagues harbored such extreme hatred for Arabs. Despite my contact with local police and my school administration, almost nothing was done to find the perpetrator of this incident. A slip of paper was handed out at a faculty meeting regarding the school district's violence policy (see figure 1) and it was implied to me that one faculty member was eventually interviewed after numerous requests by me to both administration and police, because her picture also appeared in the yearbook. I am not convinced that anyone was ever interviewed.

I contacted the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and they suggested I turn this over to the FBI, but I was discouraged from doing so by my principal. In the end, I made the choice not to pursue the issue out of fear of drawing negative attention to my family and jeopardizing my employment. This is a decision I continue to regret.

**Section 26. VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE.** The District recognizes the need for a school and work environment free from violence for all employees, patrons, and visitors. Violence in the workplace will not be tolerated. The District and the Board of Trustees are committed to maintain an environment free from all forms of violence, including but not limited to, verbal or physical threats, assaults, or other acts of intimidation, or abusive language. Employees shall report all threats or violent actions to their immediate supervisor, except where the threat or act of violence is committed by their immediate supervisor, in which case the occurrence shall be reported to the District's Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources.

Confirmed acts of violence could result in disciplinary and/or legal action.

*Figure 1. Violence in the Workplace.*

This photocopied statement from the employee handbook was handed out during a faculty meeting with no explanation as to why it was being given out. No other action was taken.

The fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks had recently passed and just like the months following the attacks, I would get up at night and look out the window at my parents' home across the street to make sure everything was in order and that there were no suspicious cars nearby. The incident with my picture at school negatively affected my day-to-day life. I worried for the safety of my family and myself. This incident was far from being the first time I had experienced a negative response to my Arab heritage. It was, however, the first time I felt physically threatened or felt that my family may be physically threatened. What had previously been impersonal reports of heightened anti-Arab sentiment in the wake of the 2001 attacks and the Iraq war had become personal and hit home.

I considered the idea that the person who harbored this hatred was teaching the students in my school and living in my community. Two years later, I found out who perpetrated the incident. By then he had retired from the district, although he remains a respected and very public community member. Several coworkers, at different times, shared with me that when this man had been drinking, he would brag about the incident. I never confronted him, and have not



seen him since he retired but the knowledge helped because I no longer had to wonder who would do such a thing. Even more bizarre, was the fact that this man was very friendly to me and I had known him for more than a decade and never felt any dislike from him.

I thought about the Arabs and Muslims who were students in my school or members of my community wondered if they had experienced similar intolerance. It was with this train of thought and the belief that Arab and Muslim Americans throughout the United States were negotiating an unwelcoming landscape in their communities and their schools that the idea of this study emerged.

## **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will present the purpose of my study along with a brief background of American perceptions of Arabs and a discussion of bias-related discrimination directed at Arab and Muslim people living in the United States. The conceptual framework combining Critical Race Theory and Collectivity will be explained and a discussion of the significance of this study for schools and communities will be presented. Within this chapter are contained simplified definitions of terms that may be unfamiliar to many non-Arab or non-Muslim people. This is done so that repeated explanations of words such as “hijab” are not required.

## **Background**

Before the events of September 11, 2001, Arab and Muslim Americans were a relatively obscure minority group. Knowledge about this group’s origins was primarily situated in the context Hollywood archetypes of belly dancers, sheiks, Bedouins, and mad bombers. Arabs and Muslims were also associated with oil and fighting mostly because of news reports regarding the oil crisis in the 1970s and the Palestinian Israeli conflict over the last half century.

Arabs and Muslims living in America, like other immigrant groups, had a group identity based in their history, language, religions, complexions, rules of behavior and traditions. For many, this was a hybrid of ancestral culture and lived American culture. This hybrid identity situated Arab and Muslim Americans away from White Americans.

Like any group who does not rest at the top of America's social power structure, Arab and Muslim Americans were subject to a certain amount of discrimination or "othering," a concept in which certain groups of people are marginalized by dominant groups in a society. For instance, in the United States, White Christian is considered the norm and non-White, non-Christian is considered "other." Jensen (2011) defines "othering" as "discursive processes by which powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups" (p. 65).

During the 1990s, the Persian Gulf War and the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City resulted in a heightened awareness of Arab and Muslim people living in the United States. It was not until the events of September 11, 2001 that the identity of Arabs and Muslims in the U. S. substantially shifted. Overnight, a group that was once viewed as typical Americans with unusual names and different traditions suddenly became suspect and viewed as the enemy living amongst us in America. Dean Obeidallah, an Arab American comedian noted that, "On September 10, 2001, I went to sleep an American. On September 11, I woke up an Arab." (Obeidallah, 2011a).

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of being Arab American in post-9/11 America. A description of the temporal delineation was best summed up by a Palestinian American woman who said "Our life is divided in two: pre-9/11 and post-9/11. Before 9/11, life

was good.” (Malek, 2011, p. 71). This process included looking at how Arab Americans construct and negotiate their post-9/11 identities.

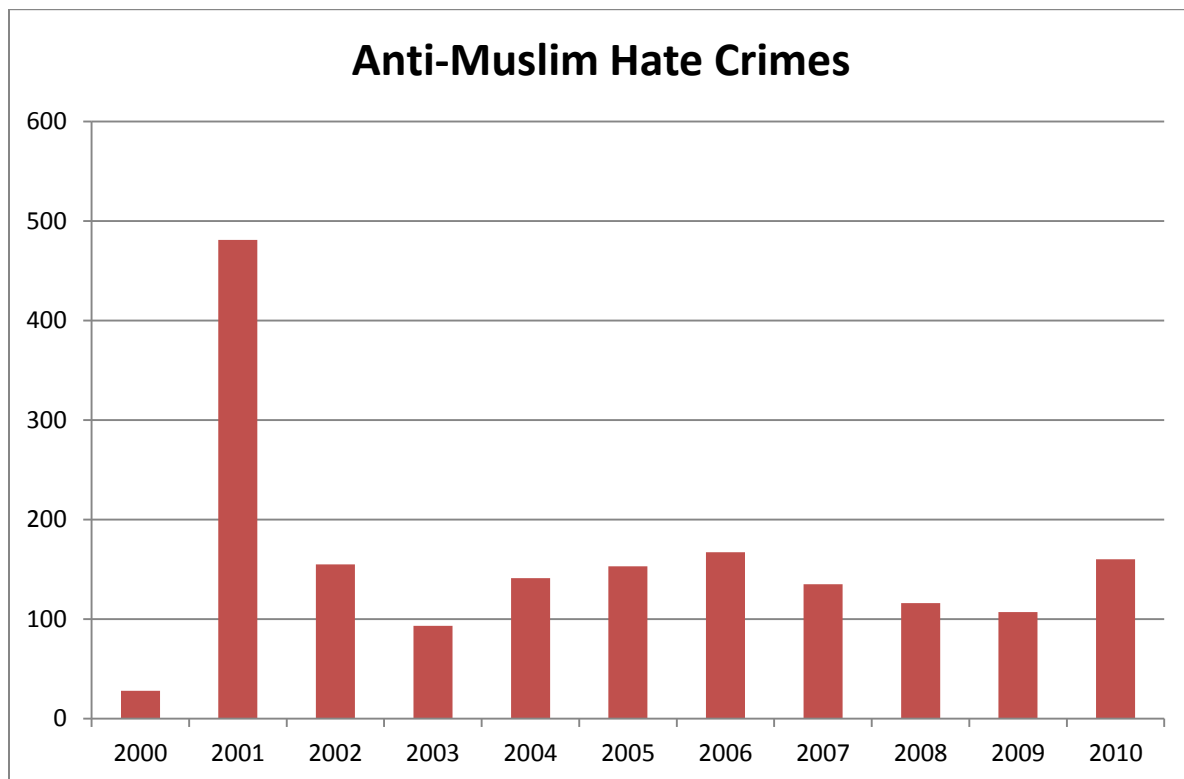
Because the identities of Arabs and Muslims are intertwined and often misunderstood as being one and the same, this study bears in mind that hatred expressed towards Arab and Muslims after September 11, 2001 did not differentiate between targets who were Arab, Muslim, both or mistakenly perceived to be Arab or Muslim. While being subjected to hatred or “othering” are not sole factors in the construction of one’s identity, they are substantial elements that change how we see ourselves and how we negotiate our daily lives.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, reports of discriminatory experiences against Arab people in the United States increased substantially (Ibish & Stewart, 2003, p. 26). The negative sentiment is directed not only at Arabs, but also at Muslims and those incorrectly perceived as Arab or Muslim. It is not likely that the reported instances of hate and discrimination are directed solely at adults. It is quite probable that Arab youth are experiencing discrimination specific to their ethnic and religious backgrounds or those of their parents.

There has been a wide variety of incidents from perceived feelings of “otherness” to murder. Targets have included men, women, adults and youth, Arabs, Muslim and people mistakenly believed to be Middle Eastern. Perpetrators have been children and teachers, violent offenders and politicians. Some perpetrators of this hatred have been neighbors, law enforcement officials, anonymous people, and even non-Arab family members.

It is notable that discrimination incidents increased and violence against people perceived to be Arab or Muslim became increasingly frequent in post-9/11 America, as evidenced by a nearly 1700% increase in the number of hate crimes directed at this group. There were 28 reported hate crimes in 2000 compared to 481 hate crimes during 2001 (see figure 2)

that were directed at Arab and Muslim people in the United States and reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (United States Department of Justice, 2002).



*Figure 2. Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes (Goldberg, 2010; Potok, 2011a, 2011b).*

In 2011, the American Civil Liberties Union, (ACLU), reported:

Recently Muslim communities in the U.S. have faced a disturbing wave of bigotry and outright hostility. From religiously motivated discrimination and attacks on existing and proposed Islamic centers to misguided congressional hearings, Muslims in America are being unfairly targeted simply for exercising their basic constitutional right to religious liberty. (ACLU, 2011)

In “Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope,” bell hooks writes of the hatred directed against Arabs and Muslims after September 11, 2001:

when the tragic events of 9/11 occurred it was as though, in just a few moments in time...much of the American public, reacting to the news coverage of the tragedy,

responded with an outpouring of imperialist white-supremacist nationalist capitalist patriarchal rage against terrorists defined as dark-skinned others even when there were no images, no concrete proof. That rage spilled over into everyday hatred of people of color from all races in this nation, as Muslims from all walks of life found themselves rebuked and scorned—the objects of a random and reckless violence. (2003, p. 9)

It is important to note that not all discriminatory acts were blatant. Many were subtle and hard to prove. Peek (2011) makes reference to some of these more covert forms of nonverbal hostility including what she calls hate stares, intimidation stares, suspicious stares and apprehensive looks. Other forms of discrimination were kept quiet by the U.S. government until reporters found and released the stories.

One such instance of government-perpetuated intimidation happened in 2002 when the Wall Street Journal revealed that then Attorney General John Ashcroft wanted to establish citizen camps for Americans who were deemed enemy combatants. Not since the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, did the U.S. government actively considered interning U.S. citizens. Saito (2001) wrote an article for the Asian Law Journal in which he draws the parallel between how America treated Japanese Americans during World War II with the treatment of Arab Americans today. “Just as Asian Americans have been “raced” as foreign, and from there as presumptively disloyal, Arab Americans and Muslims have been “raced” as “terrorists”: foreign, disloyal, and imminently threatening” (Saito, 2001, p. 11).

### **Purpose of Study**

This study was conducted to explore the collective experience of being an Arab citizen in post-9/11 America. While there is no comprehensive story for any group of people, weaving together individual stories can create a collective story, which Banks, (2009), calls “one window

with multiple panes.” (p. 4). Creating this collective story was done by examining the lived experiences of those who are caught in the currently contradictory space of being an Arab and being an American in a post-September 11<sup>th</sup> America and while the United States is in conflict with numerous Middle Eastern groups. Throughout this study, the reported experiences of Arab and Muslim people in the United States were examined from multiple perspectives or through multiple panes of the window, including the researcher’s own experience and the reported experiences of youth and adults, in schools, work, political and social environments to isolate elements that commonly occur in the reported experiences.

There is a growing body of literature regarding current perceptions of Arabs in the United States and the recent spike in anti-Arab sentiment. Books such as *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Jamal & Naber, 2008), *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America* (Bayoumi, 2008) and *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where it Comes from and What it Means for Politics Today* (Salaita, 2006) document the negative sentiment, which, while heightened to a more vitriolic level after the events of September 11, 2001 is not a new phenomenon. “There can be little doubt that anti-Arab attitudes in America exist” (Samhan, 1987, p. 11). The literature considers the detrimental impact of discrimination on all people and, while not as plentiful as research on adults, there are studies regarding the impact of discrimination against adolescents from minority backgrounds.

The literature was limited with regard to the impact of these negative attitudes on Arabs and Muslims at the time of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, but in the years following the attacks, new studies emerged as reports of discrimination increased significantly. The frequent demonization of Arab Americans has escalated along with discrimination and hate-

crimes since September 11, 2001 but the negative portrayal of Arabs is not a new phenomenon to this “not quite white” community (Akram, 2002).

Demeaning representations of Arabs come from multiple sources. The entertainment industry is guilty of frequently portraying Arab men as terrorists or wealthy oilmen, and portraying Arab women as sex objects in a phenomenon known as the “three B syndrome,” a reference to bombers, belly dancers and billionaires (Qumsiyeh, 1998) . These debasing portrayals of Arabs permeate the entertainment industry with movies, television, books and music when Arabs are frequently portrayed as terrorist or other threatening villains, all contribute to insensitive characterizations of Arabs (see figure 3). Suleiman (2001) notes that these stereotypes and false images present “the main barriers to understanding social and cultural portraits of Arab Americans,” (p. 3).



*Figure 3.* Demeaning, stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims (Be, 2011; Costume Craze, 2012; K., n.d.; Spencer, 2010).

The news media also contributes to the negatives images by giving airtime to vitriolic voices such as Bill O'Reilly, Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, Alan Keys and a plethora of FOX News

contributors such as Steven Crowder who stated, “The truth is that Muslims tend to be more violent than Christians” (Media Matters for America, 2011).

Politicians and other government officials propagated hysteria and fear of Middle Eastern people through public comments such as U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft publicly saying, “Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for him. Christianity is a faith in which God sends his son to die for you.”(Eggen, 2002). Unfortunately, Ashcroft was only one of many politicians to make disparaging remarks about Muslims and Arabs.

Public policy has also been used as a means to demonize Middle Eastern people. This was evidenced by the creation of the now defunct National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS). The NSEERS program, which the Department of Homeland Security implemented, required that people from 25 predominantly Muslim countries to register with the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Service (USCIS), formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). NSEERS remained active until April 27, 2011.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the United States witnessed a marked increase in hate crimes against people who were perceived to be Arab or Muslim (Human Rights Watch, 2002). During the first nine weeks following the attacks, more than 700 incidents of violent backlash, including several murders, were reported against people perceived to be Arabs or Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

It is important that Americans are aware of stereotypes of Arabs, as ignorance and the dehumanization of specific groups of people have led to historical tragedies. Some of these events include the internment of the Japanese, the slaughter of millions of gays, transsexuals, Poles, Jews, and disabled people in the holocaust, the denial of civil rights of African Americans



and the slaughter and internment of the Native Americans. Simply, “This is what happens when a people are dehumanized” (Shaheen, 2001, p. 4).

This study examined my own experience of being an Arab American in post-9/11 America and considered collected data on experiences that range from subtle, perceived experiences to more overt forms of discrimination such as verbal assaults, physical threats, physical violence, and even murder of people in the United States who are Arab and or Muslim youth and adults. The study considered physical locations such as school, places of employment, and other community locations such as local businesses, public events and public spaces. Temporally, the study focused on the period from September 11, 2001 until the present but will also include times outside the focus range to provide a means of comparison for the collective experience of Arab and Muslims before the events of September 11, 2001.

### **Discrimination**

Long before the attacks of September 11, 2001, Middle Eastern adults were targets of discrimination in the United States. Various forms of discrimination were encountered in a variety of venues. There are documented reports of discrimination with regard to employment, housing and more overt forms of discrimination in the form of exclusion, xenophobic rhetoric, negative portrayals in the media and stereotypes.

In 1980, Senator James Abourezk, founded the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), to protect the civil rights of people of Arab descent. Notably, the ADC was created in response to the ABSCAM scandal of the late 1970s, where FBI agents dressed up as wealthy, Arab sheiks and offered bribes to lawmakers. Arab Americans were understandably offended by the stereotype perpetuated by this government-sanctioned operation. Currently the ADC has approximately 35 chapters in 24 states and has thousands members from all 50 states

which, in itself, evidences a need to protect the civil rights of a largely singled out group of Americans. The ADC's stated objectives are:

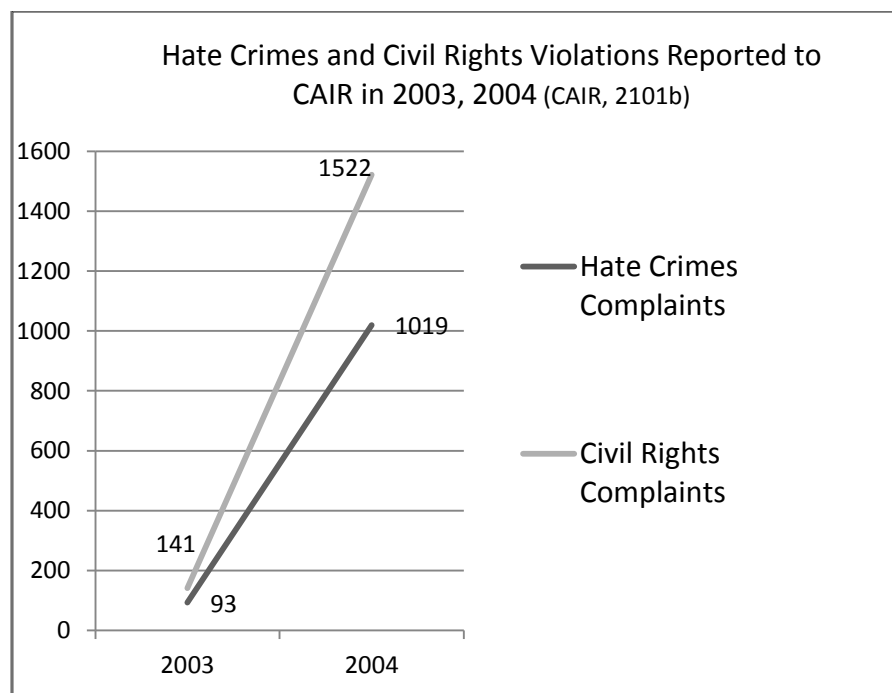
- 1) defend and promote human rights, civil rights, and liberties of Arab-Americans and other persons of Arab heritage;
- 2) combat stereotypes and discrimination against and affecting the Arab-American community in the United States;
- 3) serve as a public voice for the Arab-American community in the United States on domestic and foreign policy issues;
- 4) educate the American public in order to promote greater understanding of Arab history and culture, and;
- 5) organize and mobilize the Arab-American community in furtherance of the organization's objectives" (ADC, 2006).

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the need for a group such as ADC to protect people of Arab descent became essential. The group became a voice for Arab Americans and a clearinghouse for people to report incidents, get advice on how to proceed with legal issues and most importantly, a space, sometimes physical and sometimes virtual, in which we Arabs could congregate with other Arabs, as many of us shared the experience of living in a country in which we were no longer wanted.

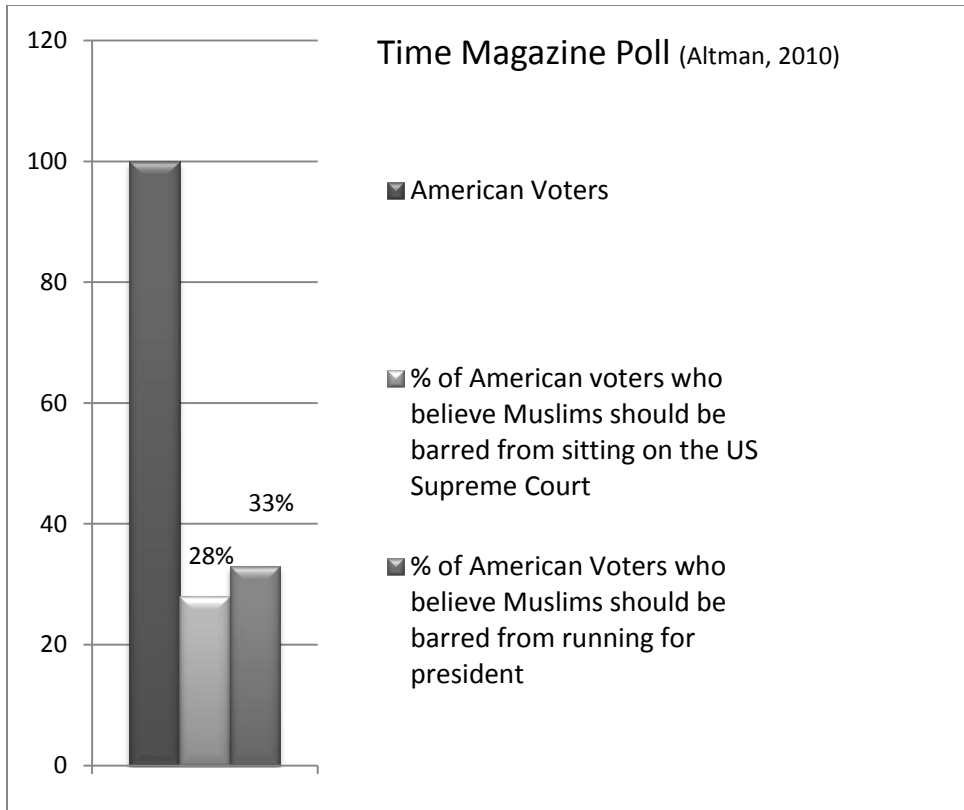
Other organizations including the Council for American Islamic Relations (CAIR) serve as protectors of civil rights for Muslim people. CAIR was established in 1994 with the purpose of challenging stereotypes of Islam and Muslims as well as to provide "an Islamic perspective on issues of importance to the American public" (CAIR, 2011). CAIR also serves as a database for

statistical and narrative information gathered regarding the social condition of Muslim Americans.

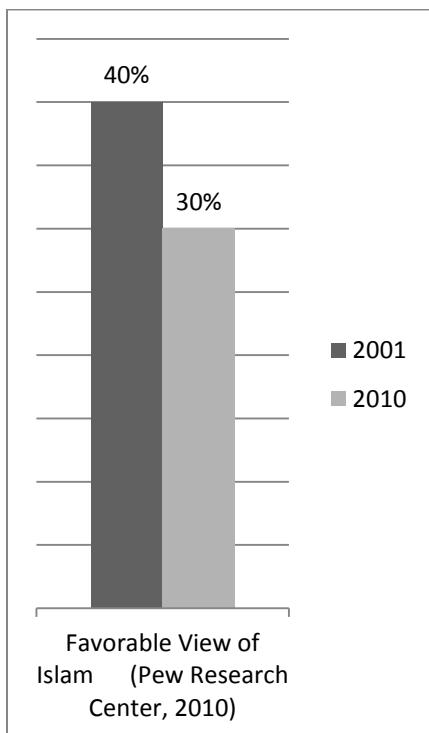
CAIR has noted that between 2003 and 2004 the civil rights complaints they received increased by 49% and the reports of hate crimes reported to them increased by 52% during the same period (CAIR, 2005). In CAIR's 2010 report on Islamophobia, they noted a 25% decrease in favorable ratings of Islam from November 2001 to August 2010 according to the Pew Research Center (see figures 4 and 6). This is notable because Islam was viewed more favorably in the months after the events of 9/11 than it is today. The same CAIR report included a Time magazine poll (see figure 5) conducted in August of 2010 found that "28% of voters do not believe Muslims should be eligible to sit on the U. S. Supreme Court" and "nearly one-third of the country thinks adherents of Islam should be barred from running for President..." (Altman, 2010; CAIR, 2010b; Pew Research Center, 2010).



*Figure 4.*



*Figure 5.*



*Figure 6.*

Discrimination manifests itself in a variety of ways. Discrimination may be violent or nonviolent, verbal or nonverbal. It may be covert, anonymous discrimination or the acts may be overt and conspicuous. It may cross legal boundaries or simply manifest itself as rude behavior. Discrimination happens virtually everywhere: in places of employment and places of worship. Discrimination occurs in the airports, on the street and in the schools, in restaurants and stores. It happens at public events and within the legal system. Strangers, employers, and family members commit discrimination. Teachers, law enforcement officials, church leaders and other trusted adults, commit it. Those with public voices perpetrate discrimination as do children and teens.

Because of this great variation of people who are targets of discrimination and variety of people who perpetrate discrimination, places, situations and methods of discrimination, incidents cannot be neatly sorted into categories. For instance, if a teacher fails to take appropriate action when a girl at school is called names and has her hijab pulled off, the incident could be categorized as religious discrimination, gender discrimination, physical contact, verbal harassment, and discrimination in schools.

Mindful of the notion of blurred boundaries in describing types of discrimination, I chose a few broad categories in which to organize these events. This is not to say that these are the only categories, or that an event may not be better placed into a different category or into several different categories. The first category is the community, which will encompass but not be limited to housing, public accommodations, government offices and public spaces. The other categories I have chosen to sort incidences of discrimination into are employment, airports, schools, religion, public speech and law enforcement and the legal system.

Within the defined categories of discrimination that I chose to use, there are several types of discrimination. Types of discrimination range from the subtle to the blatant act that cause

people from a group to become marginalized from the mainstream of the society in which they live. From bias related discrimination to harassment and threats, from hate speech to physical assault and murder, discrimination is part of the social and political landscape that Arab Americans are currently negotiating in their daily lives. While the particular discriminatory acts were separated into broad realms of where discrimination takes place, and further separated within these realms by the type of discrimination, it is also important to understand that bias related discrimination is the overarching category of discrimination against Arabs and Muslim Americans.

### ***Bias-Related Discrimination***

Often, one of the most dangerous forms of bias related discrimination is inflammatory speech. Whether it is being referred to as a “sand nigger” or “towel head” by someone on the city bus or by someone in a store, it is still damaging to the target. In 2004, Moradi and Hasan studied Arab Americans and the relationship between discrimination and mental health. Not surprisingly, they confirmed the link between discrimination and psychological distress (Moradi & Hasan, 2004b).

Religious discrimination can be a form of bias related discrimination. Examples of religious discrimination include being treated differently for wearing particular religious garb, not being allowed to wear religiously mandated head coverings at work or in public spaces, or being denied permission to build or open a mosque in a particular area. Notably, religious discrimination reports made by Arabs and Muslims have increased since 2001, as have reports of discrimination from government sources, law enforcement, and discrimination in public spaces (Markon, 2011; Morgan, 2011).

Bias related discrimination can be verbal harassment such as xenophobic rhetoric, ethnic slurs, taunting or verbal threats. Bias related discrimination occurs when the manager of an apartment complex claims that there are no apartments for rent because she does not want to rent to the person. Bias related discrimination also occurs when disparaging epithets are yelled from a car or hissed in a mall or printed on a bumper sticker on a car.

Nonverbal harassment may take the form of implied threats or gestures. Intimidating stares that imply threat and using body language to express hatred are forms of nonverbal harassment. Physical contact such as spitting, pulling off head coverings, throwing items, rape, murder and other forms of violence can all be manifestations of bias related discrimination though each of these acts could also be categorized under the heading of violence.

In examining the vast array of ways in which discriminatory acts happen, one must consider the interconnectivity of the acts. For example, incidences of bias related violence are frequently preceded by a non-violent act of discrimination such as hate speech. Human Rights First, a non-profit human rights group, noted in their 2011 report, *Violence Against Muslims Update* that “Intolerant public discourse that goes unchallenged fosters indifference to abuses committed against members of minority groups and promotes impunity for perpetrators of violent hate crimes against them” (Human Rights First, 2011, p. 3).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Imagine two high school students, one of white, European descent and the other an Arab. Both believe the United States is at least partially liable for the events of September 11, 2001, due to years of an American foreign policy regarding Arab and Muslim countries that is biased and unbalanced. It is likely that the white, European student will be regarded as extremely liberal, while the Arab student may be regarded as radical and as a potential threat. How is it that

two people with the same views can be regarded so differently? The answer to this question lies within social dominance theory and critical race theory (CRT). The concept of collectivity is then used to construct a story of shared experience.

### ***Social Dominance Theory***

Social dominance theory refers to a concept where a set of assumptions in which social hierarchies privilege hegemonic groups and put subordinate groups at a disadvantage, are formed within societies. Howard (2006) summarizes the basic assumptions of social dominance theory defined by Sidanius and Pratto (*Prejudice, politics, and the American dilemma*, 1993) as being:

1. Human social systems are predisposed to form social hierarchies, with hegemonic groups at the top and negative reference groups at the bottom.
2. Hegemonic groups tend to be disproportionately male, a phenomenon that social dominance theorist call the “iron law of andrancy.”
3. Most form of social oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, can be viewed as manifestations of group-based social hierarchy.
4. Social hierarchy is a survival strategy that has been selected by many species of primates, including Homo sapiens (p. 35).

Social dominance theory is particularly relevant in this study in that the hegemonic group in this study tends to be White and Christian, while the penalized group tends to have darker complexions and have names, clothing, and rituals that connect them with non-Christian religions. Frequently, privilege is often not earned through merit by the dominant group but rather acquired by arbitrary traits such as race and gender. The same concept applies to this study which contends that Arab and Muslim Americans are commonly penalized based on the notion that they are neither White nor Christian (Howard, 2006).



## ***Critical Race Theory***

Critical race theorists have long contended that Americans do not live in a meritocracy where people advance and are compensated for their achievements, but rather make advancements proportional to their “whiteness” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Because “whiteness” comes with automatic privileges, the white student in the above example is perceived as non-threatening and dismissed as being politically left. Delgado and Stefania (2001) define White Privilege as “the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race” (p. 78). Whiteness takes on the facet of being a property; something that one owns and can use to garner advantage. Delgado (2001), posits that White is normative and sets the standard. “Other groups, such as Indians, Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans are described as nonwhite. That is they are defined in terms of or in opposition to their whiteness—that which they are not” (p. 76). It can be argued that in America, being Christian is the standard and although religion is not race related, the theory can be applied because people are defined in terms of whether they are Christian. Edward Said alluded to this notion in his work on “Orientalism” in which the West defines itself “as a superior civilization by constructing itself in opposition to an ‘exotic’ but inferior ‘Orient’” (Said, 1978).

It is within the intersection of critical race theory, social dominance theory, and cultural studies that this dissertation emerges. Using counterstories, a term that Lindemann Nelson defines as “a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing it, and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions” (p. 23), a collective story can begin to develop. Counterstories from the researcher and from the collected external data about the lived experiences of Arabs and Muslim in America support, with testimony, the basic tenet of CRT, that “racism is embedded in the

cultural fabric of American society and therefore present in everyday practices and social interactions”(Pulido, 2008, p. 72). While Arabs are White in legal classifications, they are not necessarily considered White in American society. In examining the data, it becomes evident that being “non-White” or “non-Christian” puts Arabs and Muslims at a significant disadvantage and relegates them to the margins of mainstream society.

Using CRT as the primary lens through which to view this study compels readers to consider how race is constructed in American society and which privileges are denied or afforded a person because of their race. A major goal of CRT is to “present stories about discrimination from the perspective of people of color” (Creswell, 2007, p. 28). Such narratives provide necessary evidence to forward the eradication of racial subjugation (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

### *Collectivity*

Another lens through which that data was viewed was that of people sharing a collective experience. The notion that people who have never interacted can share a collective experience was the topic of a book about the collective guilt borne by grandchildren of Nazi war criminals. One German therapist who specializes in helping the family members of Nazis come to terms with the heinous acts committed by their relative, says that she has noticed a higher instance of depression and addiction in these descendants. While these people had nothing to do with the actions of Hitler’s regime, they continue to bear the emotional weight of these crimes (Grieshaber, 2011).

Because Arab and Muslim Americans have reported a vast number of similar experiences, the concept of creating a collective story that described this unique experience became a significant element of the study’s framework. The notion of collectivity, in voice,

memory and experience are discussed in more depth by Garagozov (2008), in his article, *Historical Choice and the Characteristics of Collective Experience*. For the purposes of this study, collectivity was used to capture the notion that Arab and Muslim Americans share a collective story even though each story has individual variations.

## **Significance of Study**

### ***Significance in the community***

Reports of discriminatory incidents since September 11, 2001 provide the basis for the relevance of this study. Patterns of discrimination and hate crimes against Arabs, Muslims and those who appear to be either Arab or Muslim are predictable. “U. S. history, as described in this report, has clearly shown that backlash violence usually followed acts of terrorism attributed to Arabs or Muslims” (Human Rights Watch, 2002, p. 4).

Recently, communities in several states fought to keep mosques from being built in their towns or neighborhoods, an indication that the vitriolic climate in which Middle Eastern people are feared, blame and hated is worsening. Although the First Amendment does not allow the passage of any law respecting an establishment of religion, at least a dozen states have introduced bills to ban Sharia Law, a system based on the moral code of Islam, as if the non-Muslim citizens were in actual danger of being governed by Sharia Law. Noah Feldman, a Harvard law professor says “It’s like a law that says we absolutely ban alligators on the South Pole” (Huus, 2012). In February 2001, Mother Jones published the following map, (see figure 7) another indicator of the worsening climate for Arabs, Muslims and other Middle Eastern people in the United States.

# Has Your State Banned Sharia?

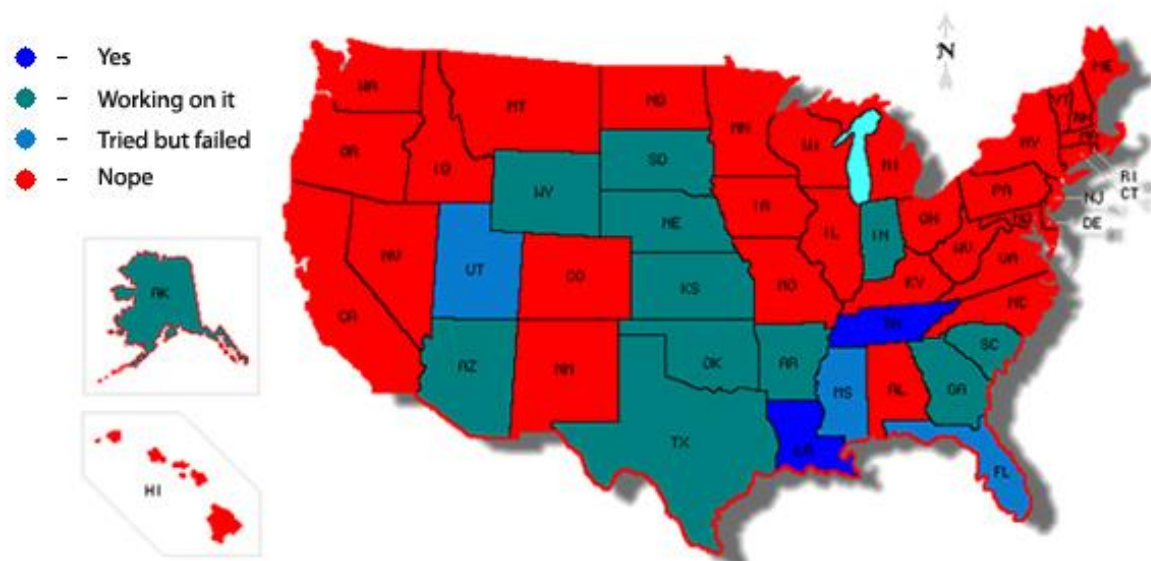


Figure 7. Map of states that have introduced legislation to ban Sharia law (Murphy, 2011).

The significance of this study lies in adding to the creation of a respectful understanding of the pluralistic nature of American society. The study also provides firsthand descriptions of experiences that can provide policy makers with necessary information when creating policies that govern our communities.

## ***Significance in schools***

It is important to explore discrimination against and marginalization of Arab students in the United States so that prejudicial trends can be reversed and Arab students can be provided an equitable and culturally responsive education. More than one million students in U.S. schools may be of Arab ancestry and in the midst of current political conflict with Arab interests; U.S. schools must provide safety and security to all their students, including those who are Arab. Middle East conflicts and future acts of terrorism against the United States will likely generate new waves of backlash violence against Arabs and Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2002). An awareness of this phenomenon is essential to ensure the safety and security of Arab students.

Teachers must be sensitive to Arab students, just as they are expected to be sensitive to African American, Latino, Asian, and other groups of students. “The teacher’s responsibility, therefore, is to explore existing cultural generalities and move students to a richer understanding of all human contributions to contemporary life” (Al-Hazza, 2005, p. 17).

The onus for cultural awareness in the schools is not solely on teachers. Policy makers have an obligation to remove or exclude racial/ethnic and religious bias from the rules they create. Leaders must also maintain the same level of awareness about all minority groups and be willing to affirm different ideals about being American.

Some schools do not allow the display of flags unless the flag is American which prevents students from even wearing simple flag t-shirts which affirm their ethnic heritage. While this policy is sometimes the result of local laws, this policy effectively silences ethnic minority students from proudly identifying themselves as having roots in another country. Other schools do not allow any head coverings, a policy which prevents Muslim girls from wearing the required hijab. “No student should be forced to choose between following her faith and enjoying the benefits of a public education” (Frieden, 2004). Silencing displays of ethnic or religious pride are not the only ways schools neglect to create a welcoming environment for Arab students.

Many schools bring in military recruiters to speak in assemblies and tell about their deadly victories such as bombing runs over Baghdad, with no consideration for the fact that Arab students may have relatives in the war zone and that they are in fact, bragging about the killing of Arabs (Wingfield, 2006). Schools must be sensitive to the experiences and lives of Arab students. It is with this notion that one goal of this study emerges. Insights into the nature and extent of Arab students’ experiences that were perceived as anti-Arab need to be provided to

educators, students, parents, researchers, policy makers and society so that this group of student may enjoy the full benefits of their academic landscape.

## **Definitions**

*AAI*-Arab American Institute- Established in 1985 and based in Washington, DC, the Arab American Institute (AAI) is a non-profit, nonpartisan national leadership organization. AAI was created to nurture and encourage the direct participation of Arab Americans in political and civic life in the United States (<http://www.aaiusa.org/pages/about-institute/>).

*ADC*-American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) is a civil rights organization committed to defending the rights of people of Arab descent and promoting their rich cultural heritage. ADC was founded by former U.S. Senator James Abourezk in 1980. Today, ADC is the largest Arab American grassroots organization in the U.S. (<http://www.adc.org/about-us/>).

*Allah*-The most commonly used linguistic term for ‘God’ in Arabic. Allah is the same monotheistic God worshipped by Christians and Jews (CAIR, 2005, p. 4).

*Arab*-Person with roots in any of the 22 countries of the Arab world, including Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

*Burqa*- A loose body covering worn by some Muslim women to cover their bodies while out in public (see figure 8)



*Figure 8. Women wearing burqas (Craw, 2010).*

*CAIR*-Council on American Islamic Relations- CAIR's mission is to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding (CAIR, 2012).

*Hijab*-Traditional religious head covering worn by some Muslim women (see figure 9).



*Figure 9. Woman wearing a hijab (Deggans, 2011).*

*Islam*-A monotheistic religion in which Muhammad is the prophet of Allah (the Arabic word for God) and is followed by Muslims

*Keffiyeh*- Head cloth worn by men throughout the Middle East (see figure 10)



*Figure 10. Keffiyeh (Hat Horizons, 2012; Rucksackshop, 2012).*

*Muslim*- One who follows the religion of Islam. The Pew research center projects that the Muslim population will increase from 1.6 billion currently to 2.2 billion Muslims worldwide by 2030 (Pew Research Center, 2011).

*Qur'an*- the religious text of Islam

*Sharia*- Moral code of Islam

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the basis for this study including the purpose of the study, which is to examine the experience of being Arab or Muslim American in post-9/11 America. This collective experience includes discriminatory acts that varied from rude to criminal. Critical race theory, social dominance theory and the notion of collectivity were used as the conceptual framework in which this study was situated. This particular framework provided a lens through which to view the stories and thus explain the significance of this work. Chapter 2 will examine literature that pertained to this study. It will create a picture of Arabs in America from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until present and explain why the Arab experience in America is also frequently the Muslim experience in America.



## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### Personal Narrative

I'm sitting on a plane from Denver to Washington, DC. I'm in first class and it is the mid-2000s-maybe 2004 or 2005. I'm on my way to a national conference for Arab Americans and I'm wearing the traditional kiffiyeh, the red and white print scarf worn over the head by Arab men, only I am wearing it around my shoulders fastened with a brooch on the front of my right shoulder. The man in the seat next to me, trying to make conversation, says, "Wow-you're pretty brave wearing something like that."

I'm not brave.

I'm proud of being Arab and I want the world to know it even if it means committing the faux pas of admitting I'm Arab while on an airplane. On this particular day, I am finished with defending who I am.

I am sick beyond words of apologizing, or of having apologies made in the name of Arab Americans. Today I am daring people to mess with me. Of course, none do. I sit in my seat and receive the extra doting from the flight attendants afforded to first class passengers. They don't know that I most often fly coach. Sipping my complimentary champagne I am spoken to again by the man next to me. "Are you going to DC for business?"

"To a conference," I say, "for Arab Americans."

"Ohhh," he says, "*that* explains the scarf."

No, that doesn't explain the scarf.

What explains the scarf is that after the rest of mainstream America demonized all Arabs and now my own aunt has rejected me. Actually, she is my great aunt who helped her own parents raise my mother in a small coal-mining town in Virginia. She was my favorite relative

growing up and as close to a doting grandparent as I can remember. All my memories of her and the farm were magical. As an adolescent, I even wanted to run away and go live with her on that farm.

As a devout Southern Baptist, my aunt has decided to cut all ties with my “Muslim” family. Never mind that we are not, nor have we ever been Muslim. She tells my mother not to call her anymore because my father and “his kind” are heathens and infidels. Therefore, my mother, brother, and I must be heathen, infidels by association. My aunt has known my father for nearly half a century but cannot wrap her narrow little mind around the fact that just because he is Arab does not mean he is Muslim. And, so what if we were Muslim? Did she always see me as lesser because I wasn’t all white or because we didn’t choose to practice her religion (or any other for that matter)? This is a huge sucker punch I didn’t see coming.

We were just there, a few months earlier, in the fall visiting her on the farm. My mother did comment on the offensiveness of the Israeli flags that her Christian Zionist Southern Baptist church asked its congregation to display. My mother has never been one to drink my Aunt’s brand of Christian Kool-Aid.

I call my Aunt-surely this is all a misunderstanding. I even hope that maybe she’s just getting senile but she’s not. She tells me that getting into Heaven is a close shave even for the best of us and that associating with infidels is not permitted for Christians. I think I will be smart and I ask her “what would Jesus do?” Not hang out with heathens, apparently, because she does not see her actions as being contrary to the teachings of her Christ. Obviously, I’m not an expert on the rules of Christianity but even I know some of the parables from the bible in which Jesus associates with undesirables. I explain again that my dad is not Muslim and she explains once

again that it's the same difference and just like that, I am no longer a member of that side of my family.

So, today, as I fly to the conference for Arab Americans, I will not be subtle about who I am. I will not explain or apologize for being Arab. Today I will wrap myself in my Arabness and go to where there are others like me. For a few sweet days, I will sooth myself with the balm of being with a group of people who are like me, even if they don't know me. Maybe by the time I fly home, the hurt will have healed enough that I will no longer need to bandage it in my Arab scarf.

## **Introduction**

Keeping in mind that the purpose of this study is to understand the experience of being Arab and/or Muslim American after the 9/11 attacks, it is first necessary to have an understanding of basic Arab identity. This chapter will introduce Arabs as a people, their history of immigration to the United States and their struggles with discrimination and forging an American identity at the beginning of the twentieth century. The chapter will also examine the different areas in which discrimination and negative treatment currently takes place against Arabs, Muslims and those mistakenly perceived to be Middle Eastern. Finally the chapter will conclude with a discussion on how discrimination affects the people it targets.

## **Who are the Arabs?**

Because most Arabs are Muslim, the story of Arabs in America is frequently the story of Muslims in America. A brief discussion about who Arabs are is included to provide background knowledge and to clarify the different religions that comprise the majority of the Arab world. Based on the following discussion the reader will be given the necessary information to understand that:

- Arabs originate in twenty-two countries.
- While most Arabs are Muslim, many are not.
- Arabs are a biologically diverse group and as a result have many different skin, hair, and eye colors.

While this study focused on Arab and Muslim Americans, it is notable that many of the targets of discrimination were neither Arab nor Muslim. Some were Sikh or Hindu, Pakistani or Indian and some belonged to other groups, but were incorrectly assumed to be Arab or Muslim.

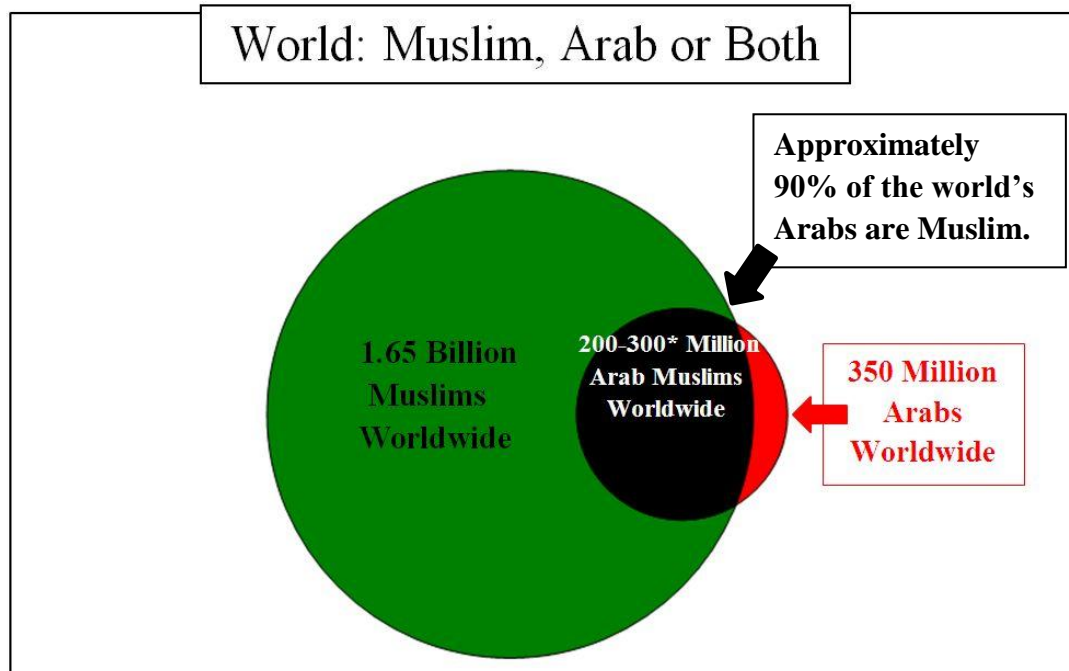
Arabs come from three main regions: the Mediterranean, the Arabian Gulf, and North Africa. While Arabs come from different racial groups, they share the same ethnicity, which is to say that while they may have biological differences, they tend to have a shared their sense of identity and cultural elements (Haboush, 2007). The Mediterranean Arabs come from Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and historic Palestine. Gulf Arabs come from Yemen, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Djibouti, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The Arabs of North Africa include those from Algeria, Egypt, Somalia, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Comoros, and Mauritania. The geographical expanse of the Arab world (see figure 11) explains why there are several races from which Arabs originate and no one phenotype applies to all Arabs (Ayish, 2003). This means they may have different skin color, eye color, hair color and a variety of physical traits.

## Map of the Arab World



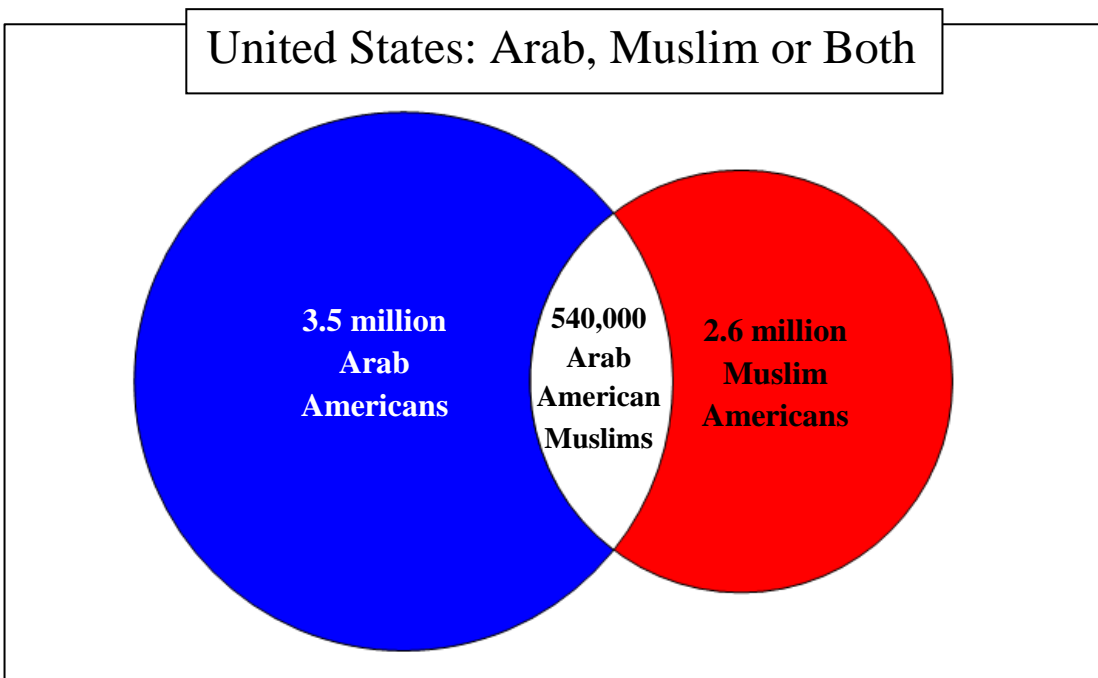
Figure 11. Map of the Arab World (US Arab Chamber of Commerce, 2011).

An estimated 90% of Arabs are followers of Islam (see figures 12 and 13). Most of the remaining 10% are Christians although there are small numbers of Arabs who observe religions other than Islam or Christianity (Pacini, 1998). The largest Christian populations in the Arab world are in Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and Jordan. Notably, while most Arabs are Muslims, most Muslims are not Arabs. Arabs comprise approximately 12% of Muslims worldwide (Al-Hazza, 2005). The inverse is true in the United States where only one in four Arabs are Muslim (see figures 12 and 13).



*Figure 12.* Diagram illustrating Arabs and Muslims worldwide.

\*Estimates vary regarding what percent of Muslims are of Arab descent.



*Figure 13.* Diagram representing Arabs and Muslims in the United States.

## History of Arab Immigration to the United States

Immigrants from Arabic-speaking countries and their descendants comprise a complex cultural group known as Arab Americans. Arab immigrants came to the United States in multiple waves. According to Suleiman (1999), there were two major waves. The first wave took place beginning in the 1870s and continued until the onset of World War II (see figure 14).



*Figure 14.* Arab immigrants to the U.S. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Assily, 2009).

The second immigration wave occurred during World War II and continues today. Other researchers characterize the immigration as happening in several waves (Ajrouch, 2000; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001). Because of faulty records it is difficult to separate the waves into distinct periods. Arabs were sometimes counted as Ottoman subjects, or they were not counted as Arabs because they entered the United States through Canada and Mexico. Many Arabs did not disclose their ethnicity to immigration officials for fear of repercussion and Palestinians often arrived with Israeli passports and thus were not counted as being Arabic (Ajrouch, 1997).

Notable characteristics define the immigrations. The earliest wave consisted of primarily Christian Arabs who came from the Greater Syria region. This area included historic Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. The immigrants from Greater Syria were primarily seeking economic gain and social status. There is evidence that the Homestead Act of 1862 drew the first Arab persons of record to America in 1862 and then, in 1876 Arabs coming to Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition remained in the United States (Al-Hazza, 2005). This particular group was uneducated, illiterate, and poor and thus, found work in factories and mines. Many Arabs from the earlier waves created tight-knit colonies primarily in Boston and New York as well as other northeastern United States cities including Detroit, Chicago and Cleveland (Cainkar, 2000; Suleiman, 1999).

The second major wave of Arab immigration to the United States followed World War II and consisted of many Palestinians (see figure 15) displaced by Israel's creation (Haboush, 2007). Others came from all over the Arab world. The second wave of immigrants, while also seeking personal advancement and wealth, sought to escape oppressive governments and war-torn countries (Suleiman, 1999). This wave was much smaller than the previous or subsequent immigration waves due to the 1924 Immigration Act, which allowed the minimum quota of 100 immigrants from Arab countries per year. Asians were the only ones given less immigration privilege, as they were totally banned from immigrating to the United States (Cainkar, 2000).





**Figure 15.** Palestinian diaspora. In the wake of Israel's creation, **804,767 Palestinian men, women, and children were forced to flee their homes. This photograph shows a train of Palestinians who were soon to become lifelong refugees (Qumsiyeh, 2004).**

Beginning in the 1960s, and including a large influx during the 1975 Lebanese Civil War, a third wave of Arab immigrants came to the United States. These Arabs were highly educated professionals. They were primarily Christian or Sunni Muslim, although many Shi'a, or Shiite Muslims joined the influx (Haboush, 2007).

The most recent influx of Arabs to the United States began with the Gulf War in 1990 and has continued through the current Iraq War. This group tends to be less educated, have less money and is more inclined to struggle with cultural assimilation than did previous Arab immigrants (Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001). The immigrants from this wave are predominantly Muslim and tend to have greater difficulty assimilating than their Christian counterparts because

they are non-Christians in a predominantly Christian country. (Jackson & Nassar-McMillan, 2005).

### Who Are Arab Americans?

The Arab American Institute (AAIF), the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), and Zogby International agree that there are approximately 3.5 million Arabs living in the United States (Altaf, nd). American Arabs come from all of the nearly two-dozen Arab countries, but the majority is Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Egyptian, and Iraqi (see figure 16). Approximately 82% of the Arabs living in the United States are citizens and the majority of U.S. Arabs are native born (Samhan, 2001). Over half of all Arabs in the United States live within six major metropolitan areas: Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Washington, DC and northeastern New Jersey. Arabs are found in all states but two-thirds of U.S. Arabs live in ten states and one-third live in Detroit and Los Angeles (AAISUA, 2006).

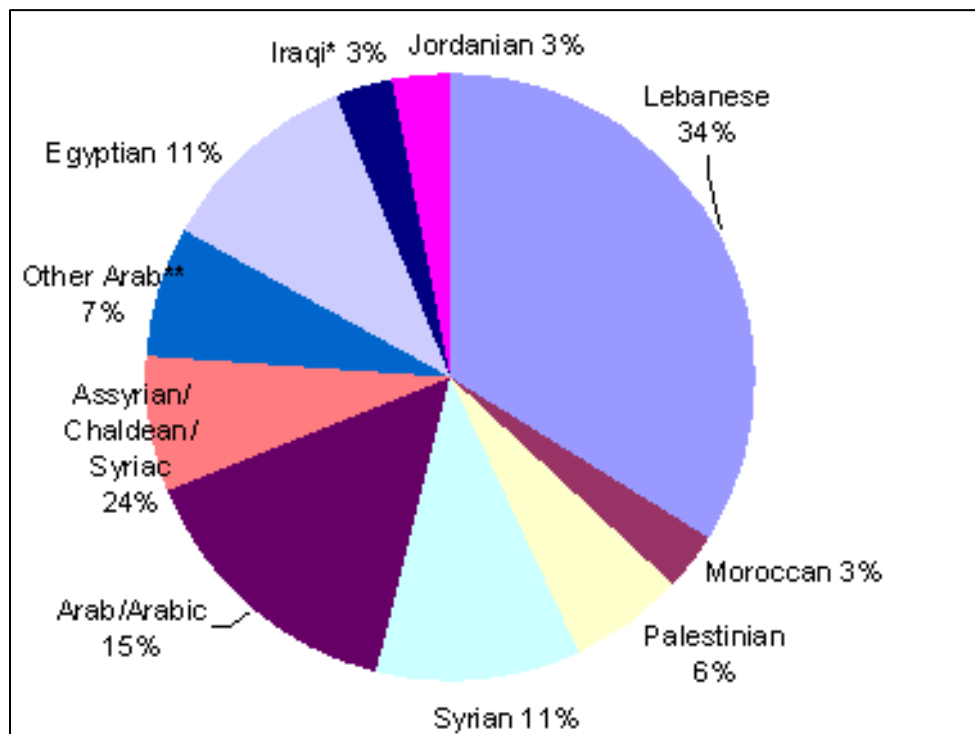
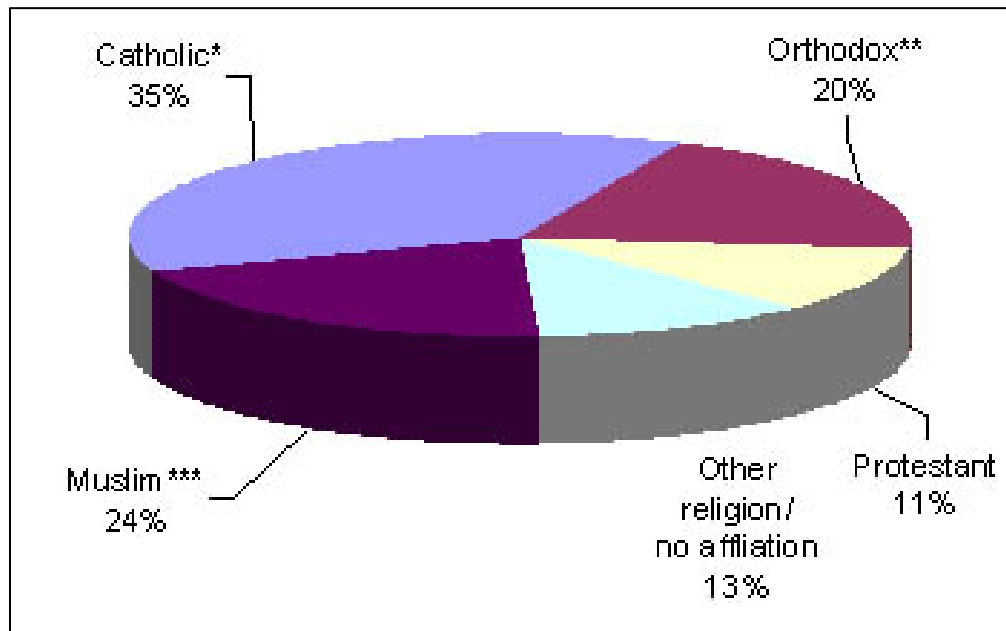


Figure 16. Breakdown of Arab Americans by Country of Origin.

In contrast to the religious demographics of the Arab countries, Arabs in the U.S. are predominantly Christian (see figure 17). Roughly, 75% of Arab Americans are Christians and about 24% of Arab Americans are Muslim. The Christian Arabs in the United States are primarily Orthodox or Catholic (Arab-American-Institute, 2003).



*Figure 17. Breakdown of Arab Americans by Religion (Drezner, 2005).*

Arab Americans tend to exceed U.S. averages with regard to household income. According to the 2000 Census, Arab American households earned a median income of \$47,000 in 1999 compared to the U.S. median of \$42,000. That same year, almost 30% of the Arab American households earned over \$75,000 while 22% of all U.S. households earned this level of income. The mean income for Arab American households was \$61,570, a full 8 percentage points higher than the national average (Arab-American-Institute, 2003).

Arab Americans excel in the area of educational attainment when compared to all Americans (see figure 18). According to the 2000 Census report, 84% of Arab Americans attain

a high school diploma compared with 80% of all Americans aged 25 and older. More than 41% of Arabs hold a bachelor's degree compared with 24% of all Americans aged 25 and older. (Brittingham & De la Cruz, 2005). While the national average number of Americans with post-graduate degrees is 9%, Arab Americans aged 25 and older nearly double that average with 17% holding post-graduate degrees (Arab-American-Institute, 2003). The current success of Arab Americans is evidenced by their continuing ability to thrive in a hostile social landscape. In the 2009 book, *Global Politics in the Dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Ayoub states:

There are roughly 3 million Arab Americans in the United States today; more than 75% of this number is composed of the descendants of immigrants. According to US census data, Arab Americans have one of the highest per capita incomes among ethnoracial minorities. They also achieve a high degree of education and have the highest per capita self-ownership of businesses and participation and managerial position. (Abouyoub, 2009, p. 118)

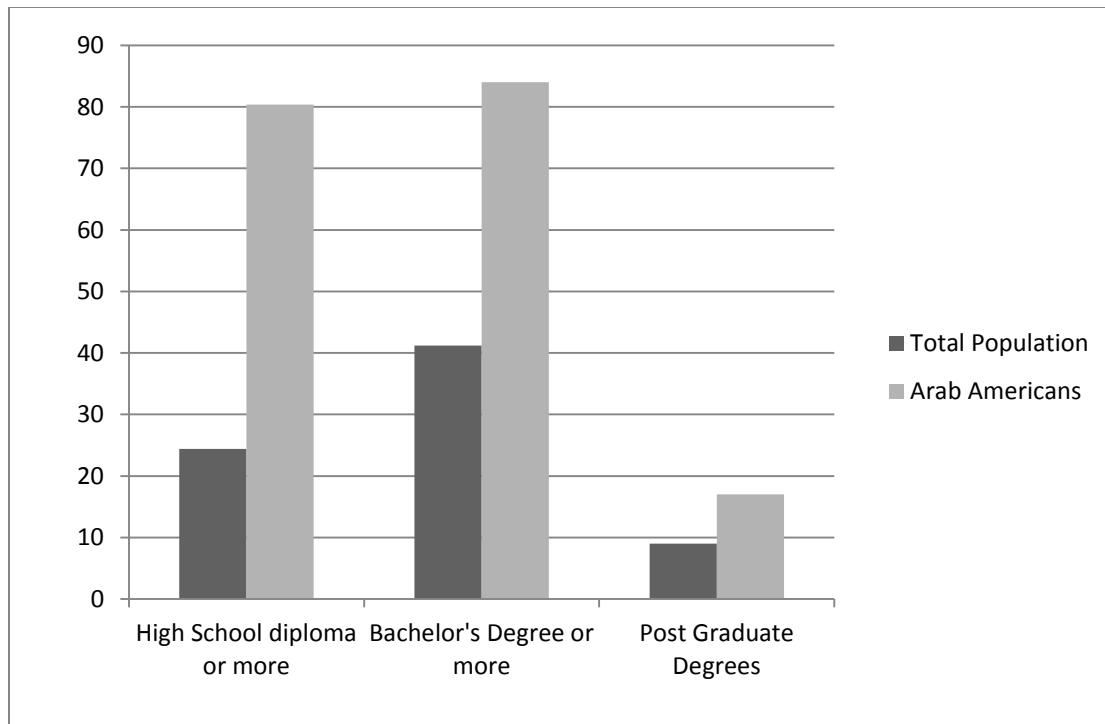


Figure 18. Arab American educational attainment. (Arab-American-Institute, 2003; Brittingham & De la Cruz, 2005).

The number of Arab students in U.S. schools remains unclear. The most current data claims nearly one half million students of Arab ancestry in U. S. schools (Brittingham & De la Cruz, 2005). This data is from the 2000 Census, which Zogby International, ADC, and AAIF claim captured only one third of the total Arab population in the United States (Altaf, nd). If it is true that there is nearly triple the Arab American population than reflected by the U.S. Census 2000, then there is likely close to one and a half million students of Arab ancestry that are of school age.

## History of Discrimination against Arabs in the United States

### *Lynching and White Supremacy*

Attacks on people of Arab ancestry in the United States are documented as early as the 1920s and with consistency since then. Nicholas Romey, a Syrian born grocer, was lynched in Florida in 1929. It is important to note that the practice of lynching did not always involve

hanging, but rather murder by a mob that would apprehended a person who was already in police custody.

Romey, a grocery store owner in Lake City, Florida had a dispute with the local sheriff. The sheriff apparently did not appreciate having a “foreigner” call his integrity into question and began to harass the Syrian grocer. The sheriff ordered Mrs. Romey to remove her vegetable display from the sidewalk and the two began arguing.

While reports vary, all agree that shots were fired into the grocery store and when Mr. Romey hid behind a counter, he was hit with a gun and fell to the floor bleeding. Mrs. Romey rushed to her husband’s aid and shot at the sheriff at which time he shot her several times, mortally wounding her. Mr. Romey was arrested and taken to jail where he was removed that night by a mob and murdered. The law enforcement of Lake City, Florida claimed to have no information about the identity or size of the mob but an investigation showed no evidence of the lock being pried off Romey’s cell, indicating he was removed with the cooperation and collaboration of the law enforcement authorities.

While lynching was not uncommon in the post-Reconstruction South, most lynchings were against African Americans. Indeed, only 15% of lynching victims were not African American (Brundage, 1993). Romey’s lynching and his wife’s killing at the hand of authorities, was not overtly connected to his heritage but the political climate of the time was that white supremacy was in jeopardy.

On August 23, 1928, several months before Romey’s death, the local newspaper warned readers of the consequences of a Republican win. “In the pending national campaign, the question of white supremacy is paramount and supersedes every controversial issue—it strikes at the very hearthstone of every white man’s home in the South” (Gualtieri, 2004). The

Republicans did win the election, an outcome that angered many white Floridians (Gualtieri, 2004). “The Democrats lost by more than six million votes, but carried a dozen of the nation's largest cities. Their hold on the so-called "Solid South" was broken, however; Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Florida, and Texas voted Republican”(Shaheen, 1984).

Another indicator of the political climate of the 1920's south was a handbill circulated by a candidate for a political campaign in Alabama, which read, “They have disqualified the Negro, an American citizen, from voting in the white primary. The Greek and Syrian should also be disqualified. I DON'T WANT THEIR VOTE. If I can't be elected by white men, I don't want the office” (Conklin & Faires, 1987, p. 77). A few years after the Romey lynching, the Ku Klux Klan bombed the home of a Syrian family in Marietta, Georgia (Gualtieri, 2004). Attacks on Arabs were not limited to the south. Pennsylvania Senator Reed, in the Congressional Record just weeks before Romey's murder described Syrians as “the trash of the Mediterranean,” (as cited in Gualtieri, 2004, p. 73).

### ***Legally “White”***

Arabs who immigrated to the United States were frequently unwelcome in their new communities. They were denied naturalization and citizenship with the accusation that they were “Asian” and therefore not white (Suleiman, 1999). At the same time, African Americans were relegated to separate bathrooms, restaurants and drinking fountains in Birmingham, Alabama and in other southern locations, local Arabs were prohibited from using “white only” restrooms, restaurants and other “white” facilities (see figure 19). Discrimination was frequently violent, especially in the Jim Crow south, and included lynching and other forms of murder. (Gualtieri, 2004; Wingfield, 2006).

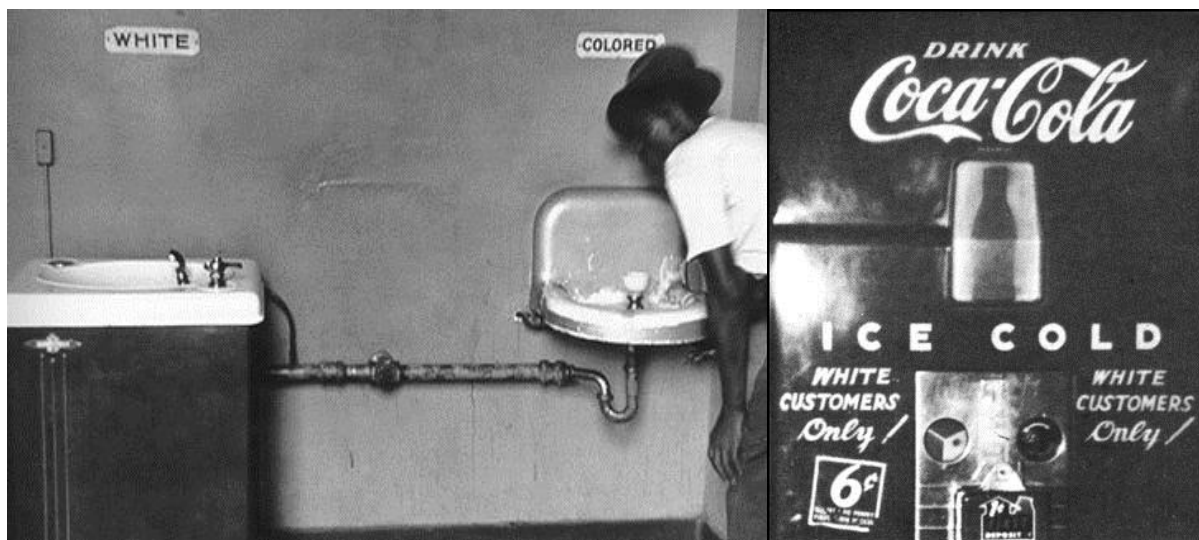


Figure 3. “White only” also meant no Arabs (Jim Crow Laws, 2012).

To protect themselves from racist court decisions and the white supremacy that dominated the early 20<sup>th</sup> century South, Arab leaders and members of the Arab community responded. Wingfield (2006) noted:

In response to the racism of Jim Crow America and to court decisions labeling them as “Mongolian” or “Asiatic” and therefore not eligible for U.S. citizenship, Arab American leaders mounted a series of successful court cases between 1909 and 1915 seeking to be officially identified as “white.” (p.254)

The legacy of being declared legally “white” has been that Arab Americans are not accurately recognized in federal statistics that include data on hate crimes, discrimination and the census (Gualtieri, 2004). Arabs also found that being legally “white” did not make them “white” enough. They continued to suffer significant racial discrimination, which continues today (Gualtieri, 2004; Ibish & Stewart, 2003; Wingfield, 2006). Not having official recognition from the government as a protected minority group has often meant that hate crimes committed against Arab Americans are not recorded as such by law enforcement agencies (Ibish, 2001). The lack of documentation is problematic because it prevents authorities, researchers, policy makers



and communities from accurately understanding the extent of anti-Arab incidents in the United States.

Many Arabs have found some security by settling into tight-knit Arab communities such as Dearborn, Michigan, home to the largest concentration of Arabs outside of the Middle East. The security found here was evidenced by the lack of anti-Arab incidents after September 11, 2001. Dearborn, a city with over 30,000 Arabs experienced only two violent hate crimes immediately after 9/11 (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Most cities, however, are not like Dearborn. “The violence discrimination, defamation and intolerance now faced by Arabs in American society has reached a level unparalleled in their over 100-year history in the US” (Cainkar, 2002, p. 26).

## **Contemporary Discrimination against Arabs Living in the United States**

### ***Stereotypes and Negative Portrayals***

Stereotypes and negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims come from a variety of sources. It is not as if the targets of the stereotyping and negative portrayals are unaware of their presence. Peek (2011) says that the Muslim she studied “were painfully aware that members of their sex and faith are stereotyped as rigid, intolerant, and inherently prone to extremism” and that the Muslim women “tend to appear in the news only when a story can be told about their real or perceived oppression” (p. 52).

News reports, the entertainment industry, schools, the religious community and the public sector are all outlets and platforms for xenophobic voices. These platforms are used to spread vitriolic and inaccurate portrayals of groups that are not members of the dominant group in

society. Because of the constant access to electronic media, information, even wrong information is quickly spread and repeated to hundreds of millions of information consumers.

It is important to note here that the terminology used when referring to the targets of discriminatory acts will alternate between Arab and Muslim and the use of either word may refer to the other. While Arab and Muslim are not interchangeable terms, the discriminatory acts are directed at a group perceived to be Arab, Muslim or both. Frequently, the perpetrators of the acts do not know the difference and direct their hatred to anyone they believe has the same characteristics as the 9/11 hijackers-Arab and Muslim. Often, these people are neither Arab nor Muslim. This study will use the terminology used in the actual reporting of the events but it is important to keep in mind that much of the discrimination labeled anti-Muslim, is also anti-Arab, and anti-Arab acts were frequently against Muslims.

### ***School Curricula/texts***

School textbooks, an area where accuracy and fairness would seem to be of great importance, tend to provide some of the most unbalanced, inaccurate descriptions of Arab people. The Middle East Studies Association (MESA), and the Middle East Outreach Council (MEOC) conducted a joint study of textbooks used in social studies classrooms in U.S. schools. Their findings indicated that there is a gross over portrayal of nomads, camels and deserts (Barlow, 1994).

The use of nomads to represent Arab people is especially problematic as only about 2% of Arabs live the nomadic life of the Bedouin. It is likely that a much higher percentage of Arabs, especially in the United States, are college-educated professionals (Wingfield & Karaman, 1995, 2001). According to Peek (2011), a review by Middle Eastern studies scholars of secondary

school social studies textbooks revealed that the information presented to American students was grossly inaccurate and “perpetuated negative images of Muslims and the Islamic faith (p. 45).

The Texas State Board of Education deemed their social studies textbooks not *unfavorable* enough toward Islam. They went so far as to pass a resolution in September 2010 denouncing the texts as being critical of Christianity while glorifying Islam. Seemingly, the only appropriate way to teach about Islam in Texas schools is to ensure that it is considered “lesser” than Christianity (Netter, 2010).

### ***Entertainment***

***Television portrayals.*** The literature contains very little current research on the portrayal of Arabs in television. The fact that Arabs are portrayed in a stereotypical manner seems to be common knowledge and nearly all articles regarding Arab stereotypes on television refer to Jack Shaheen’s (1984) book, *The TV Arab*. The few articles that are more recent than *The TV Arab* (1984) reiterate Shaheen’s claims. “Arabs are seen as terrorists and murderers due to how the media presents them” (El-Farra, 1996).

One year after Shaheen’s book, a study by L. John Martin (1985) analyzed the portrayal of Arabs on television but focused on the news media as opposed to entertainment television. Martin’s findings were nearly identical to Shaheen’s in that Arabs are consistently stereotyped as violent and as terrorists (Martin, 1985). The consistent identification of Arabs as terrorists automatically classifies Arabs as enemies (El-Farra, 1996).

***Music lyrics.*** The link between music and attitudes is well documented and has long been used by the advertising industry to steer consumers toward particular products (Gorn, 1982; Johnson & Trawalter, 2000). Rudman and Lee (2002) contend that violent music “increased the automatic associations underlying evaluative racial stereotypes in high and low prejudiced

subjects alike” (Rudman & Lee, 2002). Unfortunately, the music industry has not excluded itself from attacks on the Arab world. In response to 9/11 Toby Keith recorded *Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue*, which included the following lyrics:

A mighty sucker punch came flyin’ in, from somewhere in the back. Soon as we could see clearly, through our big black eye, man, we lit up your world like the 4th of July...cause we’ll put a boot in your ass-It’s the American way ...And it feels like the whole wide world is raining down on you...Brought to you courtesy of the red white and blue. (Keith, 2003)

The most obvious problem with these lyrics is that they insinuate that Arab and Muslim people were collectively responsible for 9/11 and thus deserving of “a boot in your ass.” While this mass blame is in line with the U.S. government’s response to 9/11, which collectively punished Iraqi and Afghani civilians, it negates the reality that these people had no responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. This generous spreading of blame is akin to blaming all Caucasian males for Timothy McVey’s actions in Oklahoma. Notably, there were no such songs or lyrics debasing Caucasian, American males after the Oklahoma City bombing.

Charlie Daniels made the obvious reference to the derogatory slur “raghead” in his song “This ain’t no rag it’s a flag.” The song begins “This ain’t no rag it’s a flag and we don’t wear it on our heads.” Charlie Daniels then goes on to refer to Arabs as cowards and fools and threatens to “hunt them down like a mad dog hound.” He then advises Arabs to “crawl back in your hole, like a dirty little mole” (Daniels, 2004).

These songs, and others like them, played on radios across the nation. The evidence connecting popular music to listeners’ attitudes indicates that the type of music noted above likely contributes to an anti-Arab climate.

**Movie images.** Negative images of Arabs in Hollywood movies go back to 1921 when Rudolph Valentino starred in *The Sheik*. These insidious portrayals continue today in blockbuster films such as *Rules of Engagement* and *Aladdin*. With almost absolute consistency, Arabs are portrayed negatively. They are frequently depicted as the fanatic, terrorist, or the villain with a propensity for cruelty and violence. Shaheen (2001) notes that the film portrayal of Arabs is limited to five categories- villains, sheikhs, maidens, Egyptians and Palestinians. In the Foreword to Shaheen's book "Reel Bad Arabs," William Greider, an author and national correspondent for *The Nation* says, "Hollywood is our great national entertainer and also the most effective teacher of our young" (Shaheen, 2001). If this is true, American youth have been successfully taught that Arabs are bad.

In *Reel Bad Arabs*, (2001) Dr. Shaheen states that of over 900 films that he reviewed, only 5% of Arab roles portrayed Arabs favorably. Shaheen also notes that the U.S. Department of Defense has worked with Hollywood in making at least 14 films in which U.S. forces are shown killing Arabs or Muslims (Shaheen, 2001). "This consistent treatment of Arabs in films has become the trademark of the American film industry to such a degree that youngsters are likely not even to be aware that they are observing a dramatically lopsided pitting of good versus evil" (Al-Hazza, 2005).

The Arab American Museum created a web exhibit titled *Reclaiming Identity: Dismantling Arab Stereotypes*. In the discussion of Arabs in popular culture, it was stated:

...the harmful influences of stereotypes depend not only on the repetition of distorted imagery, but also the omission of diverse imagery. What is absent in American popular culture are the important images of Arabs and Arab Americans who are business owners,

family members, teachers, classmates, artists, engineers, neighbors, and who have made lasting contributions to society. (Arab American Museum, 2011)

The vilifying of Arabs is not limited to Hollywood. Anti-Arab remarks by public officials and government policies that relegate Arabs to less than favorable status fuels anti-Arab sentiment (Akram, 2002). Television news and entertainment programming and other media outlets that frequently display negative depictions of Arabs add to the vilifying process. bell hooks (2003) points out that the media was instrumental in creating the us against them mentality that materialized post September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, instead of bringing to light “the incredible national and religious diversity of the victims of 9/11, (including the many Muslims who were killed)”. (p. 12).

***Video games.*** The prolific stereotyped and dehumanized images of Arabs and Muslims presented in popular video games, especially of the first-person shooter genre, has gone largely uncontested. This is likely due to the fact that until recently, there was minimal research published on the topic. In the last few years, however, several articles and studies have been published which specifically examine the negative, inaccurate and defamatory manner in which Arab and Muslim people are depicted in video games (Dahlberg, 2005; Frasca, 2004; Machin & Suleiman, 2006; Marashi, 2001; Šisler, 2008).

### ***News Reporting***

The news media, instead of being objective, uses a method known as framing. Framing is used to selectively highlight some pieces of information while intentionally obscuring other pieces so that a predetermined spin on the story is created that is in line with what the media thinks the viewer believes (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007). One of the ways in which the news media perpetuates negative images of Arabs is by making them synonymous with terrorists.

Immediately after the Oklahoma City bombing numerous television news broadcasters made inaccurate connections between Arabs/ Muslims and the bombing. The act itself was reported as terrorism in programs such as “Terror in the Heartland,” until it was revealed that the perpetrators were American, Caucasian males. The title was then changed to “Tragedy in the Heartland” (Suleiman, 2001).

While reporting about Arab and Muslim Americans became more favorable in the five years following the 9/11 attacks (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007), it is important to note that this positive change did not encompass the reporting on Arabs and Muslims who were not American. Thus, Arab Americans are still exposed to negative images of Arabs and Muslims in mainstream news reporting. Unfortunately, many Americans draw their worldview from biased portrayals permeating news media broadcasts.

The media watch group, “If Americans Knew...” conducted reports on the coverage of the Arab Israeli conflict by the Associated Press, the New York Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Jose Mercury News and the New London Day along with a report on television network news coverage. Overwhelmingly, these reports find that these news agencies over report Israeli deaths and under report Palestinian deaths. This is notable as it is Americans who consume this reporting, thus shaping their view of Arabs.

This practice, known as framing, leads viewers to perceive the Arabs as the aggressors and the Israelis as the victims, when in fact Israelis are responsible for the vast majority of killings in the Arab Israeli conflict. Prime examples of this include the number of deaths of Palestinian and Israeli children in the conflict. Between September 29, 2000, when the current Intifada began, and May 8, 2007 there were 117 Israeli children killed compared to 934

Palestinian children. The Associated Press covered the deaths of the Israeli children approximately three times per death while 85% of Palestinian children's deaths went uncovered.

From the beginning of the current Intifada until December 2004, the New York Times reported nearly three times as many Israeli deaths than Palestinian deaths though the ratio of Israeli deaths to Palestinian death was 1:4 (If Americans Knew, 2006). This is relevant to this study because this reporting reaches millions of Americans each day, creating the false impression that Arabs are the aggressors in this conflict and that Israelis are the Caucasian victims of Arab violence. This notion contributes to creating an American fear of Arabs, thus helping to justify the targeting of a people.

More recently, Gallup issued a report on how American feel about Muslims. Within the report was the following analysis from Media Tenor regarding the bias against Muslims in news coverage from 2007 to 2008:

...according to Media Tenor, a research firm that monitors and analyzes media coverage of key issues, Islam is not only the religion that is the most frequently mentioned in television news in the United States, but also a significant share of this coverage is negative. While 14% of statements about religion in television news referred to Christianity, references to Islam accounted for 36% of all statements analyzed by Media Tenor between January and August 2009. In addition, the tone of the coverage of statements about Islam (40%) was twice as likely to be negative than the statements made about Christianity (20%). Further, Media Tenor's analysis shows that two-thirds of the television coverage about Islam associates Muslims with extremism. In light of the preponderance of negative media coverage of Islam, Gallup's findings suggest it is the



observed behavior of fringe elements that may shape Americans' unfavorable attitudes toward Muslims. (Gallup, 2009, p. 11)

### **Political Cartoons**

News media portrayal of Arabs and Muslims is not limited to reporting. Political cartoons are a common venue for portraying biased images of political foes. Political cartoons in magazines, newspapers and on the internet often portray Arabs and Muslims threats to America and the American values.

In the following cartoons by Cox and Forkum published on their neoconservative website, Islam is viewed as a threat to free speech as the Statue of Liberty is beheaded by an Arab Muslim bearing a scimitar (see figure 20). America is represented in the cartoon as Lady Liberty wearing a crown emblazoned with the phrase "free speech." We know that the murderous, bullet wrapped figure in the cartoon is Arab from the traditional Arab scarf he is wearing and we know he is Muslim from the inscription on the scimitar blade that says "Islamism." The depiction of a beheaded Lady Liberty with her blood dripping from the blade of Islamism represents the threat of Arabs and Islam to America.

In the second cartoon, a caricature of former President Jimmy Carter is depicted embracing heavily armed, masked Hamas members while singing, "All we are saying is give Jew Hating Murderers a chance." The cartoon is a reference to Carter's efforts to have peaceful dialogue with Iran in 2006 (see figure 21). The cartoon is a thinly veiled attempt to disparage Arabs and Muslims by portraying both groups as threat to American ally, Israel and to American Jews. Notably, while the cartoon is meant to denigrate Iran, it portrays Arabs rather than Iranians. This method surreptitiously connects all Arabs and all Muslims as if they are the same- "Jew-hating murderers."

The first frame of the third cartoon depicts an Islamic couple complaining about being profiled at the airport. The following frame shows a large passenger plane getting ready to crash into a man sitting at his desk in an office building. The obvious implication is that because the 9/11 hijackers were Muslim, other Muslims, including American Muslims, forfeit the right to reject being racially or religiously profiled (see figure 22).



*Figure 20. “A right to blasphemy.”(Cox & Forkum, 2006c)*



Figure 21. "Peace, Love & Genocide" (Cox & Forkum, 2006a)



Figure 22. "Profiled." (Cox & Forkum, 2006b)

### ***Remarks by Government Officials***

In the months following the 9/11 attacks, it became acceptable for politicians to make derogatory slurs against Arabs and Muslims. While some were pressured into making an occasional apology, there were no serious consequences and the slurs continued (Ibish, 2001). Examples of defamatory comments made by prominent politicians in the wake of 9/11 include:

- Louisiana congressman John Cooksey's September 17, 2001 remark, "If I see someone come in that's got a diaper on his head and a fan belt wrapped around that diaper on his head, that guy needs to be pulled over" (hate, 2005).
- U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, in an interview with Jewish columnist Cal Thomas, said, "Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for him. Christianity is a faith in which God sends his son to die for you" (Ibish, 2001).
- Saxy Chambliss, a Georgia Congressman, in a November 19, 2001 meeting with Georgia officials, suggested that they "turn the sheriff loose and arrest every Muslim that crosses the state line" (Source Watch, 2007).
- Georgia Congressman Charlie Norwood, in a June 12, 2002 letter to his constituents justifying the racial profiling of Arabs, incorrectly indicated that the Taliban was comprised of Arabs. He also inaccurately claimed that it was Arabs who took over the U.S. Embassy in Iran in 1979 (Ibish, 2003).
- With regard to the proposed Park 51 Community Center which would contain a Muslim prayer area, Tom Tancredo, a Colorado Congressman until 2009 wrote these incendiary words in 2010: "...it is nevertheless breathtaking to watch our entire

- political establishment commit hari-kari to defend the rights of jihadists to celebrate the mass murder of 3,000 Americans at Ground Zero” (ADL, 2011).
- While campaigning to be elected president of the United States, Senator John McCain took the microphone from one of his supporters who said Barak Obama was an Arab. McCain told her “No ma’am. He’s a decent family man.” Regardless of McCain’s intent, the message he relayed was that one could not be an Arab and a decent family man (Gorani, 2008).
  - Newt Gingrich, Republican presidential candidate and former Congressional Speaker of the House, said in July of 2010, "America is experiencing an Islamist cultural-political offensive designed to undermine and destroy our civilization. Sadly, too many of our elites are the willing apologists for those who would destroy them if they could. No mosque. No self-deception. No surrender. The time to take a stand is now - at this site on this issue" (ADL, 2011).
  - During the November 22, 2011 Republican presidential debate, former U. S. Senator Rick Santorum, known for his racist rhetoric supported racial profiling by stating that the TSA should be allowed to target “the folks who are most likely to be committing these crimes... Obviously, Muslims would be someone you'd look at, absolutely... The radical Muslims are the people committing these crimes, by and large, as well as younger males... Not exclusively but these are things you profile to find the most likely candidate.” (Shahdid, 2011).
  - Herman Cain, a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, has previously noted that he would not feel “comfortable” appointing Muslims to his Cabinet should he be elected President. Even though he later “clarified” his statements, he jumped on

the anti- Muslim bandwagon with Rick Santorum during the November 22, 2011 Republican presidential debate saying, "If you take a look at the people who are trying to kill us, it would be easy to figure out exactly what that identification profile looks like... The terrorists have one objective that some people don't seem to get. They want to kill all of us, so we should use every means necessary to kill them first." (Shahdid, 2011);

Not only is this propaganda divisive and inflammatory, but it is broadcast with enough frequency to shape or distort listeners' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims.

#### Hate Crimes and Discrimination since September 11, 2001

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity commission:

National origin discrimination means treating someone less favorably because he or she comes from a particular place, because of his or her ethnicity or accent, or because it is believed that he or she has a particular ethnic background. National origin discrimination also means treating someone less favorably at work because of marriage or other association with someone of a particular nationality. (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2006)

Discrimination and instances of attacks, both verbal and physical, against Arab Americans and those perceived to be Arab or Muslim after September 11, 2001, escalated sharply but this was not a new phenomenon for the Arab community in the United States. During the two decades prior to the September 11 attacks, hate crimes against Arabs and those perceived to be Arab or Muslim have predictably followed Middle East conflicts and acts of terror. Repeatedly, Arabs have been attacked in the United States for terror related acts perpetrated by

Arabs or Muslims, but also for attacks perpetrated by non-Arabs as in the case of the Oklahoma City bombing (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

## **Violence**

### ***Murders***

At least three confirmed backlash murders occurred in response to the 9/11 attacks. While these murders were intended for Arab Muslims, none of the murder victims was Arab. Two were from India and one was from Pakistan. Four other murders may also be the result of the 9/11 backlash but have not yet been classified as such (Human Rights Watch, 2002). In all, there were twelve reported murders of Muslim, Arab or those incorrectly perceived to be Arab or Muslim in the first seven months following the September 11, 2001 attacks (Elaasar, 2004). Brief accounts of the three confirmed backlash murders are as follows:

- Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh wearing his religiously mandated turban was shot to death in Arizona on September 15, 2001. Mr. Sodhi was a 49-year old father of four and had emigrated to the U.S. thirteen years earlier from India. Although not an Arab or Muslim, Sodhi was incorrectly perceived by his killer to be an Arab. The killer had previously bragged at a bar that he was going to “kill the ragheads responsible for September 11” (Ibish & Stewart, 2003).
- Vasudev Patel, father of two, also from India, was shot and killed while working in his Mesquite, TX convenience store. Because a store security camera captured Patel’s murder, police were able to identify the killer, Mark Stroman, and arrest him. It was subsequently found that he had also shot Rais Uddin, a Pakistani gas station attendant

who was blinded in the shooting. While in prison, Stroman bragged about yet another killing (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

- Waquar Hassan, a 46-year old Pakistani immigrant and father of 4 little girls, was killed in his Texas grocery store. Stroman was charged in this murder but charges were dropped once he was sentenced to death for Patel's murder (Ibish & Stewart, 2003).

Mark Stroman, the same man who killed Patel and Hassan and blinded Rais Uddin by shooting him in the face, was sentenced to death by the state of Texas. Before his execution in July of 2011, he was the recipient of an effort to commute his death penalty to a sentence of life in prison. Ironically, the man who initiated and fought to spare Stroman's life was the victim he blinded, Rais Uddin. Uddin felt that as a Muslim, forgiveness was required of him. Poignantly, the self-avowed "Arab slayer," Stroman's last message was one of peace and love, inspired by Rais Uddin's efforts to save his life (Rudolph, 2011).

In November of 2011, the director of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project, Mark Potok, wrote an article *titled FBI Reports Dramatic Spike in Anti-Muslim Hate Violence*, in which he noted, "It's not provable precisely how hateful rhetoric from public figures drives criminal violence. But anecdotal evidence suggests the link is a tight one" (Potok, 2011b).

### ***Non-fatal physical attacks***

Attacks on persons or property in the aftermath of 9/11 are too numerous to individually include in this report. A partial list includes a man trying to set fire to the cars in a Mosque parking lot on September 13, 2001, the choking of a Sikh taxi driver in SeaTac, Washington, and the stabbing of a Sikh woman by two men while she sat in her car at a traffic light in San Diego. A New York man attempted to run over a Muslim woman standing outside of a mall while screaming that he was doing this for his country (Elaasar, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2002).



Places of worship were attacked with alarming frequency in the days following 9/11. The Council on American Islamic Relations [CAIR] reported dozens of physical and verbal attacks and threats against mosques throughout the United States (Elaasar, 2004). At least 174 attacks on Mosques, homes, businesses or property belonging to Arabs, Muslims or those perceived to be Arab or Muslim were recorded during the 16 weeks following 9/11 (Report on hate crimes, 2003).

### **Flying While Arab**

After September 11, 2001, flying became a nearly impossible landscape for many Arabs and Muslims to navigate. Airlines allowed passengers, flight attendants and pilots to “vote” those they perceived to be “Middle Eastern- looking” off the plane for no better reason than they were uncomfortable flying with them on board (Ahmad, 2002). The frequencies with which people who were perceived to be threatening due to their appearance, speech or religious affiliation prompted government agencies to begin keeping data. “The overwhelming number of September 11-related discrimination complaints compelled the DOT and EEOC to specially track and report the backlash incidents” (Human Rights Watch, 2002). This tracking did not put an end to the plight of flying while Arab.

More than five years after the 9/11, attacks, in November 2006, U.S. Airways removed six Imams, Muslim religious leaders, from their Minneapolis to Phoenix flight, in handcuffs. Their “suspicious” behaviors included praying, saying “Allah,” not sitting together on the plane and asking for seatbelt extensions for three of the men. The American Imams had been attending a religious conference in Minnesota and one of the men was blind and even required assistance to board the plane (Associated Press, 2006-11-21).

## **Schools**

In the Report on Hate Crimes and Discrimination against Arab Americans, Ibish (2003) writes:

The attacks of September 11 immediately brought about a major outbreak of hate crimes and discrimination against Arab American students, who encountered hostility and harassment from kindergartens to college campuses across the country. On September 11, and the days and weeks that followed, students reported physical assaults, death threats and overt ethnic and religious bigotry. Students were beaten, cursed, kicked, spat upon and insulted. There were knife attacks, bomb threats, and vandalism. Many Muslim girls reported having their head covering pulled off. Teachers and other students made fun of their Arab names and made obscene and demeaning remarks. Students were harassed in classrooms, hallways, cafeterias and restrooms, on school buses and walking home from school. Sometimes teachers, administrators and coaches were more of a problem than the other students. (Ibish, 2003, p. 105)

U.S. classrooms have unfortunately not been safe havens from the cruelty and insensitivity of negative sentiment directed towards the Arab people and Islam. As noted above, numerous incidents of physical attacks, mockery, harassment, threats of violence and death threats against Arab and Muslim students were confirmed in the months following 9/11. Even more astounding was the fact that many of the perpetrators instead of being other students, were teachers and other staff members (Wingfield, 2006).

Most reported incidents of discrimination and harassment were reported to Arab and Muslim civil rights organizations. Many of these reports have also made it to higher levels such as the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights as in the case of an Iraqi boy

attending school in Texas. According to the complaint, the boy was not only harassed but was also “the target of racial and ethnic slurs, had his arm broken, was threatened with a beating ‘if we go to war with Iraq,’ and during a class on Iraq was called a ‘traitor’ and ‘Little Laden’” (Wingfield, 2006).

In 2004, at West Jefferson High School in Harvey, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans, a history teacher was transferred to another school after forcibly pulling back the hijab or headscarf worn by an Islamic girl in his class. The teacher then told her, "I hope God punishes you. No, I'm sorry, I hope Allah punishes you. I didn't know you had hair under there" (Nelson, 2004). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights and the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) are reporting stories of this type with increasing frequency.

The negative sentiment that brought about these incidents continues today. In February 2007, a North Carolina high school social studies teacher invited an evangelical speaker to his classes. The evangelist’s main message was that Islam is bad and Christianity is good. During his visit to the Wake County school, he gave students inflammatory literature about Islam. The Prophet Muhammad was referred to as a criminal, accused of being possessed by demons and inspired by Satan. The teacher was initially put on a 90-day paid suspension but was then transferred to another school (Shimron, 2007).

Continuing this horrifying trend of harassment and bullying Arab and Muslim youth was a high school teacher. According to the ADC report, the teacher and several players from the student’s sporting team drafted a letter of invitation about a private event with the words “no Arabs are allowed at the event”. The letter was then sent to an Arab student on the team (The 2010 ADC Legal Report, 2010).

In November 2011, David Haddad, a seventeen year old Indiana high school student of Arabic descent was beaten by eight of his classmates who had harassed him for more than a year because he was Arab. The harassment included calling him “terrorist” and claiming he was related to Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi. The aggressors were all junior and senior baseball and basketball players for the school.

The beating of David Haddad resulted in a traumatic brain injury and according to the family, none of the aggressors was disciplined although the Haddad received a 10-day suspension for throwing a defensive punch while on the floor. The parents allege in their lawsuit against the school, that even though the bullying and harassment had been reported, the principal failed to act. The parents also took out a temporary restraining order to ensure the school does not alter the video surveillance videos of the beating or alter the records of the prior complaints they filed with the school. In the year prior to the beating, the complaint alleges that David Haddad had been repeatedly targeted by the students who beat him, even showing up at his home and trying to get him to come outside so they could beat him up (Huffington Post, 2011).

Discrimination experienced by school age youth, goes beyond emotional and physical damage. Medical News Today reaffirmed this notion in a report on the findings of a recent study published in the Journal of Research on Adolescence. The study found that the level of discrimination experienced by youth impact their grade-point averages and the health. Students who felt they experienced higher levels of discrimination were more likely to suffer from depression, distress and lower levels of self-esteem (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Wheeler, 2010).

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U.S. classrooms have unfortunately not been safe havens from the cruelty and insensitivity of negative sentiment directed towards the Arab people and Islam. As noted above, numerous incidents of physical attacks, mockery, harassment, threats of violence and death threats against Arab and Muslim students were confirmed in the months following 9/11. Even more astounding was the fact that many of the perpetrators were not other students, but teachers and other staff members (Wingfield, 2006).

Most reported incidents of discrimination and harassment were reported to Arab and Muslim civil rights organizations. Many of these reports have also made it to higher levels such as the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights as in the case of an Iraqi boy attending school in Texas. According to the complaint, the boy was not only harassed but was

also “the target of racial and ethnic slurs, had his arm broken, was threatened with a beating ‘if we go to war with Iraq,’ and during a class on Iraq was called a ‘traitor’ and ‘Little Laden’” (Wingfield, 2006).

The negative sentiment that brought about these incidents continues today. In February 2007, a North Carolina high school social studies teacher invited an evangelical speaker to his classes. The evangelist’s main message was that Islam is bad and Christianity is good. During his visit to the Wake County school, he gave students inflammatory literature about Islam. The Prophet Muhammad was referred to as a criminal, accused of being possessed by demons and inspired by Satan. The teacher was initially put on a 90-day paid suspension but was then transferred to another school (Shimron, 2007).

## **Profiling**

The profiling of Arabs and Muslims post-9/11 became so prevalent that Comedy Central even aired a segment called “Arabs are the New Blacks.” This phrase refers to the widely publicized practice of racial profiling African American citizens. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, racial profiling is “the discriminatory practice by law enforcement officials of targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on the individual's race, ethnicity, religion or national origin” (ACLU, 2005). While racial profiling is not a new phenomenon in the United States, it was only after the events of September 11, 2001 that law enforcement officials began openly profiling Arab and Muslim Americans.

Although research has consistently shown racial profiling to be ineffective, law enforcement began regular practices of profiling Arab and Muslim Americans after September 11, 2001. Even though racial profiling is unconstitutional, fear and hysteria following the 9/11, attacks led to an unprecedented shift in how Americans felt about the practice. Prior to 9/11,

polls indicated that 80% of Americans disapproved the practice of racial profiling. After the attacks, polls revealed that nearly 60% of Americans approved of the practice when it was aimed at Arabs and Muslims (Swiney, 2006).

CAIR collected several recent reports of racial profiling against Muslims. In one case, AirTran removed nine Muslim passengers from a flight in January 2009 because another passenger claimed that one of the Muslims made a remark about the safest seating location on the plane. Not only were the nine passengers removed from the flight they paid for, but they were barred by the airline from taking any future flights with AirTran (CAIR, 2010b).

### **Attacks on Mosques**

While attacks on mosques had increased since the 9/11 attacks, the controversial plan to build the Park 51 Community Center near Ground Zero in New York City ignited a storm of hatred in the United States. Reported incidents included xenophobic rhetoric, threats against mosques and actual attacks on mosques. Between January 2009 and November 2010, CAIR reported 56 incidents against mosques including 21 acts of vandalism, 20 acts of Islamophobic rhetoric, three threats of violence and nine acts of violence.

Additional incidents, listed as “other” in the report included supporters of the Tea Party being “told to bring dogs to harass Muslim worshippers during Friday congregational prayers” (CAIR, 2010b). During the summer of 2010, California Tea Party supporters received an email requesting that they bring dogs to harass Muslims during prayer:

An e-mail alert announcing the anti-mosque protest sent to area newspapers by "a leader of a conservative coalition that has been active with Republican and Tea Party functions" stated: "An Islamic Mosque is planned to be built in Temecula. Islam is not a religion. It is a worldwide political movement meant [sic] on domination of the world. And it is

meant to subjugate all people under Islamic law. . .Islam permits lying!. . .The Islam's [sic] treat women as second class people and they also hate dogs. Women are forbidden to sing and dogs are killed. We will not be submissive to Sharia Law. Tennessee was able to stop the Mosque so bring your Bibles, flags, signs, dogs and singing voice on Friday. (CAIR, 2010a).

Mosques were vandalized with spray painted anti-Islam slurs and had broken windows. Burnt Qur'ans were left at mosques and in one case, feces covered, torn Qur'an pages surrounded a mosque in Lansing Michigan. Several fires were also set on mosque properties and some had gunshot damage (CAIR, 2010b). Photos show vandalism at mosques in Michigan and Tennessee (see figures 23 and 24).



Photo by Nashville City Paper

*Figure 23.* (Terkel, 2010)





Figure 24. (Shakir, 2011)

### ***Impact of Discrimination***

Discriminatory, exclusive, and harassing behaviors towards Arab and Muslim people contribute in creating an environment where hostility, exclusion and aggression against the group become covertly acceptable. This is evidenced by the numerous reports of harassment and discrimination continuing against this group (Ahmad, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Report on hate crimes, 2003). It is also noted, “prejudice, discrimination, and a compromised sense of safety are historically correlated with racial subordination in the United States” (Cainkar, 2006, p. 269). There are many areas in which anti-Arab sentiment affects the well-being of the person perceiving the discrimination.

Research has made it clear that we construct our self-perceptions based on how others perceive us (Woolfolk, 1998). Further, it has been repeatedly shown that the way students perceive themselves significantly contributes to academic achievement and social adjustment (Hamachck, 1995; Hamachek, 1995; Schuster et al., 2001). A direct link was found between

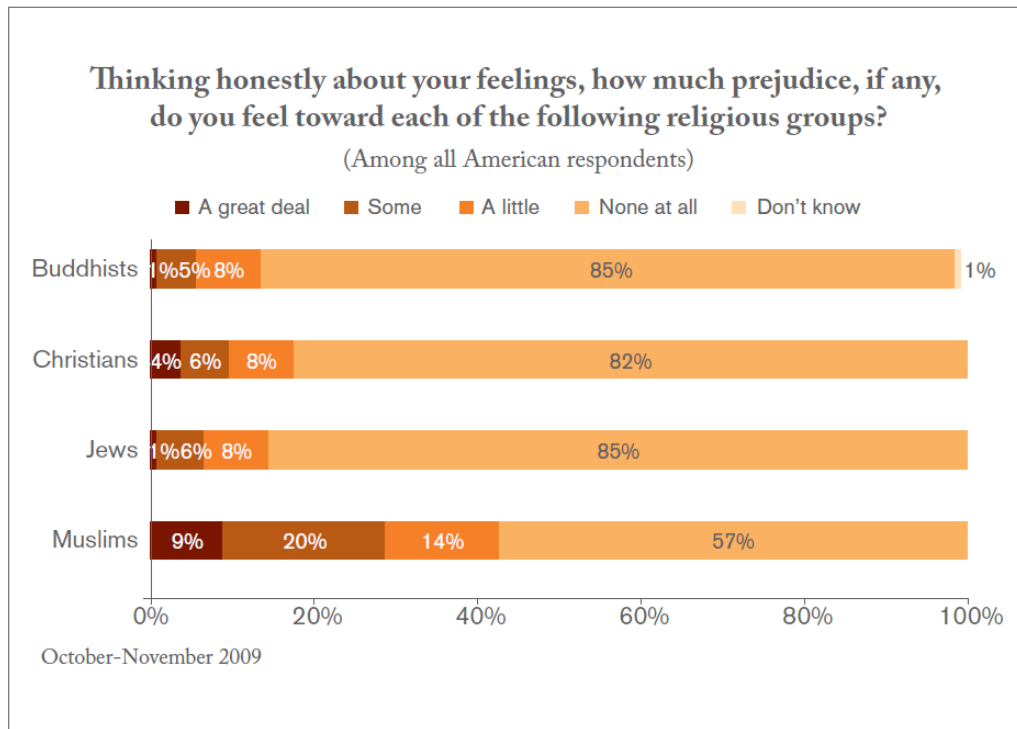
perceived discrimination events and psychological distress in Arab Americans (Moradi & Hasan, 2004a).

The effects of discrimination are also felt in the classroom where students and teachers are made to seem unpatriotic when showing either understanding or support of Arabs or when disagreeing with U.S. policy. Wingfield and Karaman in referencing Knowles and Merryfield notes:

More dangerous were the numerous incidents of anti-Arab hostility during the gulf war with Iraq, when schools and communities were swept by patriotic fervor. The flags, banners, yellow ribbons, patriotic songs, and speakers from the military undermined teachers' efforts to encourage critical thinking about news reports and official statements. There was little chance of understanding Arab society or the humanity of the Iraqi people. Arab American students often felt intimidated and silenced, although the presence of students of Arab origin in classes served to heighten teachers' sensitivity to the human dimension of the conflict. (Wingfield & Karaman, 1995, 2001, p. 143)

One of the more disturbing effects discrimination has on a group of people is the destruction of ties to their homeland. Many Arabs begin Americanizing their names, switching from Mohamed to Mike or Samhia to Sam. This is a particularly tragic because one's name has long been known to be linked to their sense of identity and sense of self. "All of these homeland ties—return travel, family visits, foreign students, family reunification, remittances and charitable donations—are likely to drop significantly due to changes in policies, the social climate and Arab American fears after September 11" (Cainkar, 2002, p. 26). Overall, discrimination is beyond hurtful, it is damaging to people individually and collectively. The

following graph (see figure 25) from Gallup evidences the significant negative sentiment directed toward Muslims:



*Figure 25.* American feelings toward Islam compared to their feelings about other major religions (Gallup, 2009).

While it is difficult to quantify the cumulative impact of discrimination, it can be argued that society does not benefit from marginalizing portions of the population. We do know that discrimination leads to the loss of opportunity and thus has an economic impact. We also know that students who experience discrimination in schools do not achieve as much as their peers who belong to the group in power. We know that hate crimes are a product of a belief system in which some people are lesser than others are. We also know that discrimination lowers self-esteem in adults and in youths and that, discrimination causes hurt and creates anger. Even though a cumulative measure of discrimination's impact is tenuous at best, the negative impact on people is undeniable.

## Summary

The experience of Arabs, and often Muslims, in America is similar to that of many other immigrant groups. Arabs came from nearly two dozen nations in the Middle East to create a better life. Though many of them found an improved existence, they also faced discrimination because of their complexions, names, religion and traditions. Arabs fought and won court battles to be recognized as “white” within the eyes of the law. As a group, they surpassed average Americans in education and earnings although the legal designation of “white” did not completely erase the social stigma of being not white enough.

A series of world events began changing the way America perceived its Arab citizens. Events such as the oil crisis in the 1970s, the Iran hostage crisis that dominated American news in the early 1980, the Gulf War in the early 1990s and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing all morphed the American perception of Arabs from obscure immigrants to a composite of an oil-rich, bloodthirsty terrorist waiting to harm innocent Americans. The aftermath of September 11, 2001 put American Arabs and Muslims into the spotlight, where blame for the attacks was attached to them based on their ethnic and religious identities. In the decade since the September 11, 2001 attacks, Arab, Muslim and other Middle Eastern Americans have been cast as the enemy and have had to learn to negotiate a new, often hostile, social and political landscape where they are frequently unwelcome in their own country.

Chapter 2 presented a brief introduction of Arab people and their waves of immigration to the United States. The chapter went on to summarize discrimination against Arabs in America, both before and after September 11, 2001. A discussion followed which examined types of discrimination, violent and non-violent, as well as spaces in which these acts were likely to occur and the impact these acts inflicted on the targets. Because the result of being targeted for

discriminatory acts results in emotional damage, Chapter 3 will discuss the study's methodology, which was selected to illuminate the emotional impact experienced by the storytellers.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

### **Personal Narrative**

In 1998, my father reconnected with one of his childhood friends, Antonio Saba, from Beit Jala. As it turned out Antonio had immigrated to the U.S. and was living in California. I planned a trip to reunite the two and my father and I flew to Orange County in February 1999.

When we arrived at the home he shared with his wife, Jeannette, I was struck by the smells when I entered. It had the same smells as my family home. The spices from food in the oven and of meals past created a unique scent that I had never even noticed until I smelled it somewhere other than my parents' house. I remember the feeling I had as I recognized the smell. It was that feeling you get when you eat comfort food or wrap up in a warm blanket on a cold day.

Antonio and Jeannette's adult daughter arrived shortly after we got there and as we were introduced, I experienced the strangest sense of belonging and soon noticed that Leila and I resembled one another. I also noticed that the interaction between the family members was eerily similar to that of my own family. Antonio could not be near his daughter without hugging her and his wife, Jeannette, was welcoming and nurturing like my own mother, constantly trying to get me to eat more. Instead of feeling like a stranger in someone else's home, I felt like I was visiting family.

The feeling of fitting in grew when we drove to San Diego and met another daughter. Everyone we encountered that day thought Antonio's daughters were my sisters and that their mother was my mother. In looking at photos of that trip, people who do not know my family always ask, "Is that your mom and sisters?" Even I see the resemblance. Before that trip, I'm not sure I even knew that our house held Arab scents and that we acted like an Arab family. I just

thought every family acts differently but it had never occurred to me that how we acted, looked and how our homes smelled was connected to a village in Palestine that I had only heard about in stories.

## **Introduction**

This chapter introduces my choice of methodology and explains why a qualitative structure with a blend of narrative and autoethnographic methods was the most meaningful way in which to present this study. Muncey (2010), in her book “Creating Autoethnographies” discussed the notion that when studying a topic using traditional methods, the researcher must extract herself from the process to provide a non-biased analysis of the facts. She notes that this leaves us with a missing story- one that can be told and understood when the researcher studies her own experience. Nash and Bradley contend that personal narrative allows the researcher to “analyze, interpret, and reflect on some larger idea or event.” Simply put, this methodology allows you to “Tell your story, speak your truth.” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 67).

This chapter discusses types of data, internal and external, how it was collected and how it was analyzed predominantly using categorical content analysis. While my data analysis did not strictly adhere to categorical content analysis and sometimes leaned strongly into a holistic content analysis, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) support this flexibility when they state “The reader should bear in mind that these fine distinctions are not always clear-cut in the reality of conducting narrative research and interpretation.” (p. 14). The trustworthiness of the method and analysis are discussed with the understanding that trustworthiness guidelines are necessary, but that they are also different from measures and criteria used in traditional research. Shank confirms that approaches to narrative analytic approaches are not always formally structured (Shank, 2006).

## **Qualitative Research**

From the beginning of my study, I knew it would be qualitative. Creswell (2005) defines qualitative research as a methodology “in which the researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants, describes and analyzed these words for themes, and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner.” (p. 39). I knew that while the numbers were important, they alone could not provide the complexity needed to tell this story.

The story I am attempting to tell is about human experience. Not just my own experience, but that of others who have found themselves to be somehow “different” than the majority of the people with whom they come into contact each day, especially since the September 11, 2001 attacks. I investigated different methodologies from phenomenology to case study to narrative until I finally found the approach, autoethnography, which would give the most revealing, honest voice to the story that is being told.

In the early stages, I opted for narrative over phenomenology because I wanted to focus on telling the story. As I worked toward a narrative study in which I would interview respondents and create a collective story, I found that I had difficulty in recruiting potential respondents and noticed that I was not comfortable in recruiting respondents in an aggressive manner. In trying to understand why I was a reluctant researcher and why so many young people with an important story to tell were loath to participate, I had to rethink how I was positioning the respondents in my study.

I called upon Anderson’s (2006) contention that one purpose of autoethnography is to gain an understanding greater than what the data provides. Bearing this concept in mind, it occurred to me that I had situated my respondents as victims in the study, which likely resulted



in their reticence. It is possible that my own reluctance in searching out respondents was due to the fact that I was asking people to reveal experiences that had made them extremely vulnerable when I had not exposed my own life experience for the same type of rigorous examination.

As a researcher, I also struggled with the idea that my own story was a valid piece of the data and so, in the beginning stages of my research, I planned only to tell the story of others. Having never investigated scholarly personal narrative or autoethnography, I had never consciously considered the concept of self as subject. While investigating narrative methods I came across Scholarly Personal Narrative, a narrative genre created by Robert Nash in 2001. Nash contended that while narrative gave a voice to the personal story of the author, scholarly personal narrative ensured that the academic voice of the author was also heard (Nash & Bradley, 2011).

I read several scholarly pieces regarding the notion of using one's self as an internal data source. It then became clear that autoethnography would allow me to examine the experience of Arab Americans post-September 11<sup>th</sup>, through multiple lenses. The experiences could be viewed through an academic lens, through the lens of my own life and through and through the lens of other people's experiences as documented in news stories, social justice web sites and literature regarding the present collective Arab American experience. In placing my own story under the microscope, I gained a measure of authenticity which would allow me to not only examine the stories of other people but it would position me to view the collective story from both an insider and outsider's perspective.

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) define insider status as the researcher "sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants..." p. 55). The concept of being positioned as an insider or outsider with reference to group membership is fluid and often

has blurred boundaries. Although I meet the requirements of an insider and can speak from personal experience, there may be times when I am positioned and treated as an outsider because members of the group being studied do not have personal knowledge or acceptance of my identity or have not extended to me insider status.

As a researcher, the privileged position of insider may add credibility to the study. Dwyer, in Dwyer and Buckle, 2009 discusses her realization that the author of a book she had read, revealed some twenty years later, that he himself was the subject of the book. This newfound knowledge of the author's identity as his own subject gave him more credibility in her view and she felt that he possessed an understanding of the topic that an outside researcher could not have possessed. (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In this study, my position as an insider (Arab American) positions me to have a unique understanding of the stories gathered. This is not a perspective necessarily available to outsider researchers.

Initially, I thought I would be able to sit down and quickly move through this process. I had, after all, spent a substantial part of my life discussing, reflecting, and examining my own identity and how it positions me in the world. What I found was that, in truth, I had examined my identity from a position of comfort and safety, in a completely private setting.

In deciding to become an autoethnographer, I was agreeing to examine my own experiences in a public manner and through lenses that were not colored to keep the pains of vulnerability or the discomfort of truth at bay. Autoethnography would mean that I would have to take my private knowledge and translate it into public discourse. I was looking at learning a new way to give a voice to my experience and to the people I want to speak for. This meant I was going to have to expose my most vulnerable self before those who will never exist within the margins I inhabit and I would need to tell our story in a language they could understand.

My contention in this study has always been that Arab and Muslim people in the U. S. navigate a different daily environment than that of their non-Arab, non-Muslim peers. This environment is not only different, but also frequently hostile. This has been especially true since the 2001 terrorist attacks and while the U.S. continues to be at war in the Middle East.

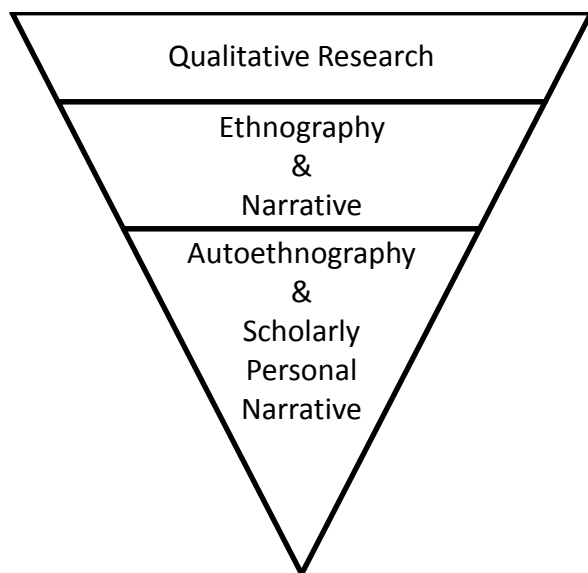
By switching my methodology to autoethnography, and becoming the primary subject of my own research, I became what is known as a complete member researcher or CMR, which Anderson describes as “a complete member in the social world under study” (2006, p. 379). Because of changing my methodology to include my own voice, the original focus shifted away from an examining the experiences of Arab and Muslim high school students to a broader group. The focus became to understand how Arab and Muslim Americans of all ages, experience and negotiate daily life differently than other Americans because of our looks, names or traditions and because of others’ perceptions about Arabs and Muslims.

Shank (2006) notes three basic tenets of qualitative inquiry. The first is that the researcher is part of the research and cannot be separated from the research itself. In this study, the researcher’s insider status provided a certain level submersion into the culture and a level of knowledge that comes from having had similar experiences. Thus, the researcher was part of the research and not separated from the research.

Secondly, qualitative inquiry is usually done to facilitate understanding in a way that benefits people who need empowering or who are marginalized. This study will serve as a record of experiences for educators, policy makers and others who work with diverse groups of people so that they may ensure the people they come in contact with are treated with dignity and respect in their schools and communities.

Finally, qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to look at topics in new ways or essentially, to look outside of the box of traditional research. Examining other cultures and subgroups belonging to a larger culture in a positive light is not a new idea. However, the anger generated after September 11, 2001, requires a renewal of this idea with regard to Arab and Muslim Americans.

Figure 26 models the narrowing focus used in this study. The process begins with qualitative research then narrows to ethnography and narrative. The process then narrows more to a concentration on autoethnography and scholarly personal narrative.



*Figure 26. Overview of methodology*

### **Narrative as method**

In its simplest form, narrative can be defined as the “spoken or written account of a sequence of events” (Webster, 1966). Narrative *is* a told account of one’s experience but narrative embodies more than the visible facts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), describe a three dimensional narrative inquiry space comprised of temporality as one dimension, place as another dimension and personal/social as a third dimension in the narrative space.

Narratives are created by what people witness, and by a unique combination of personal experiences, which includes a specific situation, personal and social interactions, along with notions of past, present and future. The personal narratives generated in this study were a result of specific situations experienced by the researcher that involved being treated a certain way or experiencing the world a particular way due to being Arab and sometimes being mistakenly assumed to be Muslim. The three dimensional narrative inquiry space suggests that the researcher's inquiry must be broad enough to allow the narrator's wealth and breadth of personal experiences to be included in the narrative. The space must also be narrow enough to focus on a specific type of situation, such as discrimination, marginalization or oppression of some type, real or perceived.

Qualitative inquiry and specifically narrative inquiry allow the researcher to delve deeper than traditional qualitative formats that use psychological scales. This ability to go deeper into the essence of the story happens because the narrative format provides respondents the opportunity to tell their stories using their own words, phrases, expressions, and tone. "People are storytellers by nature. Stories provide coherence and continuity to one's experience and have a central role in our communication with others" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7).

Because Arabs have a long history and tradition of being storytellers, and because of the importance of stories in critical race theory, the use of narrative in reporting the results of this study was deemed most appropriate. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) contend that stories are curative in minority communities as the sharing of stories discloses that comparable experiences have been shared by others. "Critical race theorists have built on...the power of stories and persuasion to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 38).

The distinction between storytelling and narrative that is drawn by some researchers should be noted at this point to clarify that while the two may be considered different approaches, they can both be used as data in examining the specific experiences of people who share membership in a common group. Frid, Ahlen and Bergborn (2000, p. 695) as noted in Muncey (2010, p. 43), define a narrative as the telling of one's own experience while storytelling is the relaying of another person's experiences. For the purposes of this study we will use Denzin's (1989) view that a narrative is "a story that tells a sequence of events that are significant for the narrator and his or her audience." (Muncey, 2010, p. 43). Most importantly, with regard to storytelling is the notion that Alia Malek notes in interviews about her work that "storytelling is one of the best ways to humanize people." (Manneh, 2011).

The boundary between fact and fiction is never clear in narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This notion is actually helpful when considering one's own story. Discrimination may be perceived rather than factual but whether real or perceived, it is a valid part of the experience of the person narrating. The researcher, when analyzing the data, must remain cognizant of this issue, as it can be a limitation of the study.

### **Autoethnography**

As we move through the Method section of this paper, one sees the broad frame of this study, which is qualitative research. The frame then narrows to become more specific with a discussion of narrative and storytelling. Now, we tighten the frame even further to situate this research specifically within the category of autoethnography which according to Chang, (2008) is "a research method that utilizes the researcher's autobiographical data to analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions" (p. 9). Autoethnography may be better defined as an approach than a

method, (Muncey, 2010) because it can be used in a variety of research processes. Ellis and Bochner (2000), describe autoethnography in terms that best describe this study:

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond recognition.” (p. 739)

I further narrow our frame once more, using scholarly personal narrative (SPN) to present the internal data. SPN can be defined as “a constructivist research methodology that recognized the researcher’s personal experience as a valid object of study.” (Heidelberger & Uecker, 2009, p. 1) Chang notes that scholarly personal narrative can be a legitimate form that autoethnography may take when it explores the cultural context of the story and its interconnectivity to the person’s own life (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 16).

Ultimately, the decision to view my data in autoethnographic terms is best described by Chang in her contention that autoethnography “gives you freedom to modify your plan as needed so that the most insightful understanding of complex human experiences can be gained with few presumptions and an open mind” (Nash & Bradley, 2011, p. 67).

Muncey,(2010) contends that a researcher’s autoethnographic story will be borne of a consideration of the researcher’s own experiences, outside influences and an examination of the correlation between the two. It was with this concept in mind that I explored the post-9/11

experience of Arabs in America through the lens of personal experience. As an autoethnographer, my internal data was my own personal experience. “The richness of autobiographical narratives and autobiographical insights is valued and intentionally integrated in the research process and ...” (Chang p49). I also compared my own experience with the experiences of other Arab Americans. This use of counter-stories, lends itself to the notion that certain groups are subjugated to the margins of our society based on their exclusion from the dominant power group. This methodology is supported in critical race theory, as it uses counter-stories as a means of identifying the collective experience of people who do not belong to the dominant power set.

### ***Key Features of Analytic Autoethnography***

The first key feature was discussed earlier in this chapter in the section on qualitative research. This feature is called CMR or Complete Member Researcher. Simply stated, the researcher is a complete member of the group they are studying. This membership can provide intimate access to the group being studied but it can also be challenging to objectively document and analyze experiences in which the researcher is so deeply emerged. Aside from guarding the fragile objectiveness of the analytic autoethnographer, the researcher must also reconcile the tensions that are sometimes created when the act of documenting the phenomenon collides with actually experiencing the phenomenon. In this study about being Arab American, being a complete member researcher also meant belonging to two groups that frequently have conflicting interests, or belief systems.

The second key feature of analytic autoethnography is that of analytic reflexivity. Anderson states “reflexivity involves an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their setting and informants.” (p. 382). Acknowledging that the researcher



shapes the research and vice versa allows analytic autoethnographers to more honestly analyze their own experiences and the experiences of others.

The third key feature of analytic autoethnography is that the researcher's voice is visible within the text. Anderson calls this "narrative visibility of the researcher's self." (p. 378). This is especially important because it shows the involvement of the researcher within the investigation. It is the researcher's voice that elicits an emotional response from the reader and this emotional response, one of understanding, is a primary goal of autoethnography.

Dialogue with informants other than the self is the fourth key feature of analytic autoethnography. This feature keeps the work in balance. Because the method seeks to understand a group of people, limiting the data source to only the researcher's self would prevent the researcher from being able to generalize about the group being studied. This is not to say that the dialogue must be verbal interaction with another group member. The interaction with other informants may take the form of reading or listening to their words or viewing their art. The important contribution of this key feature is that it requires the researcher to consider data beyond the self.

The fifth and final key feature to analytic autoethnography is the researcher's commitment to an analytic agenda. Anderson (2006) points out that the purpose of reporting the data is not simply to document the experience but to transcend the data in an effort to bring about an understanding of the social phenomena being studied.

Aside from the common criticisms of autoethnography discussed in the previous section, which include the method being too introspective and self-indulgent, the limitations encountered in this study were situated within the study itself rather than in the methodology of autoethnography. Jackson and Mazzei (2008) argue that a primary limitation of autoethnography

is that the autoethnographer writes “against the disembodied voice of objectivism” thus merely changing the identity of the privileged center.

While criticisms and rejections of the autoethnographic method exist, I found that I land squarely in the camp which contends that autoethnography is not only a legitimate form of research, but that it provides a means of eliciting the truths of individuals for examination that stranger researchers may not be able to elicit. Autoethnography requires a level of self-disclosure that many people would not feel comfortable participating in. Thus, as a researcher, examining some of my most personal experiences, I was able to do so without the inhibitions that may have been present had I been a participant, imparting the same experiences to a stranger researcher.

In this particular study, a limitation was the potential for my own experiences and feeling about those experiences, skewing my findings. To counter this limitation, I used external data sources to support the claims I made throughout the study. Because the majority of the narrative stories in the study were my own, with only a few being the self-told stories of others, I ensured that my own stories were not interpreted as the collective story, but rather pieces of experience that contribute to a collective story.

## **Data**

Because autoethnographers find themselves in two spaces at once, researcher and subject, selecting the type of data that can best tell the intended story can be a challenge. Muncey’s (2010) book “Creating Autoethnographies,” does not refer to data per se but rather to “artistic tools” and “writing tactics.” Carolyn Ellis (2004), in her book, “The Ethnographic I,” discusses field notes, interview and stories but focuses on the writing process rather than a data collection process. Chang (2008), on the other hand, discusses the collection of several types of data including personal memory data, self-observation and self-reflective data and external data.

This difference in approach is indicative of autoethnography itself. Analytic autoethnography is a highly personalized form of research in which the researcher chooses the data based on the aims of the study. In this study, my data is chosen to help develop collective story of what it is like to be Arab or Muslim in the United States since the attacks of September 11, 2001. Most of the data in this study is textual, as is usual in ethnographic studies, (Chang, 2008). I have separated my data sources into internal and external sources.

### ***Internal Sources***

Internal sources were artifacts from my own life. There were my own writings such as essays, journal entries, and field notes. The bulk of the internal data is temporally situated between September 11, 2001 and the following decade although a portion of the memory data was gleaned from my life prior to the 2001 attacks so that I could contextualize my own experiences with regard to being an Arab American woman living in post 9/11 America. The temporal space of photographic data varied. Through the collected internal data, a lens will be created which will focus inward on my own uniquely, personal experience to create an understanding of a self, situated within the cultural context of my identity.

### ***Internal Data Collection***

In collecting data that would tell the story of my experience as an Arab American woman living in post-9/11 America, I began with looking through artifacts that were in my possession. I kept a book which served as both a journal and scrapbook from 2002-2005. The book was never intended to be used as data, but was something I used to record my sorrows and angers, to collect photos, articles and other items that seemed important to me at the time. Because this book was very private and informal, it was also very incomplete. The writings came from a purely expressive and emotional place. There were no formal, objective writings and the pictures and

articles were piecemealed together into a collection of the hurt and anger I felt in the first few years immediately following the events of September 11, 2001.

When I dug the book out of storage and began to look back through it, I understood that parts of the book told pieces of a collective story of the anguish experienced by myself and other Arab and Muslim Americans I knew, had met, or had recently read their writings or listened to them speak publically. In categorizing the components of my book, I found written journal entries, art, photos, articles, bumper stickers, political cartoons, and poetry I had collected. While all of these artifacts were self-reflective data about my experience at the time, they were incomplete and did not cover the several years since the book had made its way into storage.

To create a more thorough internal data set, I chose to write personal narratives about particular incidents and time periods that related to my individual experience and provided data from which to identify themes and commonalities. The letters I included were a series of letters to the editor of a local newspaper. I wrote some of the letters but some letters were written by others and responded to by me. I determined that these few letters spoke to the social climate of fear, anger, and bias that people of Middle Eastern background in the United States were navigating.

Field notes were a category I utilized to record conversations I had with various people, my impressions of events, comments and conversations in which I had engaged. This category was not limited to the above mentioned, as I knew that there would be unforeseen pieces of data and personal observations that would best fit into the category of field notes.

### ***External Sources***

The external sources are published sources, including news articles, editorials, web projects, video interviews, and poetry, photos, and book excerpts. The purpose of my external sources is to reverse the lens and look outward towards the experiences of others who share membership in my group by means of being Arab and or Muslim in a post-9/11 United States.

### ***External Data Collection***

The external sources provide a variety of data pieces from which themes were derived. The external sources also provide a source from which a collective story could be told, as the stories in these sources come from a wide variety of people of different backgrounds, ages, and situations. News articles were used to report specific incidents and to report on the overall condition of the Arab and Muslim experience in the U.S. Many of the news articles include photographs, quotes and charts, all of which are data sources within themselves. Internet projects such as “Untold Stories of 9/11” and video interviews on YouTube will provide first-hand accounts of being Middle Eastern in post-9/11 America. Book excerpts telling individual stories and published poetry will also provide pieces of the collective story of this similar group of people.

### **Data Analysis**

In determining the most appropriate analysis method to use, it was kept in mind that “there are no formulae or recipes for the ‘best’ way to analyze the stories we elicit and collect” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 80). Rather, the aim must be to extract the deepest and truest meaning of the data. In accordance with this belief, the data was analyzed using a categorical content analysis. This method of analysis allows the researcher to extract meaning and detect emergent themes. In categorical-content perspective, “categories of the studied topic are defined,

and separate utterances of the text are extracted, classified, and gathered into these categories/groups” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 13).

### ***Categorical Content Analysis***

Categorical content analysis provides a means in which the original research inquiry could be explored. For instance, repetitive appearances of particular personal factors will provide categories that reveal which personal factors appeared to be related to the perceived discrimination. The use of categorical content analysis allows the emergence of various themes to be connected, thus providing meaning to the data.

Most importantly, the categorical content analysis provides a means for creating a collective story, which is the aim of this study. Holloway and Freshwater (2007), wrote with regard to categorical content analysis, "In the case of several narratives being analyzed, the researcher will move from one story to the next, checking the main features; confirming previous accounts; identifying common elements; and developing a collective story" (p. 85).

### **Trustworthiness**

The quality of this methodology cannot be ascertained by applying traditional research criteria for evaluation. Not only are traditional research criteria impractical for narrative types of studies but “it contradicts the very nature of the narrative approach” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 171) . This is not to imply that narrative research cannot or should not be evaluated for quality. Runyan (1984) suggests seven criteria for determining quality.

1. Providing “insight” into the person, clarifying the previously meaningless or incomprehensible, suggesting previously unseen connections;

2. Providing a feel for the person, conveying the experience of having known or met him or her;
3. Helping us to understand the inner or subjective world of the person, how he or she thinks about their own experience, situation problems, life;
4. Deepening our sympathy or empathy for the subject;
5. Effectively portraying the social and historical world that the person is living in;
6. Illuminating the causes (and meanings) of relevant events, experiences, and conditions; and
7. Being vivid, evocative, emotionally compelling to read (p. 152).

Other researchers suggest basic criteria such as validity and relevance (Hammersley, 1992) or trustworthiness and authenticity (Mishler, 1990). Lieblich et al. (1998) proposes four criteria for evaluating narrative studies. They are width, coherence, insightfulness, and parsimony. To illuminate the human element in this narrative study, Runyan's (1984) seven criteria were used as one determiner of quality in this study.

It is important to note that not all researchers believe narrative analysis can be evaluated with Runyan's (1984) criteria or any other set criteria. Reissman (2008), posits that not only is there not a standardized set of methods but that fixed criteria "are not suitable for evaluating narrative projects." (p. 185). Instead, the qualitative researcher strives to "seek truth by contextualizing their studies and disclosing all relevant procedures used in the study" (Moss, 2004b, p. 371).

### ***Trustworthiness in Categorical Content Analysis***

Within this study, scientific trustworthiness is achieved through the coding of data for common themes, although individual experiences will also be included. Including individual

experiences is paramount in conveying the participant's story authentically and acknowledging that individual experience does not necessarily fall within a designated coded theme. Reserving the right to vary methodologies based on the needs of the participant and researcher is affirmed by Moss (2004a) in her assertion that "Rigor is not a matter of strictly following procedures that have emerged in other researchers' work but more a matter of building solid structures within the context in which one is working." (p. 362). While coding for common themes provides a level of scientific trustworthiness, this particular study also utilized other methods of ensuring trustworthiness in addition to thematic coding including Runyan's (1984) afore mentioned criteria.

Riessman (2008) notes that "narrative is not simply a factual report of events, but instead one articulation told from a point of view that seeks to persuade others to see events in a similar way" (p. 187). Being mindful of this view, the analysis was completed using meticulous documentation while carefully quilting together layers of data as they relate to each other and reveal one story from the a collection of personal narratives. By situating this study within a critical perspective, the narrative tradition creates a space that encourages flexible margins.

### ***Peer Review***

Because of the personal nature of autoethnography, it can be difficult as well as ineffective to apply strict analytic procedures to the analysis process. To add another measure of trustworthiness, peer review was utilized with the intention of having someone else examine the interpretations and conclusions to ensure that evidence existed within the data to support the researcher's claims. Johnson (1997) defines the use of peer review with regard to validity as "Discussion of the researcher's interpretations and conclusions with other people. This includes discussion with a "disinterested peer" (e.g., with another researcher not directly involved). This



peer should be skeptical [sic] and play the "devil's advocate," challenging the researcher to provide solid evidence for any interpretations or conclusions (p. 283).

### ***Reflexivity***

Using reflexivity to create trustworthiness in this study was crucial to the research process. Nash and Bradley (2011) contend that "What is of the utmost importance is not the artistry; it is the willingness to tell your truth as clearly and honestly as you can" (p. 69). Continuous analysis of the researcher's personal involvement in the study was used not only to analyze data but throughout the study, with the intention of eliciting the purest form of the story based on both the internal and external data sources. Because reflexivity is done throughout the process rather than after the process, the researcher is able to adjust the method to better interpret the data. Metaphorically, reflexivity allows the doctor (researcher) to analyze and treat the patient (study data) whereas post-hoc methods tend to resemble an autopsy where the doctor (researcher) can dig in and see what went wrong, but not until after the patient is already dead.

### ***Fidelity***

In the realm of creative trustworthiness, fidelity is an important measure Blumenfeld-Jones (1995b) defines fidelity as "the act of faithfulness and integrity on the part of the researcher to preserve the 'worth and dignity of the teller'" (p. 27). Fidelity "seeks the aesthetic value and relies more heavily on subjective interpretation" (Moss, 2004b, p. 364). This is in contrast to the scientific facet of trustworthiness, which strives for an objective truth. This study seeks to bring awareness to the reader that leads to social action, reflecting the basic goal of critical narrative. With this in mind, the researcher will create a story from the stories of all the other stories that illuminates the experience of one embattled group of people who live in our midst, in an attempt to bring about social change.

## **Limitations of study**

Nicholas Holt, a senior lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University in England is familiar with the criticisms leveled at the autoethnographic method. In his own paper, *Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story*, Holt discusses common criticisms of the method. These criticisms including providing a venue for researchers to engage in “gross self-indulgence”(Coffey, 1999, p. 132 in Holt, 2003) and accusations that the method is “too self-indulgent, introspective and individualized.”(2003, p. 15). These criticisms are directed at the practice of using one’s self as the sole data source.

This study includes, but is not limited to personal data. Anderson (2006) notes that within analytic autoethnography there lies great potential for self-absorption. He also notes that as a result of the criticisms of the method, evocative ethnographers “remain largely marginalized in mainstream social venues” (p. 377). There is a certain irony in the notion that the best method for presenting my research on a marginalized group is through the employment of a marginalized method. Anderson’s same article on analytic autoethnography also provides what he calls the key features of this method, to be discussed in the following section.

## **Summary**

Because the intent of the study was to create a collective story about Arabs living in a post 9/11 America, the natural path was to examine relevant stories of individuals. Using this method allowed me to examine the stories of Arab, Muslim and other Middle Eastern people from a variety of backgrounds. The stories were from men, women, children, Muslims, Arabs, Hindus and others. Some of the storytellers were natural born American citizens and many were immigrants. Like me, some were the children of an immigrant and a natural born American. The stories were those of people with money and those without. The group included professionals,

soldiers, students, and business owners. Because the group had a variety of members, I was able to analyze for themes and identify a collective story about the post-9/11 experience of Arabs living in the United States.

Chapter 4 will tell the stories from which the themes and threads were identified. I have used the poetry of Suheir Hammad (2005) and the blog of Arab American teen Janice Freij (2011). I have included the words of one of the greatest minds ever, Professor Edward Said (2003). I have included news reports and narratives told by my own family and those gathered by other researchers. The chapter will present themes, sub-themes and implications of being Arab in post-9/11 America and ultimately, these tales will be used to tell a larger story. Each story will be another pane in the large window that looks in on the post-9/11 Arab American experience.

## **Chapter 4: Data and Analysis**

### **Personal Narrative**

Like everyone, I have moments that I'm not very proud of. That being said, I confess that I reacted hastily and out of anger when I wrote a letter to the editor of our local paper in response to another letter. Before I share the details of the story, let me first state that the time frame of the letter debacle was a mere twelve weeks after the 9/11 attacks and I was not at my best... I know this is not a good excuse for bad behavior, but truly, it's the best I've got for my actions that day.

Shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001, a local business owned by an Arab Muslim family received concerning phone calls. During the calls, the Assem family was asked why they weren't displaying an American flag (they were displaying a large American flag in the front window of their business) and if they were terrorists. The family reported the phone calls to police who notified the FBI. This was all reported by the local news at the time.

A local woman, Donna, then wrote a letter to the editor of our local newspaper in which she accused the family of lying about the calls to get free advertising. She went on to say that people who condemned the calls were "softheads" and that people from different cultures expect to qualify as saints. Donna continued by saying that the city police and FBI have more important things to do than worry about a couple of phone calls. She claimed that accounts of racism are embellished in this country and thus repugnant. Donna then went on to bash proponents of cultural diversity as threats to free speech. Did I mention that it wasn't a great day for me anyway? Ok, this is where my bad behavior comes in.

Many people responded angrily to Donna's stream of hate-filled letters and on that particular day, it seemed like a good idea to jump on that bandwagon. Never thinking that it

would be published, I responded to Donna's letter with a letter of my own. Instead of sending a constructive letter, mine dripped with sarcasm:

Donna, Donna, Donna, When I see the responses to your letters in the paper, it just tickles me beyond words that even a bunch of 'shallow thinking softheads' such as myself not only recognize pure stupidity, but recognize you as the movement's supreme leader. Could you please do Wyoming a favor and claim to be from another state when writing your letters?

I am sure the FBI will appreciate your tips on tracing phone calls and deciding which cases to address since you obviously know so much about everything. Maybe I should be comforted in knowing that I live in the same town as someone who is smarter than all the collective minds in our police department and in the FBI. What did you say your education and/or experience in that area was?

You'd be in a sorry state of being if you were ever in need of police assistance and got the response that you thought the Assems deserved. 'Sorry Ma'am but we have better things to do than worry about your alleged problems.'

It's actually kind of funny, Donna, but ignorance spewed from people like you is the reason that the FBI and police have to protect people like the Assems.

Maybe if you'd just put a sock in your venom-spewing pie hole, you wouldn't have reasons to write your own letters! If this doesn't work out for you, you could always apply for a job at the FBI with your extensive knowledge of how the bureau works."

I don't even know where I got the phrase "venom-spewing pie hole." I was so horrified when it was published I thought to call and apologize to the woman but she was quicker with the phone than I was. She called that same day, pretending to be someone else-she apparently wasn't

at all familiar with caller-ID- and gave me a piece of her mind. This would have ended there because I had vowed never to write another letter to the editor but apparently, Donna didn't make the same vow.

Donna's letter to the editor in response to mine was brutal. It was titled "Diversity has its problems":

I thought that you wouldn't print personal attacks in your column, or are the rules different if you happen to be from some fanatic, backward culture like Ms. Mufdi? Is that a name or did someone sneeze on the computer? At any rate, I'm happy you did, since Jamillah is no doubt a model of this beautiful Muslim culture that we've been asked to embrace. Wouldn't you just love to live in a neighborhood of hostile, irrational maniacs like her?

Yes, I do know about the workings of the FBI and city police. In my experience, they've always been responsive and capable. Of course, I never called them to report someone being rude or giving me a wrong look. In fact, if I were to be a pathetic little "victim," I would probably say that her letter is more of a threat than the alleged telephone calls to the Assems. At least 10,000 people are witnesses to her behavior. The Assems seem to have no witnesses to their allegations-we're all supposed to take their word for it. It must be difficult for someone from her culture to understand free speech and burden of proof when one makes allegations against others.

Gee Jamillah! Too bad you couldn't intimidate me into silence; I know that's how it's done in your world! If you don't like living with people who feel that proof is necessary when you make allegations, maybe you and your family should go back to that paradise on earth you came from. Why don't you stand out in the middle of Dell Range

Boulevard and throw a tantrum, since decorum and self-control don't seem to be in your character. (Cite this source)

If this letter gets printed it will be my second letter in a month and I will not be able to respond to your next attack. However, don't let that stop you! Because everyone should have the pleasure of learning what kind of animals we have allowed into our peaceful and progressive society, under the pretense of cultural diversity.

Donna

Ouch! Ok, to be honest, I deserved some of those hits for my own letter. The other people she attacked in the letter, however, did not deserve it. I still chuckle when I wonder what she would have thought if she knew "that paradise on earth" I came from was Colorado and that I was not Muslim. I will admit that there have been times when I have indeed felt like a "hostile, irrational, maniac" but it is not because of my culture- just my personality- and I mostly try to only be that way outside of public view.

Because I had truly learned a lesson from the publication of my own letter, I chose not to respond, ever. Still, it didn't end. The editor of the paper wrote a long editorial about the importance of printing Donna's letters so that we could reflect on ourselves as a community and to show locals that "all is not as rosy here as they believe". Several letters followed by community members supporting my stance (as poorly stated as it was), and parents of my students as well as childhood friends wrote in with firsthand testimonials assuring all that I was not the crazy, maniac Donna portrayed. I received countless phone calls of support and in each call, told the callers that I regretted the letter I wrote, but that I appreciated their sentiments.

Sadly, Donna died three weeks later. It had become such a public ordeal, that when she died unexpectedly, I received a call in the middle of the night from a hospital employee who had

followed the letters in the paper. I think she thought I'd be glad that Donna died. I did not rejoice in Donna's misfortune and truthfully, the exchange only confirmed to me how damaging words can be. I was given to understand, unofficially, that she died of a heart attack. I couldn't help but wonder if the hatred she lived with contributed to her death. Either way, we should have been gentler with each other.

Initially I chose to cut this narrative from my dissertation. It's not easy to paint one's self in a less than flattering manner. It is, however, important as an autoethnographer to put my own stories, even the unflattering one, on the table for the same scrutiny and examination to which the other data is subjected.

## **Introduction**

Chapter 2 differentiated the types of data sources as being internal—my own voice, and external—the voices of others. In this chapter actual pieces of data that were analyzed will be presented showing the themes that emerged during the analysis. The chapter will also present a discussion of threads, or commonalities that appeared in the analysis but were not identified as major themes. Often, these threads were symptoms related to one of the themes, rather than a theme in its own right. For instance, common rhetoric used against Arabs and Muslims was a thread related a broader theme of Arabs and Muslims being automatically suspect in America.

The essence of Chapter 4 is my own story and its connectedness to the stories of other Arabs living in America post 9/11. The threads and themes guide the presentation of my own experience. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary reflecting on the threads and themes, thus laying the groundwork for Chapter 5.

Based on the purpose of my study, which was to examine the experience of being Arab American in post-9/11 America by examining how Arab Americans construct and negotiate their



post-9/11 identities, I looked for themes that emerged with regard to being Arab or Muslim American since 9/11. This temporal space is important because Arab and Muslim Americans had to reconstruct their identities. With this reconstruction came learning how to negotiate the new identities in a social and political landscape that had drastically changed in the space of one morning.

Throughout the analysis, there were several common “threads” that developed. Although they did not turn out to be major themes, they were significant in that they served as slots into which incidents could be categorized and re-categorized, providing multiple lenses through which to view the data.

### **Threads**

There were certain settings in which Arab and Muslim Americans were likely to be treated differently due to their religion or ethnicity. These included, but were not limited to schools, airports and planes, public accommodations and mosques. Some settings in which discrimination occurred were not actual physical locations, but realms such as media portrayal and speech by public figures. The types of discriminatory behaviors reported were often specific to the type of setting in which they occurred. Vandalism was prevalent in reports of discrimination at mosques and negative portrayals were common in the media realm. Hate speech was frequent in comments made by public figures. Bullying, harassment and name-calling were common to reports of incidents that happened in schools.

Another thread that emerged was feeling a certain way based on being Arab or Muslim in post-9/11 America. Some of the feelings were based on external factors such as how incidents of prejudice and discrimination by others made us feel and some of the feelings expressed were

more internally based such as how we felt about our own identities as Arab and Muslim Americans.

Commonalities in the content of verbal discrimination emerged as another thread. Frequently, the same messages, with similar words were used when verbally attacking Arab and Muslim Americans. There were also common ways in which physical forms of discrimination were perpetrated.

Gender, while not a major thread, did seem to be a determining factor in which type of discrimination was experienced. Reports of discriminatory behavior due to the person being Arab or Muslim often differed somewhat based on whether the target was male or female.

Whether the target was an adult or youth was also a factor in the types and settings of the discriminatory acts. For instance, adults were more likely to be assaulted by strangers while youth were most vulnerable to attacks by peers in their school.

## **Themes**

Several major themes emerged when analyzing the data. Regardless of how the data were sorted, categorized, or labeled, there were a number of persistent themes into which nearly all the data could fit. There was one overarching or predominant theme that incorporated all the other themes. This was that the events of September 11, 2001, created a completely different America for Arab and Muslim Americans whether they were immigrants or natural born American citizens. The other major themes were all sub-themes that related to our experience after this watershed event. This theme and its sub-themes construct a post-9/11 model of the collective experience of being Arab or Muslim American.

The events of September 11, 2001 are inextricably attached to Arab and Muslim Americans. In some cases, we are haunted by 9/11 because we share the same religion, ethnic

backgrounds or national origins of the hijackers. Some of us share a physical resemblance to the hijackers and sometimes people suspect we must be sympathetic to the hijackers. Like all Americans, Arab and Muslim Americans experienced fear, anger and grief in response to the attacks. Unlike other Americans, we also experienced fear that we would be blamed, and shame that such a horrendous act was committed by other Arabs and Muslims. Much was spoken and printed after September 11, 2001 about how America came together and how Americans united as a people. Unfortunately, Arab and Muslims were excluded from this unification:

Arab and Muslim Americans became the targets of hate crimes, harassment, and government surveillance. Thus, although the events of 9/11 brought together many Americans and led to increased feelings of patriotism and national unity, the public and political response that followed the attacks alienated and further marginalized millions of others. In fact, we were really not ‘all Americans’ on that day.” (Peek, 2011, p. 22)

The sub-themes that illuminate this indelible mark on our collective identity include the following notions:

- Arab and Muslim Americans are suspect, just by nature of being Arab and Muslim
- Discrimination regularly permeates the lives of Arab and Muslim Americans.
- Arab and Muslim Americans are not viewed or treated as “completely *American*”
- A sense of internal conflict exists from being both Arab and American or both Muslim and American.
- Many Arab and Muslim Americans embrace the multiplicity of their identities and feel integrated and even welcomed into the landscape that comprises post-9/11 America.

### **Exploration of Overarching Theme**

### ***9/11 was Watershed Moment for Arab and Muslim Americans***

The overarching theme that emerged was that the events of September 11, 2001 were a momentous game changer in the lives of Arab and Muslim Americans. Whether these people experienced any sort of discrimination against them individually, their status as Americans became suspect. They became members of a group who would be blamed for terrorism, war, inconvenient security measures at airports and be seen as threats to national security, Christianity, and peace.

The analysis of a personal narrative reflection along with a poem by Palestinian American writer and poet, Suheir Hammad demonstrated how inextricably intertwined the events of 9/11 are with Arab and Muslim American identity. Whether this connection is because of how others see us, or how these events altered how we see ourselves, the events of September 11, 2001 were a defining point in the collective experience of being Arab or Muslim American.

Both of the following pieces, my own essay and Hammad's writing reflect on the days and weeks following the events of September 11, 2001. My own narrative was written nearly a decade after, while Hammad's poem takes place a week after the planes crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the Pennsylvania field. Interestingly, I was unaware of Hammad's piece when I wrote my own essay and yet the two pieces shared striking similarities in content, supporting the notion that there is a collective post-9/11 experience shared by Arab and Muslim Americans.

### ***9/11 Narratives***

"first writing since"  
by Suheir Hammad

1. there have been no words.

i have not written one word.

no poetry in the ashes south of canal street.  
no prose in the refrigerated trucks driving debris and dna.  
not one word.  
today is a week, and seven is of heavens, gods, science.  
evident out my kitchen window is an abstract reality.  
sky where once was steel.  
smoke where once was flesh.  
fire in the city air and i feared for my sister's life in a way never  
before. and then, and now, i fear for the rest of us.  
first, please god, let it be a mistake, the pilot's heart failed, the  
plane's engine died.  
then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now.  
please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone  
who looks like my brothers.  
i do not know how bad a life has to break in order to kill.  
i have never been so hungry that i willed hunger  
i have never been so angry as to want to control a gun over a pen.  
not really.  
even as a woman, as a palestinian, as a broken human being.  
never this broken.  
more than ever, i believe there is no difference.  
the most privileged nation, most americans do not know the difference

between indians, afghanis, syrians, muslims, sikhs, hindus.

more than ever, there is no difference.

2. thank you korea for kimchi and bibimbab, and corn tea and the genteel smiles of the wait staff at wonjo the smiles never revealing the heat of the food or how tired they must be working long midtown shifts. thank you korea, for the belly craving that brought me into the city late the night before and diverted my daily train ride into the world trade center.

there are plenty of thank yous in ny right now.

thank you for my lazy procrastinating late ass.

thank you to the germs that had me call in sick.

thank you, my attitude, you had me fired the week before.

thank you for the train that never came,

the rude nyer who stole my cab going downtown.

thank you for the sense my mama gave me to run.

thank you for my legs, my eyes, my life.

3. the dead are called lost and their families hold up shaky

printouts in front of us through screens smoked up.

we are looking for iris, mother of three. please call with any

information. we are searching for priti, last seen on the 103rd

floor. she was talking to her husband on the phone and the line

went. please help us find george, also known as adel. his family is waiting for him with his favorite meal. i am looking for my son, who was delivering coffee. i am looking for my sister girl, she started her job on monday.

i am looking for peace. i am looking for mercy. i am looking for evidence of compassion. any evidence of life. i am looking for life.

4. ricardo on the radio said in his accent thick as yuca, "i will feel so much better when the first bombs drop over there. and my friends feel the same way."

on my block, a woman was crying in a car parked and stranded in hurt. i offered comfort, extended a hand she did not see before she said, "we're gonna burn them so bad, i swear, so bad." my hand went to my head and my head went to the numbers within it of the dead iraqi children, the dead in nicaragua. the dead in rwanda who had to vie with fake sport wrestling for america's attention.

yet when people sent emails saying, this was bound to happen, lets not forget u.s. transgressions, for half a second i felt resentful. hold up with that, cause i live here, these are my friends and fam, and it could have been me in those buildings, and we're not bad people, do not support america's bullying.

can i just have a half second to feel bad?

if i can find through this exhaust people who were left behind to  
mourn and to resist mass murder, i might be alright.

thank you to the woman who saw me brinking my cool and blinking back  
tears. she opened her arms before she asked "do you want a hug?" a  
big white woman, and her embrace was the kind only people with the  
warmth of flesh can offer. i wasn't about to say no to any comfort.  
"my brother's in the navy," i said. "and we're arabs".  
"wow, you got double trouble." word.

5. one more person ask me if i knew the hijackers.  
one more motherfucker ask me what navy my brother is in.  
one more person assume no arabs or muslims were killed.  
one more person assume they know me, or that i represent a people.  
or that a people represent an evil.  
or that evil is as simple as a flag and words on a page.

we did not vilify all white men when mcveigh bombed oklahoma.  
america did not give out his family's addresses or where he went to  
church. or blame the bible or pat robertson.  
and when the networks air footage of palestinians dancing in the  
street, there is no apology that hungry children are bribed with  
sweets that turn their teeth brown. that correspondents edit images.



that archives are there to facilitate lazy and inaccurate  
journalism.

and when we talk about holy books and hooded men and death,  
why do we never mention the kkk?

if there are any people on earth who understand  
how new york is feeling right now,  
they are in the west bank and the gaza strip.

6. today it is ten days. last night bush waged war on a man once  
openly funded by the cia. i do not know who is responsible. read too many  
books, know too many people to believe what i am told. i don't give a fuck  
about bin laden. his vision of the world does not include me or those  
i love. and petitions have been going around for years trying to get  
the u.s. sponsored taliban out of power. shit is complicated,  
and i don't know what to think.

but i know for sure who will pay.  
in the world, it will be women, mostly colored and poor. women will  
have to bury children, and support themselves through grief.

"either you are with us, or with the terrorists"  
meaning keep your people under control and your resistance censored.

meaning we got the loot  
and the nukes.

in america, it will be those amongst us who refuse blanket attacks  
on the shivering. those of us who work toward social justice, in  
support of civil liberties, in opposition to hateful foreign policies.

i have never felt less american and more new yorker, particularly  
brooklyn, than these past days. the stars and stripes on all these  
cars and apartment windows represent the dead as citizens first,  
not family members, not lovers.

i feel like my skin is real thin, and that my eyes are only going to  
get darker. the future holds little light.

my baby brother is a man now, and on alert, and praying five times a  
day that the orders he will take in a few days time are righteous and  
will not weigh his soul down from the afterlife he deserves.

both my brothers - my heart stops when i try to pray - not a beat to  
disturb my fear. one a rock god, the other a sergeant, and both  
palestinian, practicing muslim, gentle men. both born in brooklyn  
and their faces are of the archetypal arab man, all eyelashes and  
nose and beautiful color and stubborn hair.

what will their lives be like now?

over there is over here.

7. all day, across the river, the smell of burning rubber and limbs  
floats through. the sirens have stopped now.  
the advertisers are back on the air.  
the rescue workers are traumatized.  
the skyline is brought back to human size.  
no longer taunting the gods with its height.

i have not cried at all while writing this. i cried when i saw those  
buildings collapse on themselves like a broken heart. i have never  
owned pain that needs to spread like that. and i cry daily that my  
brothers return to our mother safe and whole.

there is no poetry in this. there are causes and effects. there are  
symbols and ideologies. mad conspiracy here, and information we will  
never know. there is death here, and there are promises of more.  
there is life here. anyone reading this is breathing, maybe hurting,  
but breathing for sure. and if there is any light to come, it will  
shine from the eyes of those who look for peace and justice after the  
rubble and rhetoric are cleared and the phoenix has risen.  
affirm life.

we got to carry each other now.

you are either with life, or against it.

affirm life.

(Hammad, 2005, p. 98)

### ***My 9/11***

While the attacks of September 11, 2001 impacted all Americans, Arab and Muslim Americans carried with them an extra burden. The collective shame, guilt and fear of retaliation was ever present for Arabs, Muslims and those who looked like them living in the United States at the time of the attacks. Instead of being able to grieve with the rest of the nation, an entire group of citizens had suddenly turned into the enemy overnight. A popular refrain in the Arab and Muslim community is that we went to bed white on September 10 and woke up Arab on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Our names, faces, cultural practices, and religious garb were suddenly suspicious. We were no longer welcome in places we had once frequented and neighbors closed their doors to us. Non-Arab family members disowned us and we quietly discussed amongst ourselves what was to become of Arabs in America.

#### **When the Towers Fell**

I was at home in Wyoming, nearly 2000 miles from New York City, getting ready to go to work. It must have been somewhere around seven a.m. when I noticed the breaking news report about a plane crashing into the World Trade Center. I was stunned. How could such a horrible accident happen? Why do they even allow planes to fly that close to skyscrapers? Was it instrument failure? Surely, the pilot could see that he was in the wrong place. How could he not get a visual on buildings that were more than a hundred stories tall? A news reporter questioned whether this event could be an attack and I was immediately irritated that they always

sensationalize even the most minor of events and I thought using scare tactics was a cheap shot for a situation so obviously tragic.

My 15-year-old stepson came upstairs and sat on the sofa beside me and we watched with our mouths open as another plane crashed into the second tower. I was shocked. Had the radars malfunctioned, directing these huge airliners to crash into buildings? Were more planes going to crash before they could fix this navigation catastrophe? How could this have happened? We were supposed to be safe when we flew and some huge error had resulted in these two planes crashing into the World Trade Center. This situation was totally unacceptable, I thought indignantly.

Somewhere, from the television, I heard the reporter indicating that this was surely a calculated attack. I turned to my stepson, rolled my eyes, and told him that news people always try to make a big deal out of nothing. As I heard the absurdity in those words coming out of my mouth, I felt sick to my stomach. Was it naiveté or was it denial? For some reason, it never occurred to me that this was more than a tragic accident. Maybe it was a subconscious, instinctive denial my mind was engaging in to protect me. Maybe I had more faith in humanity and simply could not imagine that such an event could have been intended.

Once my brain processed that we were indeed witnessing a terrorist attack, my mind reflexively took me to the next step. For me this step was where I repeat silently in my head “please don’t let it be Arabs. Please don’t let it be Arabs...and if it is Arabs, please don’t let it be Palestinians.”

While people were falling hundreds of feet to their deaths, burning, running for their lives and being paralyzed with fear that one of their loved ones was unsafe, I was experiencing a different brand of terror. That of being Arab, when it was possible that Arabs just committed the worst attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor. I picked up my coffee and brief case and went to

work while pausing for a brief second to be grateful that my stepchildren were blue-eyed with blonde hair and would not suffer for the crimes committed this day.

As I arrived at the high school where I teach, I saw that students and staff were gathered around television monitors throughout the building. Few people were speaking and most just stared silently at the news feeds of the burning towers. I moved quietly to my office, praying over and over that this attack was not carried out by Arabs. I pray hard. I'm not religious now, nor have I ever been religious. I'm not sure who I am praying to...maybe god, maybe fate, maybe I'm not really praying but wishing. Wishing so hard that I can make it someone other than the Arabs who have perpetuated this atrocity.

By 7:20 a.m. MST, Osama bin Laden's name has already been mentioned by CBS news correspondent, Jim Stewart, as a possible suspect. Shit. Let him be wrong. They always blame the Arabs first. Remember Oklahoma City? Ironically, it was the same correspondent, Jim Stewart, who announced just hours after the OKC bombing that "The betting here is on Middle East terrorists." Connie Chung, reporting on the same bombing said that "According to a government source, it has Middle East terrorism written all over it," What? Middle East terrorism? Does debris look different when it has been bombed by a white Christian? See? Maybe they have just gotten it wrong again and it won't be Arabs.

How selfish of me. People are dying and losing loved ones and I'm worried about myself. No, it's much more than simply being worried about myself. What about my wonderful, kind Arab father? His name is Jadallah. It means gift from God- how can people hate him? What about my mother, who is married to an Arab? My Arab family and friends? What about the Palestinian cause? How will we ever claim the right to self-determination if the whole world hates us?

Within an hour of arriving at work, the towers have collapsed, a plane crashed into a Pennsylvania field and another has hit the Pentagon. My heart is sick. There are reports that more planes have been hijacked and while the White House maybe a target and we don't know where the others may crash.

In my defense, I'm not thinking only of my Arab family and self. I'm also thinking of my American family and self. What the hell is happening to us? This stuff doesn't happen in America! It only happens in places like...Arab countries. Crap. There is no getting away from this. As an American, I'm being attacked by Arabs and as an Arab I'll soon be attacked by Americans. Not looking good.

The Days Following...

I spent the days following the attacks glued to my television. I slept little and was very unproductive at work. I had been outspoken regarding the Palestinian cause and felt my coworkers were judging me as an "Arab sympathizer" and thus somehow sympathetic to the 9/11 hijackers. Many coworkers avoided eye contact, while others not knowing I was Arab made racist, hostile comments about Arabs in front of me. A social studies teacher had suggested that, as a class activity, a Jewish teacher and I discuss the Palestinian/Israeli conflict in front of the history classes so that students could hear perspectives from both sides. After the attacks, the same teacher canceled the activity and said to me that she didn't want anyone coming into her class and justifying suicide bombings.

At night when I should have been sleeping I was replaying in my head how I would have tried to get out of the towers. How many steps could I have taken at once? Should I stop and help others? I'd have had to have been below the impact point or the stairs may have been gone. Could I have navigated my way through smoke to safety? Should I call loved ones? What should

I tell them? Would my cell phone work? How long does it take to get down a hundred flights of stairs? Why the hell would people jump? What if by some freak miracle you could have found a way out but you jumped instead? When people jumped, were they cognizant of the last seconds?

At length, I would finally jump up out of bed, heart racing and go to my bedroom window. My parents live at a diagonal to me. I would look at their house to ensure that all was quiet and that no one had vandalized or burned anything in their yard. How would I protect my parents from those wanting revenge against Arabs? Would law enforcement care if I called them and reported aggression against an Arab family? In Chicago, a corrections officer from the Sherriff's department was involved in beating an Arab American cab driver in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks (Elaasar, 2004, p. 66). At other times, I lay awake rehearsing what I would say to people who confronted me about defending Arabs. Even though I knew I couldn't reason with people at this point in time about the hijackers not representing Arabs and Muslims, I still rehearsed conversations in my head until my exhaustion became depression.

I remember going to my parents' house one evening and visiting about nothing in particular when my father and I began discussing the news. Unexpectedly, from what seemed like out of nowhere, I burst into tears, sobbing that we were going to be blamed. My father, instead of telling me I was being ridiculous, told me that we must be careful of what we say in public right now.

### **Comparison of the 9/11 narratives**

In the following comparison of a personal narrative, "My 9/11" and "first writing since" by Suheir Hammad, I have separated excerpts by author initials. "My 9/11" excerpts are represented by the initials JM and "first writing since" excerpts are signified by the initials SH.

*Maybe this was an accident-not an attack...*



**SH:** first, please god, let it be a mistake, the pilot's heart failed, / the plane's engine died.

**JM:** Had the radars malfunctioned, directing these huge airliners to crash into buildings? Were more planes going to crash before they could fix this navigation catastrophe? How could this have happened? How could such a horrible accident happen? Why do they even allow planes to fly that close to skyscrapers? Was it instrument failure? Surely, the pilot could see that he was in the wrong place. How could he not get a visual on buildings that were more than a hundred stories tall?

When the world was first made aware that one of the World Trade Center towers was on fire, even news reports speculated that it may have been an explosion from inside. Others speculated that it was simply a plane crash. President Bush was initially told that it was believed that a twin engine plane had simply crashed into the World Trade Center.(Patel, 2001). It is likely that this reaction of disbelief about being attacked was not specific to Arab and Muslim Americans, but rather, we tend to remember specifically that our initial belief, our initial hope, was that this was simply a tragic accident.

***Please, please, don't let it be Arabs...***

**SH:** then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now. /

please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone / who looks like my brothers.

**JM:** praying over and over that this attack was not carried out by Arabs. I pray hard. I'm not religious now, nor have I ever been religious. I'm not sure who I am praying

to...maybe god, maybe fate, maybe I'm not really praying but wishing. Wishing so hard that I can make it someone other than the Arabs who have perpetuated this atrocity.

For me this step was where I repeat silently in my head "please don't let it be Arabs.

Please don't let it be Arabs...and if it is Arabs, please don't let it be Palestinians."

The similarities in my essay and Hammad's poem are coincidental but not unexpected. It could be easily argued that most Arab and Muslim Americans shared hopes that the attacks were not attacks and that if they were indeed attacks, that they were not committed by Arabs or Muslims. It was a sentiment that appeared over and over.

In an interview, Alia Malek, a Syrian American author and journalist, was asked what came to mind when she became aware of the attacks. She responded, "I was walking to work, walking past the IMF and the World Bank [in Washington] and when I saw that we were under attack, the first thing I thought was I hope no one I know is hurt, I hope all my friends are okay, and I hope it's not Arabs" (Manneh, 2011). Aman Ali, one of two Muslim students in a high school with nearly 2000 students recalls talking with the other Muslim student "At first we were like, 'Man, I hope it's a white guy.'" (McCloud, 2010).

***So lucky...***

**SH:** 2. thank you korea, for the belly craving that brought me into / the city late the night before and diverted my daily train ride into / the world trade center.

there are plenty of thank yous in ny right now.

thank you for the train that never came, / the rude nyer who stole my cab going  
downtown. / thank you for the sense my mama gave me to run. / thank you for my legs,  
my eyes, my life.

**JM:** pausing for a brief second to be grateful that my stepchildren were blue-eyed with  
blonde hair and would not suffer for the crimes committed this day.

People gave thanks for different things after the 9/11 attacks. Some were thankful that  
they were not in the towers. Others were thankful that no one they knew was killed in the attacks.  
For Arabs and Muslims thanks was given for all of the above and given by some for not  
outwardly appearing to be Arab or Muslim.

***What will happen to my family?***

**SH:** and now, i fear for the rest of us

my baby brother is a man now, and on alert, and praying five times a / day that the orders  
he will take in a few days time are righteous and / will not weigh his soul down from the  
afterlife he deserves.

both my brothers - my heart stops when i try to pray - not a beat / to disturb my fear. one  
a rock god, the other a sergeant, and both / palestinian, practicing muslim, gentle men.  
both born in brooklyn / and their faces are of the archetypal arab man, all eyelashes and /  
nose and beautiful color and stubborn hair.

what will their lives be like now?

**JM:** What about my wonderful, kind Arab father? What about my mother, who is  
married to an Arab? My Arab family and friends?

**SH:** ...and i cry daily that my / brothers return to our mother safe and whole.

**JM:** How would I protect my parents from those wanting revenge against Arabs? Would law enforcement care if I called them and reported aggression against an Arab family?

The fear of backlash experienced by Arab and Muslim Americans has been widely written about. From news articles to books to interviews to entire studies, there has never been any doubt that Arab and Muslim Americans knew a heavy price would be extracted from them simply for sharing the ethnicity or religion of the attackers. The Arab American National Museum was only one year into its planning stage in September of 2001. While the museum had already collected numerous stories and artifacts from Arab Americans to display in the museum, the attacks generated an intense fear for the contributors. Many who had provided information and artifacts to the museum wanted out of the project. In an article published by the American Association of Museums, the director of the Arab American National Museum reflected on this fear.

Many Arab Americans wanted to distance themselves from their Arab heritage and did not want to share their stories and experiences. Some of the people whom I had planned to feature in the permanent exhibits contacted me, demanding not to be included and asking for their artifacts back. They expressed fear at having their stories in an “Arab” public place like the museum. Some, especially new immigrants who were most often victims of hostility, questioned the legitimacy and the sanity of building an Arab-American museum in the existing climate” (Ameri, 2006).

***Arabs and Muslims are going to pay...***

**SH:** we did not vilify all white men when mcveigh bombed oklahoma.

**JM:** They always blame the Arabs first. Remember Oklahoma City?

**SH:** that correspondents edit images. / that archives are there to facilitate lazy and inaccurate / journalism.

**JM:** Osama bin Laden's name has already been mentioned by CBS news correspondent, Jim Stewart, as a possible suspect. Shit. Let him be wrong. They always blame the Arabs first. Remember Oklahoma City? Ironically, it was the same correspondent, Jim Stewart, who announced just hours after the OKC bombing that "The betting here is on Middle East terrorists." Connie Chung, reporting on the same bombing said that "According to a government source, it has Middle East terrorism written all over it,"

**SH:** 4. ricardo on the radio said in his accent thick as yuca, "i will / feel so much better when the first bombs drop over there. and my / friends feel the same way."

on my block, a woman was crying in a car parked and / stranded in hurt. i offered comfort, extended a hand she did not see before she said, / "we"re gonna burn them so bad, i swear, so bad."

**JM:** others not knowing I was Arab made racist, hostile comments about Arabs in front of me.

**SH:** i don't give a fuck / about bin laden. his vision of the world does not include me or those / i love.

**JM:** After the attacks, the same teacher canceled the activity and said to me that she didn't want anyone coming into her class and justifying suicide bombings.

Again this is not a difficult argument to make: During the attacks of September 11, 2001, Arab and Muslim Americans knew they would bear the responsibility for these attacks. Dean Obeidallah, a Palestinian Muslim American comedian wrote in an article for CNN that "...as I stood on the corner of Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue in Lower Manhattan on that fateful

September morning watching in horror as the towers crumbled before my eyes, I knew all our lives would change.” (Obeidallah, 2011b).

Even our leaders shouted to us that we no longer belonged and that our lives would change.

- Just turn [the sheriff] loose and have him arrest every Muslim that crosses the state line.” Rep. C. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA).
- “If I see someone come in that’s got a diaper on his head, and a fan belt wrapped around that diaper on his head, that guy needs to be pulled over.” Louisiana Congressman John Cooksey (R-LA).

More frequently were the verbal reminders from people who were not leaders but “shock-jock” mouthpieces who had access to network microphones.

- “We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity.” Ann Coulter. (Coulter, 2001)
- “I don't think that many westernized Muslims know when they pray five times a day that they're cursing Christians and Jews five times a day. ... I believe in the idea of a moderate Muslim. I do not believe in the idea of a moderate Islam.”

Pamela Geller. (Barnard & Feurer, 2010)

My fears regarding the aftermath of 9/11 were not unfounded. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, hate crimes greatly increased against Arabs, Muslims and many people who were incorrectly perceived to be Arab or Muslim. According to the FBI, this attacks increased seventeen fold in the first year following the 9/11 attacks. Victims were verbally attacked, beaten and even murdered. Their vehicles, homes and mosques were vandalized. Middle Eastern “looking” people where kicked off airplanes, fired from employment and some experienced

housing discrimination (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Police and FBI misconduct, hate speech and intimidation, as well as educational discrimination and defaming comments by public figures became commonplace occurrences for Arabs and Muslims Americans and those who looked like them (Ibish & Stewart, 2003).

Many Arab and Muslims chose to stay in their homes during the period immediately following 9/11 for fear of being attacked. Others chose to publicly speak out, insisting that Arab and Muslims living in the United States were just as patriotic as other Americans. A few even ventured so far as to suggest that the U.S. may want to review foreign policy and see why Arab and Muslim groups may have wanted to attack the U.S. Some Muslim women stopped wearing hijab while others began wearing hijab in defiance of attacks on their religion (Sirin & Fine, 2008). In some cases, Muslim men stopped using their Arab names and became Michaels instead of Mohammeds. Some Arab and Muslim Americans were put under surveillance and racial profiling was openly used against them. Many were detained by law enforcement and other government entities.

For many Arab and Muslim Americans the political climate of the U.S. starkly resembled that of WWII when Japanese citizens were treated as enemy combatants and interned in camps. “As with the Japanese in 1941 and al-Qaeda in 2001, the government decides to target those that are close by and "look like" the enemy, those being Japanese, Arab, Muslim, and South Asian Americans. What follows this type of thinking? Hate crimes and bias incidences, as those that "look like the enemy" can become victimized and killed. (Akiyama, 2008, p. 212). Arab and Muslim people had individual reactions, but they also had a collective response to the attacks.

Collectively, the Arab community tried to convince the rest of America that we were not the enemy. We displayed American flags everywhere we could put them, from our yards to our

cars to our lapels. We sent our sons and daughters off to wars in which they would kill other Arabs and Muslims. We sought out civil rights groups such as the ACLU, ADC, AAISU, and CAIR in hopes we would be afforded some protections and find comfort in the company of others who were unfairly bearing the blame for the attacks. Muslim and Arab groups made public statements condemning the attacks and affirming their commitment to America. Still, hate toward Arab and Muslim Americans festered. “The violence, discrimination, defamation and intolerance now face by Arabs in American society has reached a level unparalleled in their over 100-year history in the US.” (Cainkar, 2002, p. 22).

As to why Arab and Muslim Americans were perceived as responsible for the 9/11 attacks, Louise Cainkar explains the mass blame as a result of Arabs and Muslims not being extended white privilege. “...because ‘whiteness’ bears the privilege of individual culpability, negative actions such as the abuse of Iraqi, Afghani, or other Arab or Muslim prisoners are represented as the work of lone ‘bad apples’” (Cainkar, 2008, p. 52). Thus, Cainkar implies that the non-white bear collective culpability for the actions of people who share similar biological or religious characteristics. This notion of collective and individual culpability lends itself to understanding why White, Christian males were not targeted after the Oklahoma City bombing.

***Our hearts broke that day, too...***

**SH:** i cried when i saw those / buildings collapse on themselves like a broken heart.

**JM:** Within an hour of arriving at work, the towers have collapsed, a plane crashed into a Pennsylvania field and another has hit the Pentagon. My heart is sick.

**SH:** can i just have a half second to feel bad?

**JM:** Instead of being able to grieve with the rest of the nation,



For some reason, during the events of September 11, 2001, Arab and Muslim Americans lost their membership in the club known as America. While we were still American on paper, we were not considered American by our fellow Americans. As Americans, we felt the full impact of the devastating attacks just like everyone else in America and then we felt even more devastation. Because of the perceived collective culpability for the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, even Arab grief was suspect. Some believed we secretly celebrated the attacks while others claimed to have seen Arab and Muslim Americans openly celebrating the attacks in public places around the United States. The following photo (see figure 27) illustrates a conflict of identity.

*I'm American, I'm Arab...*



Figure 27. Arab? American? Muslim?(Ezzat, 2010).

**SH:** hold up with that, cause i live here, these are my friends and fam, / and it could have been me in those buildings,

**JM:** I'm also thinking of my American family and self. As an American, I'm being attacked by Arabs and as an Arab I'll soon be attacked by Americans.

My own most profound sense of grief came from the tension I felt, being both Arab and American. It seemed that if we were not openly critical of all Arabs and Muslims, we were not

patriotic, not supportive of the troops and not really American. Attempts I made to separate the hijackers from other Arabs and Muslims were received as me defending the attackers and having questionable loyalties and when I was too emotionally exhausted to discuss it anymore, I was haunted by the guilt of not speaking up.

### **Exploration of Sub-Themes**

#### ***Arab and Muslim Americans are Automatically Suspect since September 11, 2001***

Arab and Muslim Americans knew before anyone else that they would face terrible consequences for the 9/11 attacks. As soon as we (Americans) knew we were being attacked we (Arabs and Muslims) knew that we would be found guilty by association, or in this case, guilty by the crime of having similar names, faces or traditions as the hijackers. It was likely our parents, who had enough life experience to understand, that knew first.

In my essay, *My 9/11*, I wrote of my own father warning me to be careful what I say now. In a focus group interview with Sirin and Fine, eighteen year old Samira recounts her mother's warning to her: "my mom would tell me...just right after September 11<sup>th</sup>—if anybody asks you what you are, don't tell them. Lie." (2008, p. 11). American soccer player Omar Jarun remembers his father's advice. "After 9/11 it was very difficult. My dad would tell me: 'Be careful what you say.'" Adamah Bah, a sixteen-year-old Muslim girl, raised in the New York since age two remembers calling her father immediately after the attacks. Her father told her "Shh, don't talk about it. Be quiet, bye." (Malek, 2011, p. 27).

I was not aware of this trend as I gathered stories. Though I was not looking for these instances, they kept appearing, leading me to believe that our Arab and Muslim parents knew long before anyone else, that they and their children had just become members of a sub-group of Americans who were now suspect, now the enemy.

## **Flying Narrative**

### ***The Randomness of Flying While Arab***

My husband collects TSA notices from my luggage and puts them on a wall in his office. The TSA assures us that this is completely random and purely coincidental that I am “randomly” selected for luggage searches each time I fly. Some of my husband’s colleagues note that they too, have found a TSA slip in their luggage. He asks them if they get one every time they fly.

My mother-in-law believes that if I would just use my husband’s last name rather than my family name, this wouldn’t be an issue. I’m not willing to hide my Arabness and even if I were, I know that regardless of what name I use, in the eyes and databases of the TSA, I am an Arab.

In the fall of 2007 I attended a conference for educators in Vancouver, BC with five colleagues. While I jokingly quipped that they may not want to sit with me on the plane, I knew that being my travel companion could be an experience of utter inconvenience. When we checked in at the small airport in a rural western town, the ticket agent looked over my passport and her computer screen and asked where I was from. “Here.” I said.

“No. I meant, where were you born?” she asked.

“Colorado.” I said.

She looked somewhat confused and said “That’s not what I meant...your name...?”

I knew exactly what she meant but didn’t feel obligated to offer up any information. She apparently decided not to pursue the issue and sent me to the folding table that served as the security line for searching luggage. I stood there as my luggage was searched and I was allowed to board my flight. In truth, I hardly found this event notable and it was only in hindsight that I spent any time really considering the conversation.

In Denver, I boarded my flight to Vancouver without incident but upon arrival in Vancouver, each of my five colleagues pulled their luggage from the carousel while I waited until the carousel stopped, indicating that no more bags were forthcoming. My boss, a formidable woman who stands over six feet tall and is used to being in charge was growing impatient. “Sorry,” I mumbled. “This happens sometimes when I fly.”

“Don’t be ridiculous!” she scolded me. “I’ll find out where it is.” With that, she marched over to customer service and demanded that they find my luggage immediately. The agent made a few brief strokes on his keyboard and told my boss that my luggage wasn’t lost after all.

“Good. Where is it? We need to get our cab.” She impatiently informed the agent.

“It’s been ‘randomly’ detained at customs in Denver for further screening. It will be here tomorrow assuming it’s released from customs and then we’ll deliver it to your hotel.” The agent explained.

My boss was about to argue when I saw the realization in her face, that this really was about my ethnic background. She seemed visibly uncomfortable and avoided making eye contact with me. She told me that I was excused from the morning sessions of our conference so that I could go purchase clothing to hold me until my luggage was released by customs. My luggage did arrive the next day, with my requisite ‘random’ TSA slip tucked neatly inside, and my belongings, which had been unceremoniously rearranged.

While the realization that I am sometimes treated differently because I am Arab made my boss uncomfortable, she didn’t realize that she also treated me differently on occasion. For instance, she always ensured that all two hundred plus employees received a card before Christmas vacation. While everyone else received the same Christmas card, I always received a “Happy Holidays” card. I understand that she was trying to be respectful of my Muslim beliefs,

which would have been really nice if I had been a Muslim. She is not alone in assuming that all Arabs are Muslims. One of our secretaries, the one charged with getting me the “special” card heard me say once that I wasn’t Muslim and she wanted to know when my family converted.

“Never” I told her. “My father came from a Christian village in Palestine.” She seemed surprised that the Christian village would allow us “Muslims” to live there with them. Sensing her confusion, I asked her “Have you heard of Bethlehem? It’s right next to my father’s village. My family has always been Christian.” She seemed further confused wondering why there would be Arabs near Bethlehem (and Muslim ones at that) and still not clear on when my family converted... “Never mind.” I said. “Thanks for the card.”

The rest of my Vancouver trip was uneventful. At least it was until we went back to the airport a week later. My colleagues teased me that they were going to act like they didn’t know me so that their luggage wouldn’t get held, too. All seemed to be going smoothly when an armed agent ‘randomly’ approached me in line and quietly instructed me to follow him. I was escorted to a separate security line where I was questioned and my carry-on luggage was inspected. The agent was very polite and made conversation about my home state and then took me back to my group. My colleagues were speechless.

Actually, I was glad that five people who knew me witnessed the experience of flying while Arab. I believe that there was a certain awareness they gained that week. Once home, I unpacked my gift-laden suitcase. I gave my mother a Christmas tree ornament, my father some smoked salmon and for my husband, two brand new, ‘randomly’ placed, TSA inspection slips for his office wall (see figure 28).



 <p><b>Transportation Security Administration</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>NOTICE OF BAGGAGE INSPECTION</b></p> <hr/> <p>To protect you and your fellow passengers, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is required by law* to inspect all checked baggage. As part of this process, some bags are opened and physically inspected. Your bag was among those selected for physical inspection.</p> <p>During the inspection, your bag and its contents may have been searched for prohibited items. At the completion of the inspection, the contents were returned to your bag.</p> <p>If the TSA security officer was unable to open your bag for inspection because it was locked, the officer may have been forced to break the locks on your bag. TSA sincerely regrets having to do this, however TSA is not liable for damage to your locks resulting from this necessary security precaution.</p> <p>For packing tips and suggestions on how to secure your baggage during your next trip, please visit:</p> <p><b>www.tsa.gov</b></p> <p>We appreciate your understanding and cooperation. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact the TSA Contact Center:</p> <p>Phone: 866.289.9673 (toll free) Email: TSA-ContactCenter@dhs.gov</p> <p><small>* Section 110(b) of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2001, 49 U.S.C. 44901(c)-(e)</small></p> <hr/> <p>Rev. 8-1-2004</p> <p><b>Smart Security Saves Time</b></p>	 <p><b>Transportation Security Administration</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>NOTICE OF BAGGAGE INSPECTION</b></p> <hr/> <p>To protect you and your fellow passengers, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is required by law* to inspect all checked baggage. As part of this process, some bags are opened and physically inspected. Your bag was among those selected for physical inspection.</p> <p>During the inspection, your bag and its contents may have been searched for prohibited items. At the completion of the inspection, the contents were returned to your bag.</p> <p>If the TSA security officer was unable to open your bag for inspection because it was locked, the officer may have been forced to break the locks on your bag. TSA sincerely regrets having to do this, however TSA is not liable for damage to your locks resulting from this necessary security precaution.</p> <p>For packing tips and suggestions on how to secure your baggage during your next trip, please visit:</p> <p><b>www.tsa.gov</b></p> <p>We appreciate your understanding and cooperation. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact the TSA Contact Center:</p> <p>Phone: 866.289.9673 (toll free) Email: TSA-ContactCenter@dhs.gov</p> <p><small>* Section 110(b) of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2001, 49 U.S.C. 44901(c)-(e)</small></p> <hr/> <p>Rev. 8-1-2004</p> <p><b>Smart Security Saves Time</b></p>
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Figure 28. TSA Notice of Baggage Inspection.

## Discussion

Problems for Arab and Muslim Americans with regard to air travel are so prominent that “flying while brown” or “flying while Muslim” is now a common phrase, which equates it to

another setting in which racial profiling is common, “driving while black.” The phrase “flying while Muslim” is so common that in one quarter of one second, Google will return over 82,000 search results for that exact phrase. There is even a film documentary by that name.

In 2003, Alaska Air diverted a plane and had nine Egyptian first-class passengers removed due to the apparent racial hostility of the flight crew on the plane. The businesspersons, their wives and a fiancé were interrogated by the Transportation Security administration and cleared to fly but the pilot refused to re-board them.

“Based on his evidence, a jury might well conclude that Captain Swanigan's refusal to let the Egyptians continue on to their destination had nothing to do with safety or order but was designed to placate a flight attendant who had taken a dislike to certain passengers, perhaps because of their nationality or ethnicity," Chief Judge Alex Kozinski wrote for the San Francisco-based panel. (Courthouse News Service, 2011). They were able to fly on another airline but missed their convention meetings because the crew from Alaska Air reported them to the Joint Terrorism Task Force and the nine were publicly detained by the FBI and interrogated. (Cohen, 2010).

While these nine people were not American, this case is indicative of how Arab and Muslim people are frequently treated on U. S. air carriers.

- In 2010, four Muslims were removed from a Delta flight in Minnesota after a flight attendant claimed that they were behaving suspiciously when one of the men bent over to pick up a pen he dropped while filling out a customs form. (CAIR, 2010b).
- In 2009, nine Muslim passengers were kicked off the plane because another passenger heard one of the women in the group talk to her husband about where the safest seats on

the plane were located. Air Tran has also barred the nine from any of the airline's future flights. A lawsuit is pending. (CAIR, 2010b).

Literally hundreds of similar cases have been reported to civil rights groups in the last decade. The instances include cases of Arab and Muslims being removed from planes because crew members or other passengers felt uncomfortable having Arabs or Muslims on the plane. In one instance, a software developer was reading his newspaper as he waited for his plane to take off from Seattle. He was approached by an American Airlines employee and told he was being removed from the plane. When he asked why he was being removed from his flight, he was told "the pilot does not like how you look." (CNN, 2001).

Other reports of flying related mistreatment included being detained, strip searched or shackled to chairs. Some also had tickets canceled with no refund. Frequently these people were interrogated about their religion, race, and political beliefs or treated in an insulting and demeaning manner simply for being Arab or Muslim.

The experience of flying while Arab has been well documented since the September 11, 2001 attacks. Even now, ten years after the attacks, Arabs have come to expect that the travel experience will somehow be different for them. Omar Jarun, a Palestinian American soccer player from Peachtree City, Georgia noted in an interview:

Before 9/11 there were no problems, really. I had always established myself as an American from the Middle East. After 9/11 it was very difficult. My dad would tell me: 'Be careful what you say.' I would get double, triple-checked at the airport. You know it's for safety for the country, so I don't have many complaints about it. (Montague, 2011)

Jarun notes the different treatment and then excuses it as a security necessity. I frequently hear my own Arab or Muslim friends tell similar stories. They, like Jarun, seemed compelled to



somehow add their own version of “but I don’t mind.” It is as if admitting that they did mind might somehow make them suspicious characters that are unsupportive of national security efforts.

Wrapped in the cloak of national security, racial profiling underlies the experience of flying while Arab. The term itself, refers to a practice of identifying potential criminals based on “race or ethnicity or national origin, as opposed to behavior.” (Jadallah & el-Khoury, 2010). The same concept of identifying people as potential villains based on something other than their own behavior is also used against Muslims. In addition to, or instead of their race or ethnicity, Muslims find themselves being profiled because they wear a scarf, pray publicly or carry a Qur’an.

### **Discrimination regularly permeates the lives of Arab and Muslim Americans.**

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of the discrimination reported by Arab and Muslim Americans involved physical settings. Discrimination or mistreatment of Arab and Muslim people appeared most likely to occur in certain settings. Types of biased and discriminatory acts differed depending on the setting in which the act occurred. For instance, people targeted in schools were often called derogatory names, while people who were targeted in airports may not have been called names, but were subjected to enhanced screening. Acts of intolerance at mosques frequently took the form of vandalism while discriminatory acts on the street sometimes included murder.

Though types of discrimination varied within settings, specific incidents in this section are categorized based on settings because frequently, the hostile acts were related to the particular setting. Settings that stood out as being the places that Arab and Muslim Americans

were most likely to be targeted included schools, airports and mosques. It must be kept in mind that the boundaries that separate the themes are blurred because incidents and experiences often fall into more than one category. For instance, while the discussion on flying was categorized in the thematic area of Arabs being suspect, the discussion could just as easily have been placed in the section on discrimination since being suspect leads to different treatment. Because the airport experience was already discussed in the previous section, the following section will focus on discrimination against Arab and Muslim Americans in public schools.

### ***Discrimination in Schools***

Bullying, harassment, discrimination and intolerant treatment is particularly damaging when it happens in the school setting. We've all heard stories of school shooters that were bullied prior to their attack on the school. We've also heard too many stories of students ending their own lives because they were bullied. Because school is mandatory and because kids often do not have the option of selecting their school, the school environment lends itself to creating captive audiences out of the intended targets of bigoted acts. The ACLU, ADC, CAIR are some of the civil rights organization which collect reports of discriminatory acts.

### ***Unequal Treatment***

- A 7<sup>th</sup> grade Muslim girl found to be praying during breaks between classes was told by school officials that she was not allowed to pray on school grounds (CAIR, 2010b).
- A 12-year old, middle school basketball player was benched by a referee who cited her head scarf as a safety concern. The Maryland girl's coach supported her and she was allowed to play in the second half of the game after her parents released the school from liability in case of injury due to the girl wearing her headscarf (Connor, 2011).

- A fourth-generation Palestinian American student from California was pulled out of his class and questioned by the FBI for having doodled the letters “PLO” on his notebook two years earlier. The student was questioned about his political beliefs and whether he had pictures of any terrorists on his phone. The student’s parents were not notified by the school that their son was going to be questioned by the FBI (LCCR & CAIR, 2005).

### ***Physical Contact***

- Two New York City middle school students, a 13-year old girl and 14-year old boy are facing hate crime charges after they attacked a 13-year old Muslim girl at their school. While being called a Muslim and a terrorist the girl was kicked and punched. The attackers then tried to rip off her head scarf (CBS News, 2011).
- Gurprit Kaur, a 12-year old Sikh girl had her braided hair cut off at her school in Queens, New York. Gurprit and her brother say that their harassment at school is ongoing “Gurprit's brother Talwinder, a sixth grade student, is routinely subject to ridicule because of his Sikh articles of faith. Other sixth-graders call him "potatohead" and "turbanator." Students would say that Talwinder has a bomb on his head, and to get away from him because he is going to blow everyone up” (Sikh Coalition, 2008).
- A high school student was attacked and punched by another student who had put keys between his fingers to intensify the results of the attack. The attacker also tried to pull off the target’s patka, a small turban. (Bronner, 2008).
- A Muslim high school freshman was punched, beaten and kicked in the groin with such force that he had blood in his urine. The attackers spit in his face while calling him a “f\*\*\*ing Muslim” and “f\*\*\*ing terrorist.” The four attackers were expected to be charged as minors (Tinker, Lauinger, & Hutchinson, 2010).

### ***Policy Issues***

- In Oklahoma, a public middle school prohibited a Muslim student from wearing her religiously mandated headscarf. The Civil Rights Division of the U. S. Department of Justice intervened to stop the school from violating the constitutional rights of students by way of their discriminatory uniform policy (United States Department of Justice, 2011).
- A 14-year old girl was not allowed to march in a parade as part of Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) because of her religiously mandated headscarf. Her school agreed that she would have to conform to U.S. Army regulations if she wanted to participate. It was noted that a Jewish, male student could wear his yarmulke because it would fit under his uniform. CAIR has asked the school to allow the girl to participate while wearing her head scarf and has also sent a letter to the U. S. Department of Defense requesting that policy be changed (Giordano, 2011)

### ***Unwelcoming environment***

- A 4<sup>th</sup> grade Muslim girl in Delaware was repeatedly harassed by her public school teacher and classmates. The teacher also presented a strongly pro-Christian agenda to the class. Eventually the girl was pulled from school due to emotional distress. The U.S. Department of Justice reached a settlement which acknowledged that the teacher harassed and singled out the student, which resulted in the girl being severely harassed by other students in the school (United States Department of Justice, 2011).
- A teacher in Minnesota was accused of providing air freshener to spray when Muslim kids entered the classroom (CAIR, 2010b).

- A Minnesota school bus driver was reported to regularly strand Muslim students in the winter months (CAIR, 2010b).

CAIR noted that while the two Minnesota incidents had been reported to school administration, they did not effectively act, and as a result, CAIR requested that the incidents be investigated by the U. S. Department of Education (CAIR, 2010b).

The instances of unequal treatment and discrimination in schools are too vast to list in this study. In the past decade students who are Arab, Muslim or incorrectly perceived to be Arab or Muslim have been targeted not only by peers, but by teachers, administrators and policy makers. In her blog, *Tale of an Arab Teen*, Janice Freij tells of growing up as a relatively “normal” kid in an American suburb. It wasn’t until high school, that she found out that she wasn’t “normal,” she was “Arab”:

The year was 1991, and the Gulf War was on the minds of most Americans. Because there was a lot I didn't understand about the war, I was excited when my Cultural Geography teacher announced that we would spend a unit learning about the Middle East. I also remember feeling anxious to learn more about the part of the world my parents came from. After giving a brief overview of what we would be learning in the upcoming weeks, my teacher asked us to take out a piece of paper. "Alright, class. I'm going to give you a few minutes to write down any stereotypes you may have about people from the Middle East." Knowing that many of these students had little or no exposure to any Arabs or other people from that region, I was curious about what they would write. My curiosity was interrupted by an abrupt statement from one of my classmates. "They smell!" The other students not only laughed at the comment, but added their own insights. "Ay-rabs are so rude!" "They're so mean to their wives!" "They wear rags on their heads!" Before I

knew it, most of my "peers" engaged in conversations about Arabs' noses, their unwillingness to hire any non-Arab, their attire, their love of violence, and more.

I looked around the classroom in astonishment. Hundreds of thoughts flooded my naïve mind: "Do they not realize I'm Arab? Maybe they do, but they don't care. Or maybe they think I'm just different than the other Arabs. Why isn't my teacher stopping them from saying such horrible things?" The question that would not leave my mind was this. "Why do they hate me and my people so much?" Being so overwhelmed by what I was experiencing, I left the classroom and released all of my confused emotions in the form of tears. And lots of them. In fact, I cried in the girl's bathroom the rest of the class period. (Freij, 2011)

### **Implications of Discrimination in Schools**

It is not only Arab American students, but all students who are treated differently as a result of their identities or cultures that may feel a negative impact on their school experience and thus, their ability to learn (Nieto, 2004). The relationship between ethnic identity and self-esteem is such that having a strong sense of ethnic identity enhances an adolescent's ability to cope with discrimination and lessens the negative impact of discrimination on self-esteem (Umana-Taylor, Vargas-Chanes, Garcia, & Gonzales-Backen, 2008). This relationship is significant because strong self-esteem is directly related to academic achievement (Zimmerman, Copeland, Shope, & Dielman, 1997).

James A. Banks' work on understanding the role of multiculturalism in schools and the development of culturally responsive curricula serve as a foundation for understanding additional research on culture, identity and learning. Keeping in mind that culture, identity and learning are

deeply intertwined, schools wanting to create spaces in which students learn to affirm diversity must take definitive steps. Schools must actively assist students to develop strong ethnic identities, cultural awareness and provide a culturally sensitive curriculum.

In navigating the school landscape, students face far more than academic challenges. Each day they are faced with issues of culture, identity, and belonging. As schools continually become more diverse teachers struggle to create a space in which all students can thrive. At the same time, diverse students are challenged with fitting into the school communities which frequently expect them to assimilate, sometime at the cost of their cultural or ethnic identity (Nieto, 2004).

It is important to note that for the purposes of this study learning is viewed in a much broader sense than the academic realm. References to learning include academic achievement, sociocultural development and the development of one's ethnic identity. In terms of this paper, the definition of culture is borrowed from Nieto (2004). "Culture consists of the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location language, social class, religion, or other shared identity" (p. 146).

Discrimination has been linked to increased stress, delinquency and lowered academic achievement among adolescents (DeGarmo & Martinez Jr., 2006; Grossman, 2005; Simons, Yi-Fu, Stewart, & Brody, 2003). Considering increased tensions with Arab and Muslim countries during the Iraq war and since 9/11, it is reasonable to suggest that Arab adolescents in U.S. schools are experiencing more discrimination than they experienced prior to September 11, 2001 and while the U.S. is warring with Arab and Muslim people abroad. Reported instances of

discrimination perpetrated by peers, as well as by teachers, counselors and school officials evidence a need for the recognition and reversal of this trend (Abu El-Haj, 2006).

Arab teens in the United States are a little studied group who often remain obscured by their ability to appear “white” and the fact that they are relatively successful in school compared to other minority groups (Nieto, 2004). It cannot be assumed that the heightened anti-Arab/Muslim sentiment is directed only at adults. In addition to criminal and discriminatory practices faced by students, school curricula and the popular media, both areas in which students are constantly immersed, negatively depict Arabs. “Not since cowboys roamed the range killing bad Indians have such stereotyped images been a part of popular culture, and this idea seldom is raised in American classrooms” (Al-Hazza, 2005, p. 10).

It is imperative that educators understand this complex group of non-homogeneous students and the impact of anti-Arab, anti-Muslim sentiment, curriculum and policies on these students. Banks et al. (2001) notes that one’s school experience is instrumental in the development of one’s cultural and ethnic identity. To create safe, equitable learning environments for students in U.S. schools, the needs of Arab students, like any minority group, must be understood and considered.

Educators must recognize and be cognizant of the deep impact demeaning treatment has on students. This is especially true of high school students who have a stronger awareness of attitudes toward them than do younger students. DeGarmo and Martinez (2006) and Grossman (2005) documented the impact of discrimination in relation to adolescents’ mental health and academic achievement. As predicted, the higher levels of discrimination were significantly associated with higher levels of depression and lower levels of academic success. The impact of the negative sentiment toward people perceived to be Arab or Muslim is not imagined. Charles



Taylor's book examining multiculturalism noted "...a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (Taylor, 2002, p. 25).

A few years after the events of 9/11, a colleague proposed that another teacher in our school who is Jewish and I come into the world history classes to present both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the unit on the Middle East. I was very excited about the prospect as the teacher they wanted me to co-present with was both a friend and mentor. I was also happy to have the opportunity to tell about the situation from a Palestinian perspective. When I tried to arrange times with the World History teacher, she told me that she decided not to include this presentation in her curriculum because she "wasn't going to have anyone come in and justify suicide bombing" to her students.

Though I was taken aback, I tried to assure her that my intention was not to justify suicide bombings, but rather to engage in balanced discourse on the topic. Needless to say, the presentation never occurred. The teacher who had suggested the presentation asked me to come to her World Geography class and present a Palestinian side to the conflict. It was a wonderful, exciting exchange of ideas that happened in that class on that day and I hoped word would get to the reticent teacher that her narrow vision of Palestinians as supporters of terrorism was flawed and incorrect. Either she never got the message or didn't believe it to be true, but I was never invited to speak to any of her classes.

## **Not Viewed or Treated as Completely American**

### ***Not Completely American Narrative***

According to Edward Said, “All families invent their parents and children, give each of them a story, character, fate, and even a language.” (Said, 2003, p. 3). I was invented by people from very different cultures and lives. My mother grew up in rural Virginia in the 1940s. She was born to a fourteen-year-old girl. My mom’s grandparents raised her and though she spent some time with her own mother, she had little contact with either her mother or her father. My mom recalls being in a general store when she was a little girl and a relative introduced her to a man and said “Do you know who this is? This is your daddy.” I think he bought her a piece of candy.

When my mother was in high school she decided that she’d had it with the narrow-mindedness of the “Bible Belt” and the ways of the small town coal mining community. She boarded a bus for Wichita, Kansas where her mother was living and then the two of them moved on to Denver, Colorado. My mother lived as a typical single girl in the late 1950s. At one point, she was working as a waitress in an Italian restaurant. She still makes a fabulous pizza and credits the chef at the restaurant where she worked for teaching her. He was a chef on the Andrea Doria before it sank.

My mother worked at more than one restaurant in Denver and was friendly with the other girls she worked with. One day my mother made a bet with another waitress that she could get a date with “that cute foreign guy.” Three weeks later she married my father in the local courthouse and moved to the mountains of Colorado where he had recently accepted a position as a music teacher.

My father immigrated to the United States from Palestine in May of 1952 at the age of 22. He dreamt of being a musician and thought he might be able to realize his dream in America. He boarded a boat where he bunked with a young Italian sailor. The two taught each other cuss

words in their native languages, words which my father can use today as if he had grown up cussing in Italian. They sailed through the Corinth Canal across the Atlantic Ocean and into 1952 America.

My father was not alone here. His older brother had come a few years earlier and had married the daughter of Palestinian immigrants to Syracuse, New York. Dad worked his way through college by painting houses and doing other odd jobs. By the time my parents met, my father had been in the United States for seven years. He tells great stories of those years. One time he was trying to find Arkansas on a map but couldn't. He did, however, note a new state he had never heard of: ar-KANSAS.

He also tells me about being a student at a Christian college in Greenville, Illinois. Each day the students would go to pray. The college wanted to affirm my father's Middle Eastern identity so they wanted him to pray "like a Moslem" during prayer time. He tried to explain that he was not Muslim but they insisted, thinking he was just being polite. After several failed attempts to explain that he came from a Christian village he gave up and during prayer time he would "pray like a Moslem."

By the time my parents met, my father already had one Master's degree. They married in August of 1959 and my mother completely embraced my father's culture. The two of them agreed to raise their children with an understanding of the Palestinian culture.

One of my first memories of knowing that we were different was when I heard my dad speaking Arabic. It was like this great secret code that only some people, like my dad, got to know. When I saw him write and read letters in Arabic I was mesmerized that only he, of all our family, could decipher the meaning of all those little scratches and dots. I also remember my brother and I being the only kids on the block whose dad yelled at them in a combination of

Arabic and English. We were pretty special. Even a trip to the post office required special paper and envelopes to mail the pages of secret code that my father sent to his family in Palestine.

When I began kindergarten, I was in for several shocks, the first being that my best friend since age two told me we could no longer be friends. As it turns out, boys aren't supposed to like girls in kindergarten. My next unexpected revelation was when I found out that my name was weird. In a class of less than twenty students we had two Debbies and three Karens. The other handful of girls in the class had names that everyone had heard of. I was the only girl in the class with a name no one had ever heard. There were no other Jamillah's in my class. My mother prudently reverted to my nickname given to me by my brother when I was born and she told the teacher to call me Mia. That didn't help much.

Although my teachers and classmates could finally pronounce my name, it was still weird and no one had ever heard that name either-possibly because it was created by my two year old brother. As I muddled my way through the confusing landscape of elementary school, other kids, and even my elementary school gym teacher made fun of my name. Mia Pia was most common. Luckily, I was either fairly resilient or not yet wise enough to know that I was being made fun of. Either way, I was aware that my family was different than my classmate's families.

My brother also had a name that no one had ever heard of. His name is Youseph. He made the switch to the English translation of Joseph, shortened to Joe, by 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade because he was quick enough to understand that he was being made fun of. He says he was tired of people mispronouncing his name and teasing him about it.

My brother, who was one grade ahead of me, remembers a ten-year-old classmate who came to school after the Munich Olympic attack by Palestinian rebels. The classmate, whose name my brother still remembers, called him a terrorist and continued to harass him for his

Palestinian blood. I was a happy-go-lucky fourth grader at the time and had no idea that this was occurring. One year later, my brother recalls my father listening to our short wave radio trying to get information about Palestine during the devastating Yom Kippur war of 1973. I'm glad I didn't know anything about that. My father would have been listening and worrying about his mother and the rest of his family in Palestine. My brother says it was after that when he quit telling people he was Arabic although he was identified for several years by classmates as Arab.

Other than having a weird name, my elementary school experience regarding my own Arab roots was much less political. I do remember being in my 5<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class after the teacher asked my mother if she would bring in some traditional Arabic food for my class to sample. This would have been around 1973 and our traditional bean dip, hummus, was not yet popular (or even heard of) in America. I remember feeling complete shame as I looked at the tan, oily paste and saw my classmates say "eeeewwwwww" or "gross" as they wrinkled their upper lips and noses. Why would my mom do this to me?

All the other kids' mothers brought in pretty cupcakes and no one was grossed out. I still remember being thankful, that one boy, wanting to show off his bravery, said "I'll try it." After chewing and considering, he proclaimed that it "wasn't bad" and then a few others then tried it. It wasn't until after several of my classmates tried the hummus that I would have some. Even though I loved hummus and ate it all the time at home, I didn't want to confess liking it to my classmates in case that would make me seem even weirder. I still remember the brave boy fondly.

We were raised with exposure to Arab food, music, and language. It was not overemphasized but we knew who we were. We grew up on the stories of my father's childhood in Beit Jala and his trips to the Dead Sea. My parents threw frequent social events for Arab

students at the University so that they would not feel alone while they were far from home.

While the students came to the university and moved on a few years later, my parents stayed and served as a cultural hub for all these students to find one another and be able to partake in Arabic celebrations during their time in Wyoming. My brother and I were always included in these parties, which were filled with Arabic food, language, music, and families. Many of the students wore keffiyeh or hijab, knowing that at our party, such garb would not make them stand out.

While we had all of this exposure to our Arab culture, we were also encouraged and taught to affirm other people's culture. My family had some good friends down the street who were practicing Jews. It was not uncommon for us to join in their Passover celebrations or for them to join in our Christmas celebrations. One year at Halloween, my brother wore the men's Arab robe and headscarf, while his Jewish friend dressed as a rabbi. They were a Halloween neighborhood hit in the mid-1970s.

There were also other experiences from that same time period that illuminated the ways in which my family was unlike other families in the neighborhood. When I was a young child in the late 1960s, my family went on a camping trip to the Snowy Range in southern Wyoming. We stopped in a small town along the way to put fuel into our truck and my brother and I ran into the little store to get treats. As the woman at the counter rang up our purchases, she asked if our father was the man outside with the accent. I told her no, as I did not know my father had an accent. The woman must've chuckled to herself as it was obvious that we were a family. Back in the truck, as we were driving I asked what an accent was. This has become one of those family stories that are frequently told at family gatherings.

Another memory I have is of an elderly couple who lived down the block from us when I was a child. They had no children of their own and the neighborhood kids would visit them

frequently because they let us play with their dog, fed us home baked treats and occasionally Mrs. Farmer would sew a toy such as a beanbag and give it to one of us children. While I was never picked to receive one of the toys, I was always fond of the couple.

It was when I was a little older, still elementary school age that one of the other kids told me that Mr. and Mrs. Farmer didn't like me because my dad was a "foreigner." I'm not actually sure of the word that was used, and at the time I wasn't sure if I believed the story. My dad was foreign, but the Farmers were so nice. Did they really not like me? Being an optimist, I decided that the story must not be true so that I could continue to visit their house. In later years, I heard through the neighborhood grapevine that another neighbor had told many people in our neighborhood of their distaste for my family and that my father was an alcoholic and a foreigner. My father has never been a drinker.

Years later, as an adult, I attended a national conference for Arab Americans in Washington D. C. While making a purchase at one of the conference booths, the Arab man who ran my credit card noted my name and said "So, you *are* Arab? From looking at you, I thought maybe you just married an Arab. You don't look Arab." These seemingly innocuous words sliced through my soul. How could someone who has devoted so much of themselves to defending Arabs, learning the history of their people and growing up wearing a name like Jamillah Mufdi, not be obviously Arabic? What about my olive skin? Granted, it's a light olive tone, but it is olive. What about my nose? It's definitely an Arab nose. One time, a drunken man in a bar told me I was pretty good looking "for a chick with a big nose." While that may have offended some, I got a kick out the comment and took it as an indirect and unintentional nod to my Arabness.

In my early 30s, I found that something was missing in terms of my self-identity. I became set on visiting Palestine in spite of my father's objections. "I didn't raise you in America

so that you could go to a war zone!” he would insist. I felt as though I was an outsider, an interloper, in my hometown who never truly fit in and felt that if I could go see the place my Arab roots came from, I could fill the void. Hadn’t I, after all, seen the place where my mother grew up? Hadn’t I visited the houses of relatives she had visited as a child? Hadn’t I traveled with my mother learning of my maternal history from her as she showed me where she spent her childhood? Wasn’t it fair then, that I should learn of my father’s history and thus my own place in the world?

I voraciously studied Palestinian history, current events, the maps, the conflicts, the culture, the food, the people, and the language. I looked into Arabic language immersion programs in the West Bank and Beirut. The more I learned, the more obvious it became to me that even when I visited Palestine, even if I were the strongest advocate for the Palestinian people, even with my Arab name, I would still be an outsider.

It was then I realized that I occupied a 3<sup>rd</sup> space. I wasn’t simply Arab, I wasn’t simply American. There was a third space. It was not simply an “Arab American” space but a space where people like me exist. We aren’t really Arab, we don’t live in predominantly Arab communities in the US and we don’t speak Arabic. Many of us pass for White and some of us even come from European ancestry by way of a parent.

Because our identity or faith is not visually apparent the people we encounter often do not know that we are Arab or Muslim. This ability to “pass” may have protected some from the full force of the 9/11 backlash but as Peek (2011) confirms, those of us who were able to pass were not left unscathed. We still worried about our families, friends, and others who could not pass. We worried that we would receive different treatment as people realized our identity as Muslims or Arabs. Whether we “pass” or not, we carry a certain “otherness” with us. Whether



that otherness comes from our appearance, our traditions, our religion, our political beliefs, or the story of our history, we tend to find ourselves in a different space.

In 2003 Edward Said published his memoir, *Out of Place*. In reading the book, I found myself hearing my own story of not belonging and realized that many people exist in a space that is not clearly defined by one or two facets of their identity. Said speaks of having a Palestinian father with American citizenship, a Lebanese mother, a British first name, an Arabic last name and an American nationality. He was raised in Egypt where he attended a British school and then schooled in the US, where he completed college. In the end of the book, Said concludes that “With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place” (Said, 2003, p. 295).

Suheir Hammad’s *A Road Still Becoming, (Becoming American personal essays by first generation immigrant women, 2000)* tells the story of her own family coming to America. Published in the book, *Becoming American*, Hammad makes several references to existing in a space that was not quite American and not quite Arab. “We are not these people. We are Arab. We are not American or Spanish or black. Ihna Arab.” These sentences were a kind of mantra both of my parents used when they wanted to get across to us that we were not to dress, eat, do, talk, study, or simply be like anyone else. I always found it interesting who my parents thought Americans were. When they said, “American, black, or Spanish,” they were clearly differentiating between the “real American,” and the others, the Africans, the Latinos, and, eventually, the Arabs. America was, and is, to my parents, still the frozen, white, and magical fantasy, with no room for us. ...the images of young Palestinian kids throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers helped me to understand my place in the world, my place in America, and my place in myself. I was of more than one place.

I walk with my ancestors in my bones. They are heavy. I walk with a beat in my head, usually a beat with a rhyme laced on top of it. Not too heavy, but deep. I am walking into the millennium. And America is walking alongside of me, many of her youth with the same step. No longer walking behind, not interested in leading the way, but together. Down a road still becoming. Nothing is static, and we change with every breath, I can never be apple pie, but more and more, America is becoming like me, like us.

Edward Said speaks of being “out of place,” Suheir Hammad tells of being of more than one place and I exist in a third space. However we word it, we are referring to the idea that no matter what we do, we will never be completely American or completely Arab. It’s not who we are. This oneness of space does not exist in our minds.

It is not just that Arab and Muslim Americans tell themselves that they are not completely American but that they hear this sentiment reflected back to them regularly (see figure 20). Hani Kahn, a teenage girl who was fired from an Abercrombie and Fitch store for refusing to remove her headscarf received hate mail telling her to go back to her country. Hani was born and raised in the United States but her name, her skin and her scarf keep her from joining the privileged club reserved for those who appear to be white, Christian, Americans.

Amir Sulaiman, a teacher and poet recalls that after 9/11 he was asked by parents of his students, “Are you American or are you Muslim?” An American born Arab woman, who fought a Delaware school district for bullying and harassing her Muslim children notes “Unfortunately, I have heard it said that people feel that, as Americans, we are at war with Arabs and Muslims” (Malek, 2011, p. 92). These statements clearly illuminate the dividing line that exists between being Arab or Muslim and being American (Malek, 2011). Figures 29 and 30 illustrate the notion

that Americans who are Arab or Muslim are not wholly perceived to be American. Figure 29 shows party affiliations, while figure 30 looks at media sources.

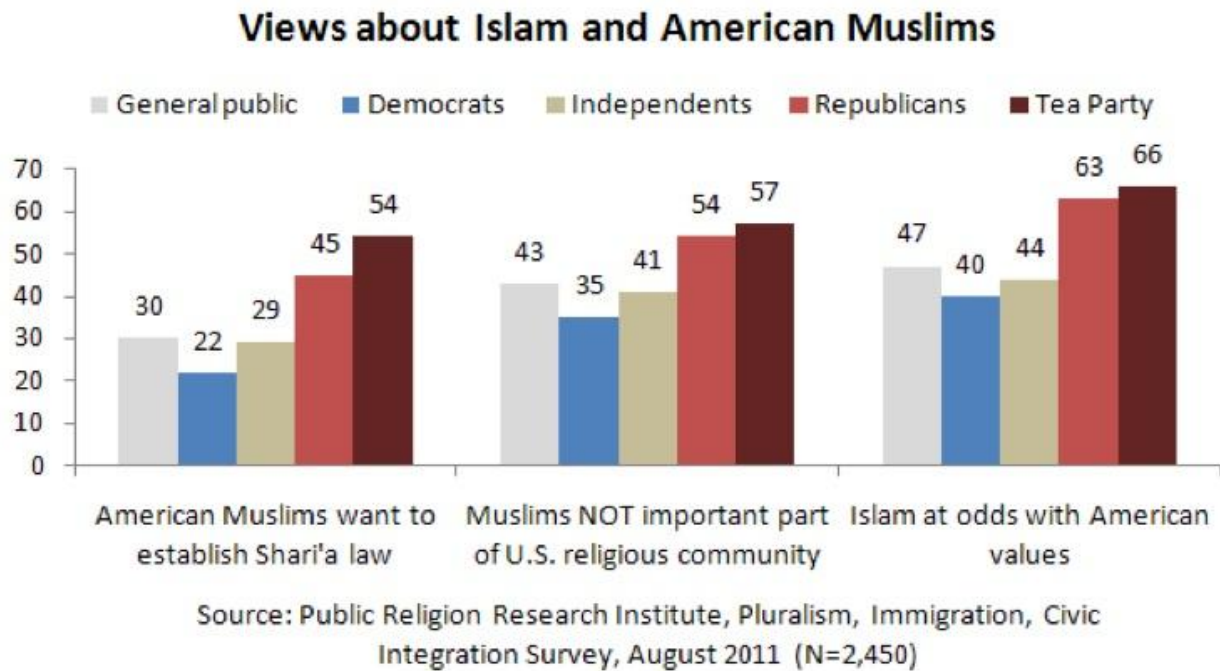


Figure 29. (Lathrop, 2011).

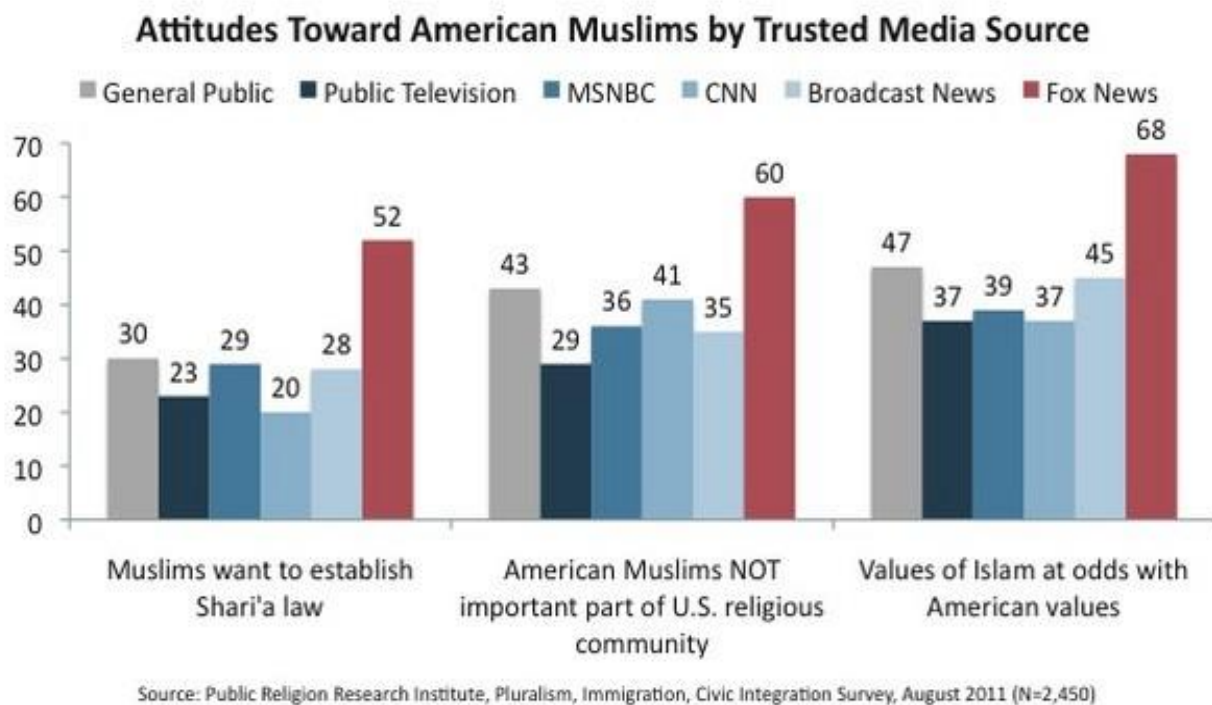


Figure 30. (Lathrop, 2011).

## **Tension Narrative**

On a personal level, I frequently experience the tension that comes from being a member of two groups that don't always embrace each other's ideologies. For instance, when I hear people criticizing Islam, I find myself defending Muslim people for their religious beliefs. I'm not a Muslim and although my paternal family comes from an ancient Christian village, I am not a practicing Christian. I don't practice any religion and yet I find myself defending Muslims for their religious beliefs because I find that they are so often unfairly maligned for what people say Islam means or what the Qur'an says. Sometimes I think I defend Islam just because so many Arabs are Muslims and when I hear Muslims being attacked, it feels to me like Arabs are being attacked and so I find myself stepping up to defend something I don't even adhere to.

In 2003, after the Space Shuttle Columbia came apart upon reentry killing all seven astronauts aboard. I wrote a journal entry that I feel illustrates the tension I experience between being Palestinian and American. The entry was written February 1, 2003 at a time when America's hatred and distrust of Arabs was gaining momentum. I was feeling very angry, defensive and unwelcome in America. While the writing reflects my anger toward American treatment of Arabs, the entry was written merely as a venting tool and record of my own emotional state during a very difficult period. Even now, nearly nine years later, I wince while reading the piece. Though uncomfortable, I have chosen to include parts of the entry in this paper to shine a light on the complexity of emotions that permeated my life during the years immediately after 9/11 and during what is known as the second Intifada in Palestine.

### **Journal Entry. February 1, 2003.**

The Space Shuttle Columbia blew apart this morning upon reentry. (17 years and 4 days from Challenger's explosion)-16 minutes before they were supposed to land. Am I sad? Yes, for

6 of the 7 astronauts but it is really the 7<sup>th</sup> astronaut that draws my attention. He was Ilan Ramon, the 1<sup>st</sup> Israeli astronaut. An Israeli hero. Butcher. [Ariel] Sharon called him “the best Israel had to offer.” He was a hero there because he had a long, glorified history of killing Arabs. He participated in Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982 which killed tens of thousands of Palestinians (many in the massacres at Sabra and Shatilla). He fought in the Yom Kippur war and bombed Iraq in the Gulf War. Yeah, a real fucking hero, stealing land and killing unarmed people from the safety of his fighter jet. I hope that when the shuttle blew, it blew the murdering bastard straight to hell.

Every day the Palestinians lose national heroes and they are disregarded as militants or terrorists. To the Palestinians they are freedom fighters-our heroes. Maybe now Israel can feel one one-zillionth of the loss Palestinians feel every single day of their lives.

I’m sure George W. is inconsolable- but only because he can’t blame this on Saddam.

I wonder if anyone else appreciates the irony that the first Israeli astronaut blew up and came down in tiny little bits over “Palestine,” Texas. He made a life of blowing Palestinians into bits in one Palestine and now he’s blown to bits in another Palestine. Hmmmm. Maybe there is a god, after all.

Do I feel bad about the Columbia? Let’s just say I’m 6/7ths sad.

## **Discussion**

While this story did not, at face value, have anything to do with the treatment of Arab and Muslim Americans post-9/11 there was an important connection. It was a primal response to feeling like my own country hated me as a Palestinian Arab American and that my own country preferred and supported those who hated Arabs in the international community. The United

States has a history of being very instrumental in the oppression of Arab peoples, particularly the Palestinians. The U.S. also has a history of glorifying, justifying, and financially supporting acts against indigenous Arab peoples with unwavering support for Israel.

This type of American sponsored aggression against Arabs set the stage for the way Arab and Muslim Americans were treated in America after 9/11. They were already a suspect people, vilified by the American government and regularly referred to as “terrorists” and security threats. Thus, it was not a huge leap to envision the Arabs and Muslims who lived in the U. S. as threats and enemies in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

Howell and Shryok (2003) refer to the conflicting space that Arab and Muslim Americans occupy, especially after September 11, 2001, as a coercive predicament (see figure 31).

In the aftermath of 9/11, Arab and Muslim Americans have been compelled, time and again, to apologize for acts they did not commit, to condemn acts they never condoned, and to openly profess loyalties that, for most U.S. citizens, are merely assumed. Moreover, Arabs in Detroit have been forced to distance themselves from Arab political movements, ideologies, causes, religious organizations, and points of view that are currently at odds with U.S. policy (Howell & Shryok, 2003, p. 444).



Figure 31. Book cover illustrating the “coercive predicament” occupied by Arab and Muslim Americans. (Howell & Shryok, 2003; Shah, 2002).

On September 11, 2001, we were attacked for being American. Then, we were attacked by Americans for being Arabs and or Muslims. There was always the implied notion that defending one side meant disavowing the other. Moustafa Bayoumi, in his book about being young, Arab and American speaks of this tension when he says “...those young Arabs, a minority, who have abandoned their ethnic roots or religion out of either shame or fear or both. They have changed their names and try to pass as other-than-Arab—Latinos most often.”(Bayoumi, 2008, p. 11). Other writers speak of those who defied negative treatment and flaunted their Arabness by wearing the hijab, speaking the language of their parents, attempting to educate their communities or reverting to their Arab names (Bayoumi, 2008; Malek, 2011). Regardless of whether Arab Americans tried to be more Arab or more White, they did not seem to fit neatly into either category (see figure 32).



*Figure 32. Arab-American: Too Arab For Americans; Too American For Arabs (T's El 3Arab, 2012).*

In one of the more public and tragic stories regarding the conflicted space that is being American and Arab or Muslim, was that of Army psychiatrist, Major Nidal Hasan. Major Hasan went on a shooting rampage at Ft. Hood in November of 2009, killing thirteen people and injuring approximately thirty more. Hasan's request to be discharged from the military because he felt he should not kill other Muslims had been denied. Though he had hired an attorney to continue negotiating his discharge, he was scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan.

Hasan's family said that he felt harassed in the military in the years since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and was called derogatory slurs such as "camel jockey" by his fellow military coworkers for being a Muslim. Hasan had also been the victim of anti-Islamic harassment by a soldier who objected to Hasan's religion. The soldier was charged with vandalizing Hasan's car causing a thousand dollars in damages and ripped an "Allah is Love" bumper sticker from the car. While nothing can excuse or justify Hasan's crime, examining his actions within the context of the tensions created by being an Arab American Muslim may help explain his motive.(CBS News, 2009).



The experience for many other Arab American soldiers is quite different. Sami, a Brooklyn native with roots in Egypt and Palestine served as an American marine in Iraq. Moustafa Bayoumi tells Sami's story of enlisting in the military barely four months before the September 11, 2001 attacks. The following excerpts from his story illustrate the conflict experienced by one Arab American soldier serving in the Middle East, but likely tell the story of many young people like him. In telling about his military experience, Sami explains his sense of being enthusiastic about avenging 9/11 while also entering a space where others may question his loyalties.

But when his Arab roots appeared, the comments came rushing out. He became “al-Qaeda” and “sand nigger.” The names just slid off his back...No one questioned the mission, including Sami. The attacks of September 11, eighteen months earlier, were still fresh in everybody's memory and continued to smart like a collective wound. It didn't matter that this was Iraq and not Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein and not Osama bin Laden. Tomorrow, everyone agreed, there would be payback. Sami, too, felt this way...

In reflecting back to the end of his basic training and finding out the U.S. had been attacked, Sami tells of finally contacting his parents in New York City and finding them unhurt. “Everybody in his family was all right, but everyone—in the family, in the military, in the world—also knew what the attacks meant.” (p.57). Of course for Sami's family, it not only meant they had been attacked as Americans, but that they would soon feel the backlash and most importantly, their newly enlisted son would now be going to fight a war in the Middle East in which he may kill or be killed by other Arabs.

At first, Sami, who didn't identify much with his Arab background, tried to avoid any coverage of the attacks. When he finally sat down and watched them he began to cry. “*Arabs did*

*this?* he thought. *My own people?*” (p. 59). As this sense of conflict festered, Sami again tried to avoid the situation confronting him. “I have a problem, sirs,’ he said after saluting. ‘I have a conflict of interest.’ He shifted on his feet. ‘I’m Arab, and I can’t fight against my own people.’” (p. 60).

Sami questioned his own character. “Was he less of an American because he didn’t want to fight? he wondered. Was he like the terrorists who attacked the United States? Who was he helping?” (p. 60). Despite his internal conflict, he deployed with the First Marine Division on February 14, 2003. Once he entered Iraq, he recalls expecting antagonistic Iraqi’s to be everywhere waiting to find but instead what he saw left him feeling sympathy for the Iraqi people:

People were walking around on cement in 120-degree heat, without shoes. They lived simply in makeshift houses. He found that the destitution was causing him pangs of regret, and he wanted to give the people he passed something, but regulations barred it, out of fear of starting a riot...I wanted to give them that kind of dignity. If I did that, at least it would show some kind of humane feeling toward them, you know, that we were not just here to murder everybody. That we were here to help.

A few of his fellow marines didn’t take well to his sympathies. ‘Fuck those guys. Get rid of them all,’ they would say, and then Sami would stop and ask, ‘Do you really think we should just kill everybody here?’ ‘Hell yeah, fuck them all!’ they replied. Sami would just shake his head, and they would call him ‘terrorist.’

In one instance, Sami tells of being called to interpret during the search of a group of elderly Iraqi men who had come toward his camp.

Wearing only his T-shirt, shorts, and boots, he climbed down off the truck. And there they were, a group of old men surrounded by marines armed to the teeth. The men were all on their knees in the gravel, looking lost and pathetic. PFC Andrews, a kid with an M16, was so wound up, so stressed out from not yet being able to shoot of his gun, and so pumped up by being this close to his Iraqi enemy that he was yelling and screaming at the elders with massacre in his eyes.

“Don’t fuckin’ move! Don’t move! Don’t move!” he screamed, his fingers loose on his weapon.

Sami shook the sleep out of his eyes and saw the situation for what it was. He looked at his fellow soldier in disbelief. “Hey, Andrews,” he said “Relax! These are just some old men. Let me get you on *your* knees on the gravel and see how long you can take it.

Andrews told Sami to fuck off and mind his own business. Sami was getting more worried by the bloodlust he saw in Andrews’s eyes. However, at the same time, he worried that if he were seen showing too much mercy to the Iraqis, he would be branded as being soft on the enemy. ‘I am wearing name tapes that say “U.S. Marine, United States,” but my parents are Arab, and I can’t forget that, he told me.

During Sami’s second deployment to Iraq, he was in a camp where many Arab people worked. Sami went out of his way not to interact with them because “He didn’t want any of his friends or superiors questioning his loyalties, and he didn’t want the Iraqis asking him what he, an Arab, was doing in Iraq.” (p. 69). At one point, Sami wonders “Why can’t I be happy about being Arab?” (p. 70).

After Sami completed his military service, he returned home to New York and in trying to reconcile his multiple and conflicted identities, he decided to get a tattoo:

What he came up with was the New York City skyline as the tattoo's basis, but instead of the World Trade Center towers, two memorial beams of light will shine upward. The moon, vaguely imprinted with the marine emblem, will land high on his shoulder. The stars will spell out 'N-Y-C.' Underneath, and in Arabic, will be written the words 'Always remembered, never forgotten.' A little bit of everything—New York, Marine, Arab—to be put carefully together and marked indelibly.

Sami's story is one of self-discovery, the construction of a newly realized identity and a story of conflict and reconciliation. While Sami's conflict with being an Arab and a U.S. Marine serving in the Middle East turned out much differently than the story of Major Nidal Hassan it is apparent that this battle between selves exacts a high price from those who inhabit this space.

A wide range of intense emotions are evoked from the discord created by inhabiting these often incompatible spaces. It may be guilt because of not stepping up to the defense of other Arabs and Muslims, anger that led you not to be saddened by an astronaut's death, rage because you cannot reconcile the conflict, or shame for "passing" and pretending to not be Arab or Muslim. As in Sami's case, the emotion may be frustration at having your loyalties questioned by others. Regardless of which sentiments were conveyed or experienced with relation to the theme of feeling conflicted, they always seemed to be intense and powerful expressions of the particular emotion.

### **Feeling integrated and welcomed**

Most heartening in the research for this study was that not all the experiences were negative. In fact, many Arab and Muslim Americans reported feeling embraced by and

integrated into their American communities. Sirin and Fine (2008) had Muslim American youth draw “identity maps” in which respondents draw representations of their identities. One respondent, an eighteen-year-old Palestinian American Muslim woman, drew three flags superimposed on each other. The flags are the American flag, the Palestinian flag, and the flag of Islam. Underneath the flag she draws a heart with the words Palestinian + American inside and an arrow containing the word “Islam” goes through the heart. At the bottom of the map she writes “Islam is the thread that holds together my American-Palestinian identity.” (Sirin & Fine, 2008, p. 195).

In my own community of approximately 60,000 people, I can hardly go out in public without someone saying “Are you related to Mr. Mufdi the music teacher? He was my violin teacher! I love Mr. Mufdi!” My family is well loved and well respected in our town. We have been here since 1964 and my father, probably the only Arab in Cheyenne, Wyoming at that time, educated our community on the Arab world, not by teaching or lecturing about Arabs, but by having a strong sense of his own identity and a willingness to share his cultures with those curious enough to enquire.

Though my father immigrated during a time when immigrants were expected to quietly assimilate, my father was able to fit comfortably into his new country by not letting go of his Arab identity. He bestowed Arabic names on my brother and me, unlike his brother who perhaps felt less conspicuous by naming his children Charles, Catherine and Patricia. I remember one of my cousins who would have been in her early twenties at the time, asking her mother “now, are we Palestinian or are we Arab?” I understood then that when my aunt and uncle invented my cousins and gave them their story, it began in America. The words Palestinian and Arab were vague, confusing terms in my cousin’s mind.

When my mother's childless aunt heard that my mother was pregnant with her first child in 1961, she offered my parents one hundred dollars to name the child Joe after her husband. My parents were young and broke and my father wanted to give Arabic names to his children. In a clever compromise, my brother was named Youseph, the Arabic equivalent of Joseph, my parents got the hundred dollars and everyone was happy. When I came along, my father wanted to name me after his mother and so I became Jamillah. My mother had long since embraced my father's Arab culture and was quite pleased with the names.

My father's own name changed dependent on location. When he was a small child in Colombia, South America in the late 1920s and early 1930s he was known as Jorge. Back in Palestine he was Jadallah, a name when broken down means gift from God. Once my father arrived in American in the spring of 1952, others found his name too hard to pronounce, spell, or remember so he became George, the English version of his name in Colombia, Jorge.

I believe my father's openness about his heritage conveyed the message to others that he was comfortable in his skin and that he would not mind if they asked questions. By not trying to "pass" as another more common race and wearing his Arabness comfortably out in the open, my father educated our community on his homeland. With the exception of a few hateful acts by individuals, our community as a whole has always embraced my family and seemed disappointed when we show up to a party without bringing hummus, tabouli, or another traditional Arabic treat.

In the literature about discrimination, hate crimes and mistreatment there were also shards of light and evidence of a kind of humanity much greater than what the hatred and anger revealed. Balbir Singh Sodhi was an American gunned down on the Saturday after September 11, 2001 in retaliation for the attacks. While the Sodhi family is not Arab or Muslim,

investigators believe it was the turban worn by Sikh men that led an angry man in a pick-up truck to murder Sodhi. When the man was arrested he yelled “I’m a patriot! I stand for America all the way!”

Days later, over 3000 people showed up to a memorial service for Balbir Sodhi. The attorney general of Arizona made a public statement condemning the crime and the mayor opened the Civic Center for the memorial. Local officials invited family members from India to attend the memorial service and the U.S. embassy ensured that visas were immediately issued to the family members. The embassy even arranged for the parents to be met when they got off the plane and cleared them in immigration without delay. The family received cards, letters and an American flag from people around the country and Balbir’s name was included in the 9/11 memorial in Arizona’s State Memorial Park.

Eleven months after Balbir’s murder, one of his brothers, Sukhpal was gunned down in San Francisco while driving his cab. The police were never able to classify his killing as a hate crime but Balbir and Sukhpal youngest brother Rana, believes that Sukhpal was also killed because of his turban. Even though Rana lost two brothers in the space of less than one year he still feels supported and embraced by his American community. Nearly a decade after the loss of his brothers Rana Sodhi writes:

I felt very encouraged from neighbors, from government. I lost my two brothers, but I felt like I made hundreds more brothers. That makes my heart open, and I feel proud to be part of this community. I don’t have anger in my heart, because of the way the community rose up and joined us. (p. 164).

Rana, who now speaks publicly about the loss of his brothers and works to educate people about the Sikh culture. He speaks with hope about America's future with regard to how we treat our "othered" citizens:

Every time we have a crisis, we learn and get better, right? During World War II, they put Japanese Americans in camps and treated them badly. What happened after 9/11 was bad, but see the difference? Things have changed: the government is different, people are different. So we are becoming a more educated country. (cite source)

## **Summary**

Within the vast amount of pages of information explored or analyzed, similar stories were repeatedly shared. These stories involved being scared, targeted, being hated, misunderstood, and treated unequally, especially since the events of September 11, 2001. There is little doubt that Arab and Muslim Americans now divide their lives into the time before September 11, 2001 and the time after. It is not a coincidence that dozens, maybe hundreds of books have emerged in the last decade, which explored every possible variation of being Arab or Muslim in America.

Many of the events from the stories occurred in similar places such as schools and airplanes and airports. Discriminatory behavior is not unexpected at airports and on planes considering that the attacks were directly connected to air travel. The possibility of another attack invoked terror in many travelers and their fears were exacerbated by a social and political climate thick with hatred and fear. From bullying in elementary schools to federal legislation targeting entire populations, America made it acceptable to openly discriminate against other Americans in airports and on planes.

Many of the stories shared commonalities that involved being suspect and being treated as not wholly American and experiencing internal conflict created by the tension on belonging to



two groups that seemingly represent cultural polar opposites. One example is the previously mentioned case of parents asking their children's teacher if he was American or Muslim. The obvious insinuation being that being Muslim negates being American or vice versa. Former president George W. Bush perpetuated this divisive notion when he famously stated, "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." (Bush, 2001). This comment further separated the two identities in the minds of the American public at a time when the terms Arab and Muslim were considered by many to be synonymous with the term terrorist.

Finally, there was also a recurrent notion that in spite of the discord of the past decade many Muslim and Arab Americans feel integrated into and supported by the larger American community. Naturally, these stories were not as prevalent because just as any news, reports tend to focus on the terrible and on the shocking events. This does not mean, however, that stories of support and affirmation are not out there, just that they are reported with less frequency. This also does not mean that the number of positive stories compares with the number of negative stories. There is a reason so many books and films have been created in the last decade regarding the mistreatment of Arab and Muslim Americans and that reason is simply, that there are an abundance of these stories in post 9/11 America.

The final chapter will provide the conclusions of the study and reflect on the methodology as well as the experience of conducting the study. The chapter will offer recommendations for social, educational and policy change and for further research. Finally, in alignment with the purpose of this study, Chapter 5 will tell the collective story of Arabs in post 9/11 America.

## **Chapter 5: Findings**

### **Personal Narrative**

Every summer we have a fourth of July picnic. We eat hamburgers and hotdogs with potato chips and drink beer. Sometimes we even have apple pie and ice cream. Like most Americans we are thinking about having fun, cooking out or camping and watching fireworks more than we are thinking about being American. I've always been an American so usually I don't have to think too much about it.

This is probably why it came as such a surprise to learn that my father was not an American citizen. Only recently did he become a "real" American. He's always been American in my memory and my "American" parents always taught us that as Americans it was our civic responsibility to vote and so we did. It was not until after September 11, 2001 when my mother revealed to me that my father was not an American citizen and that he had never voted. I was astounded. All of my life I believed he was a model American and he did, after all, have all the attributes that one might expect from a model American... except for the fact that he wasn't really American. He was here legally though and he held a green card identifying him as a "permanent resident."

My father had never voted although he always paid his taxes, never used government assistance and was never in trouble with the law. He contributed to society by teaching music to underprivileged kids and lived an American existence for as long as I can remember. So why, I wondered had he never become a citizen and why did my parents keep this secret from my brother and me? There are no simple answers. Maybe, in his heart, obtaining his American citizenship meant relinquishing his Palestinian citizenship. Maybe my dad didn't feel he truly belonged or maybe it was just one of those things he never quite got around to doing. Anyway, for whatever reason, my dad never applied for citizenship.

After the 9/11 attacks it was revealed that there was support in the American government for the internment of Arab citizens. During the summer of 2002 a member of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, appointed by former President Bush publically stated that the detention of Arab Americans was not out of the realm of possibility. Another Bush appointee to the commission defended the statement noting that the constitution did not protect citizens from being embarrassed or inconvenienced. These suggestions were mind numbing. I might have been able to dismiss them as absurd had there not been discussion on national news programming about such camps. My mother became fearful that my father was more at risk of detention because he did not hold U.S. citizenship. She was also concerned that if my father left the country to visit family he may not be allowed back in.

After much discussion, we decided that my father should apply for citizenship, even if it drew attention to him as an Arab. Because Palestine is not recognized as a country, my father did not hold citizenship from any country, thus making him a refugee. Negotiating the naturalization process was nothing less than daunting and involved several months, three states, and one U.S. senator. Eventually, after 52 consecutive years of being a model citizen, my father officially became an American. My family went to Denver for the ceremony and watched with pride as my 74-year old father was finally acknowledged as the American he had been for more than half a century.

That Fourth of July we held a cookout just like every other year. And, just like every other Fourth of July, next to the hamburgers, hot dogs and potato chips sat the hummus, pita bread and stuffed grape leaves. Next to the apple pie sat a pan of baklava and we ate and watched fireworks and like other Americans, we still thought more about cooking out and having fun than we thought about being American.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of Arab Americans living in post-9/11 America. The examination was done by scrutinizing the experiences of this group from various perspectives. Using Bank's (2009) notion of "one window with multiple panes" (p. 4) this study utilized personal experiences and the lived experiences of others, both youth and adult. The study considered time, both pre and post-9/11. The spaces in which the experiences occurred provided yet another pane through which to examine the data. Looking at specific spaces such as schools, airports, places of employment or housing and common spaces such as local businesses or public areas added another perspective through which the data could be viewed.

In this chapter, I present a discussion of the findings of this study. In addition, I reflect on the use of analytic autoethnography as a means for conducting this study. Next, a brief summary of how the research fulfilled the key features of an analytic autoethnography is presented. A discussion about how the current literature with regard to Arab Americans compares to the findings of this study is presented. Recommendations for future research are discussed with implications for educational settings. Finally, I will conclude with what I have found to be the collective story of Arab Americans living in post-9/11 America.

## **Summary of Themes and Threads**

This study found one key theme that seemed to dominate the recent experience of many Arab Americans. The dominant theme was that September 11, 2001 was a watershed moment in the lives of Arab Americans. In addition to the burden that all Americans experienced as a result of the attacks, Arab Americans carried the additional weight of being Arab, like the hijackers. This extra weight was the knowledge and fear that Arab Americans would inevitably pay for these attacks.

Sub-themes that emerged in the data analysis included Arab Americans being automatically suspect. Although Arab Americans are a group regularly targeted in a discriminatory fashion and frequently not viewed as completely American by some, they embrace the unique space they inhabit. Importantly, in the space beyond the hate, most Arab Americans, like other Americans, continue to integrate themselves into America's rich cultural landscape.

Threads or common components of the reported experiences of Arab Americans developed during the data analysis. Settings such as airports, schools, and mosques were likely places for discrimination to occur. The type of discriminatory behavior varied between different settings. Language used to harass and intimidate Arab Americans often shared similar messages and included the word terrorist. The findings of this study derive from the combination of threads, sub-themes and the overarching theme.

## **Findings**

Since the events of September 11, 2001 Arab and Muslim Americans have not only faced discrimination and been subject to hate crimes and demeaning treatment by the very institutions created to protect Americans but this group has also been thrust into the position of defending their ethnicity, their religion, their political beliefs and their traditions. Arab and Muslim Americans have spent an entire decade, so far, being compelled to apologize for attacks in which they were also victims and that they did not condone or participate in. They have been expected to disavow their Arabness or their religions and tolerate being treated differently so that they do not appear to support the agendas of the 9/11 attackers. The notion that only adults have been "cast out" to the margins of American society compounds the damage. Many Arab and Muslim children in American schools were targets of backlash hatred and harassment. Other Americans

who are neither Arab nor Muslim became targets because the attackers mistakenly believed them to be Middle Eastern in a social and political climate where it has become acceptable to single out a specific group for collective punishment.

This study confirmed that Arab Americans, like other minority groups in the United States, have been the subject of differential treatment. This is true both before and after September 11, 2001. An ABC News poll conducted in 1991 suggested that 8 out of 10 Americans associated the term “terrorist” with Arabs and nearly 6 out of 10 Americans applied the term “violent” to Arabs. According to a Newsweek poll after conducted immediately after the 9/11 attacks one third of Americans supported putting Arabs living in the U. S. under special surveillance as was done to Japanese Americans during World War II (Jones 2001 in Marvasti, 2005).

This study found that Arab Americans share a collective story with regard to living in America post-9/11. Prior to the events of the 9/11 attacks, Arabs were associated with caricature-like stereotypes but also remained relative invisible in pre-9/11 America. Now, this group is frequently unwelcome in their own communities and their own country. There is a need to end the silence about the treatment of Arabs and Muslims in America just as there is a need to expose other shameful acts against other human beings. Arab Americans as well as other Middle Eastern and Muslims share a need to repair what Goffman (1963), calls our “spoiled identities.” Spoiled identities preclude members of the stigmatized group from full social acceptance.

As America passes the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attacks it is important to document and explore where the events have led all Americans including those Americans who share similar religious, ethnic or national characteristics with the men who perpetrated the attacks. Perhaps it is especially important to explore this topic so that when and if another group of

people are targeted as being “lesser” in the United States we will respond better than we did with Japanese Americans in World War II, better than we did during the Holocaust and better than we did after September 11, 2001.

### **Reflection on the use of analytic autoethnography as method**

In exploring and understanding the experiences of a group of people, it is imperative to hear stories. In documenting these same experiences, it then becomes necessary to tell or retell the stories. Autoethnography as method provided the perfect venue for gathering a mixture of my own stories as well as the stories of others. There were many numbers and statistics available to support the collected stories, but as noted, they only “support” the stories. It is up to the storyteller to make the numbers have meaning on a human level.

Autoethnography allowed me a means of delving deeper into the experiences of Arab and Muslim Americans living in post 9/11 America. While reports of experiences provided the facts of what took place, it was reading the stories that expressed how the experiences affected the storyteller’s life that added richness not present in factual reports and numbers. The use of autoethnography also allowed me as a researcher and a subject, to compare and contrast my own experiences with that of others while recognizing threads and elements that a non-participant researcher may not have been able to access.

The use of Critical Race Theory as one lens through which to view my study allowed me to situate my findings in previous research. In a predominantly White, Christian country, non-white people and non-Christians are not necessarily afforded the privilege of equal treatment either by society or by the legal system. Provisions of the Patriot Act were used to strip legal rights from American citizens who were Arab or non-Christian. Because Arab and Muslim Americans were not members of America’s dominant power group, it was acceptable for them to

be collectively targeted and “othered” by these new laws which were enacted by a congress in which nearly 9 of every 10 members were white males and in which 99% of the members were Christian (Congressional Quarterly, 2002; Menendez, 2000).

Being mindful of Anderson’s (2006) work in which he defines key features of analytic autoethnography, I fulfilled the requirements of the first feature, which is to be a complete member researcher (CMR). Being a complete member of the group I was studying provided me with first hand experiences related to the group I studied. As a CMR, I had a unique perspective with which to view data that came from other group members.

Reflexivity, the second key feature of analytic autoethnography, requires the researcher to develop an awareness of how their own feelings may shape the interpretation of the respondent’s words. (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). In this study, I was required to consider the words of others in relation to my own experiences. As an Arab American, my particular set of experiences shaped how I viewed and interpreted the told experiences of others. It also shaped how I construed statements made by others about Arab Americans.

Anderson considers the visible voice of the researcher to be another key feature of analytic autoethnography. In this study, my own voice was present in my narratives and in my interpretation of the other narratives. My voice was also present in the discussions of the data. This particular feature emphasizes the “auto” in autoethnography.

In attempting to understand a large group of people, one cannot simply analyze their own experiences and assert that they represent the entire group. In the fourth key feature of analytic autoethnography, the researcher must move away from the self and consider the experiences of other members of the group. The poetry of Suheir Hammad and the voices in the other collected data analyzed in the study provide this balance.



Finally, this study adheres to the requirement that the researcher be committed to an analytic agenda. While this study does document individual stories, it transcends the data in its construction of a collective story to create an understanding a specific group. In this case, the story helps to build an understanding of the experience of being an Arab American in post 9/11 America.

### **Comparing the Findings to the Literature**

The published literature regarding the post 9/11 experience of Arab Americans supports the findings of this study. The mere volume of publications about the Arab American experience that can now be found provides evidence that there is a story to be told about this complex group of people (Shalal-Esa, 2012). Literally hundreds of books about and by Arab Americans have been published in the last decade. Topics include feminism, race, identity, food, portrayal in the media, treatment by government and community, art and politics.

In academic publications, there has also been a marked increase in the volume of literature regarding both Arab and Muslim Americans. Much of this literature focuses on race, culture, identity construction, discrimination, religion, and the impact of the September 11, 2001 attacks on this particular group of Americans. The preponderance of studies regarding discrimination against this group of people supports the notion that Arab Americans not viewed as completely American and as a result, face substantially more discriminatory treatment than members of more socially dominant groups. Cainkar contends that while the events of September 11, 2001 significantly exacerbated the hostile climate toward Arab and Muslim Americans, they did not create the climate. Rather, the identity of this group had already been constructed by stereotypes created by the media and government prior to the attacks (Cainkar, 2011).

Multiple studies, polls, books, and peer refereed works support this study's contention that Arab Americans navigate a hostile social landscape. In an Amazon.com search of the term "Arab American" produced 941 results and a search of the term "Muslim American" resulted in 137 results. Virtually all of these books have been published in the last decade.

Searches of academic databases provided a variety of articles published in the last decade. EBSCO Academic Search Premier contained 1,501 articles on Arab Americans of which 1,156 were published since 2001. When the term "Arab American" is combined with the term "race," 68 of the 75 articles were published post-9/11. When the term "Arab American" is combined with the term "discrimination" the results are 141 of the 181 articles in the database were published after the events of September 11, 2001. The search results indicate that discrimination and race are notable issues for Arab Americans and that the issues have become substantially more prominent based on the volume of literature publishes since 2001 (Report on hate crimes, 2003). Similar searches substituting the term "Muslim American" for "Arab American" showed that 423 of 461 articles were published after 9/11. All but two of the articles that included the term "discrimination" were published after September 11, 2001.

These numbers support the notion that September 11, 2001 was a watershed moment in the lives of Arab and Muslim Americans. The mere visibility of articles on topics that were virtually nonexistent prior to the attacks suggests that Arab and Muslim Americans have become a visible population in America. Jamal and Naber (2008) confirm the loss of obscurity for Arab Americans in their book *"Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects."*

Books such as *How Does it Feel to be a Problem* (Bayoumi, 2008), *"Civil Rights in Peril: The targeting of Arabs and Muslims"* (Hagopian, 2004) and *Patriot Acts: Narratives of*

*post-9/11 Injustice* (Malek, 2011) support this study's contention that discrimination regularly permeates the lives of Arab and Muslim Americans. Bassiouni (2003) compares the erosion of Arab Americans civil right to "McCarthy's witch-hunt for Communists or their sympathizers."

### Implications and Recommendations

While the amount of literature about Arab and Muslim Americans has increased since 2001, there continues to be a shortage of literature regarding the experience of Arab and Muslim American students in public schools. The consequences of not understanding the experiences of students who have been subject to torment and disparaging treatment are often tragic and fatal. The increasing number of school shootings evidences this.

The following words come from the journal of a high school student with an extensive history of victimization by bullies. The school psychologist in the building where this student went to school prior to his expulsion shared the following journal excerpt: "My obsession with death is not suicidal, it is homicidal. One of the few pleasures I take is contemplating my tormentors' demise. They make me feel as if I'm not a person. I simply imagine taking their humanity...permanently (Warnygora, 2004, p. 100)." The words illuminate the damage caused when people become victims of bullies. The words are potentially a chilling warning of retaliation violence.

In an effort to create educational environments where all students can thrive, educational leaders must commit to addressing issues of othering and discrimination. Such commitment cannot be effective in the absence of research that focuses on the experiences of specific groups who are targets of differential treatment in schools. Studies such as *Educating Muslim American Youth* confirm that Arab and Muslim American students navigate a hostile school environment

suggesting the need for further research about the social educational experience of these students (Bonet, 2011).

There is a need for programs that address bullying in schools. While many schools offer such programs, they are usually surface programs which do not examine in-depth the issues that lead to the targeting of particular groups. In my own school, we began a bully prevention program in which we trained less than 3% of our students and expected them to attend functions on Saturdays and hold group meetings during their already brief lunch period at school. By not creating time during the school day for this program, we conveyed the message that this program was not valuable. By training so few students, we implied that this was not important for every student.

Like all schools, we have certain required classes such as math. All students are required to take math and time scheduled each school day for students to learn math. Without passing a designated amount of math, a student cannot earn a diploma. If core academic areas, such as math, were given the same regard and resources as our bullying program, a few kids would get two days of math instruction early in the year and have the option of going to math meetings for about thirty minutes during lunch once every few weeks and participation would be optional. Students would not need any math to graduate. A math program such as this would be laughable and yet a bullying program with this set-up is acceptable. It is thus, not surprising, that schools continue to be bastions for bullying.

Many of the stories shared by Arab American youth included being targeted in their schools. This indicates a need for effective bullying programs in schools. While Arab or Muslim teens have not committed school shootings, students who claim to have been bullied at school have committed many school shootings. The importance of effective and thorough bullying

programs in schools cannot be understated. As the presenter in a bully prevention training I attended noted, “It’s hard to hate someone when you know their story.”

The need for future research that is designed to create an understanding of Arab Americans and to prevent the targeting of Arab Americans is also necessary outside of schools. Major Nidal Hassan, the officer who perpetrated a deadly mass murder at Ft. Hood had a well-documented history of being tormented by his coworkers in the army. Because data specific to Arab Americans has not historically been collected due to their legal designation of being White, policy makers have lacked the data with which to create informed policy about the targeting of Arab Americans by coworkers, institutions and community members (Moradi & Hasan, 2004b).

On a state level, the designation of Arab Americans as a protected minority group for the purpose of collecting hate crime data is essential. Without specific data, policy makers are unable to create effective policy. An article about a study conducted at the University of South Florida on hate crimes against Arab Americans noted:

The authors criticize the lack of an "Arab" category in the nation's hate-crime reporting mechanisms, which, they argue, is a major obstacle in studying hate crimes against Arab Americans in the wake of 9/11. While Muslims are covered by the racial, ethnic and religious categories established by the federal Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990, hate crimes against Arabs are likely to be assigned to the "other ethnicity" category” (UFS News, 2011).

Scrutinizing bills for evidence of bias is necessary before their passage into law. Such scrutiny serves as a safeguard against misguided laws that specifically target an entire group of people. The passage of laws that prohibit profiling is also imperative in preventing institutional targeting of people based on their ethnicity or religion.

While Arab Americans were the focus of this study it could be argued that this study is really about how Americans treat each other and what happens as a result. Arab Americans, like other non-hegemonic groups experience life differently than members of a socially dominant group. I chose to look through an Arab American lens but differential treatment is not reserved solely for Arab Americans.

Perhaps it is simply a tragedy of our culture that Americans frequently do not understand each other. In February 2012, Trayvon Martin, an African American teen on his way home from buying candy was shot to death shot to death by a neighborhood watch patrol. National outcry about the fact that the shooter was not arrested prompted New York Times reporter, Charles Blow to write an article about the burden of belonging to a group who is racially profiled and does not receive equitable treatment under the law:

As the father of two black teenage boys, this case hits close to home. This is the fear that seizes me whenever my boys are out in the world: that a man with a gun and an itchy finger will find them “suspicious.” That passions may run hot and blood run cold. That it might all end with a hole in their chest and hole in my heart. That the law might prove insufficient to salve my loss.

That is the burden of black boys in America and the people that love them: running the risk of being descended upon in the dark and caught in the cross-hairs of someone who crosses the line. (Blow, 2012).

Ultimately, this study adds a component in constructing understanding between people who are different but share a community, country, or world. Through the sharing of stories, people are given an opportunity to understand each other. Until stories about concentration camps, internment camps, and Indian reservations made their way into mainstream culture,

people did not have to confront their lack of understanding about these groups. It is through the sharing of stories that we learn to know each other and begin to create a culture in which it is socially unacceptable for public voices to perpetuate hatred. At the end of the day, we are all Americans with similar hopes and dreams. When we share our stories with each other, we begin to demolish the barriers that divide us.

### **Collective story**

The collective story of Arab Americans is based in the American dream. Like most Americans, we are the descendants of immigrants or we are ourselves, immigrants. Like others who journeyed to America, we came for a better life. Those of us who were born here expect to have better lives than the generations of our families before us who did not come to America.

The reality is that we do have better lives than previous generation of our family who did not immigrate to the United States. As my father once told me, America is the greatest country in the world. We live in a wealthy nation where we have the legal right to practice any religion we choose. We live in a nation that provides women opportunities to be educated and self-sufficient. We live in a nation that affords each of our children an education. We live in a nation where we have the freedom to shout our politics, no matter how unorthodox or unpopular, in public. We are not legally bound to behave a certain way or dress a certain way based on our gender. We have the opportunity to contribute to our communities, serve our country, and be proud Americans.

Our nation, the one that many Arab Americans call home, is not without its flaws. Even though we are Americans, we sometimes are unwelcome in our country and the officials who pass, enact, and enforce our laws do not always represent us (nor do they usually represent any minority group). Sometimes we face hurtful discrimination similar to other American minority

groups such as Gays, Blacks, Hispanics, indigenous Americans, and women. However, ultimately, like most Americans, we live here because we choose to live here.

Discrimination is a part of our experience, just as it is with all minority groups, but it is far from the whole of our experience. Discrimination does not define us. We, like other minority groups, continue to fight for our rights. We are a proud people with a history rich in tradition, education and accomplishment and as Americans, we continue to weave our histories, our religions, our politics, our language and our customs into our daily lives. It is in this way that we live the American dream.



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