

**Keeping Faith in the Post-9/11 Era:
Studying Transparent U.S. Muslim Networks of Communication**

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**Spring 2014
Legal Studies H195B**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my husband Joe, my family and friends, who have supported me and believed in me through the ups and downs of my educational endeavors. I would like to acknowledge and thank all those who have shown an interest in my project and have contributed to the completion of this thesis.

The realization of this project relied greatly on the insight, support and patience of my advisor Professor Michael Musheno. His enthusiasm, encouragement and advice throughout the past year have helped me to overcome the challenges I encountered during the process of this thesis. Thank you for your time and effort to conceptualize my ideas. I also would like to thank Professor Musheno, as well as advisor Christina Stevens-Carbone, for providing a platform and guidance for undergraduate students to develop their own research and contribute to the academic field of their studies.

Of course, none of this research would have been possible without the engagement and assistance of those involved in the study. The individuals I encountered at local mosques were welcoming and invited me to learn about their spirituality as well as their political ideals. I want to thank all those who have in any way contributed to this project and who were willing to talk to me about their personal experience and their opinions.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

As a European born international student and non-Muslim in the United States, I should take a brief moment and explain how I arrived at the topic of my research. Growing up in a predominantly Catholic country with a small Muslim minority and attending a Catholic school for my entire primary education, I found myself disillusioned with religion in the face of institutional hypocrisy and intolerance toward others. Xenophobia, especially toward the Muslim minority is widespread in my hometown of Vienna, Austria, and I witnessed this fear-mongering and discrimination for many years living in a city district with a high number of immigrant residents from Turkey and the Balkans, many of them my immediate neighbors and friends. With this rather confusing experience of religion, I decided early in my life to disengage with any organized religion completely. However, upon studying immigration and citizenship law in the United States, I found discrimination against Muslims to be even more pronounced here, which finally motivated me to study the relationship between the state and Muslims in the U.S. since September 11, 2001.

As a non-Muslim and non-American, choosing to pursue research on the Muslim community inherently has its challenges, most notably limited community access and cultural understanding. However, while I did experience a certain amount of hesitation and difficulty gaining trust with some individuals in the community, it was a limitation that I feel could be overcome with additional resources. Indeed, perhaps the primary limitation to my work was the scale of the research project itself, mainly with regard to time, which did not align with the scope of the population that was being investigated. While I was aware of this risk, and had been warned about potential time and resource constraints from the outset of the project, I have found great personal intrigue with this subject that

has helped me to grow on a personal level as well as to gain a deeper understanding of community and my place in it.

This work gives analysis of impressions and interactions with those interviewed and involved, with findings limited in scope to the time and resources available. Even since starting work on this project in the fall of 2013 the issues of surveillance and Muslim discrimination have continued to rapidly evolve and garner increased national media attention. In this sense the work provides one answer to the research question proposed, and although some of the findings should be seen as speculative, I encourage further investigation of this project by taking into account my initial findings with regard to the Muslim community in Oakland.

ABSTRACT

As a result of the September 11, 2011 terrorist attacks, Muslim American communities have been subject to increased surveillance, state scrutiny and religious profiling practices, which potentially threaten their constitutional right to freedom of religion. While recent reports have started to show the extent to which religious freedom of Muslims has been violated, little research has been done to examine how this group has organized itself to push back against discriminatory policing practices. This project studied human interaction in and around local mosques in Oakland, California, as well as online interaction on the social media platform Twitter in order to determine how community organizing and political activism emerge from a religious population under surveillance and state policing scrutiny. Personal interviews and observations were carried out over the winter of 2014 with theoretical work in the field of community, solidarity, and activism used to frame my analysis. The findings of my case study reinforce how the state inappropriately classifies and targets the Muslim community as a single entity, and how the diversity and individuality of the East Bay Muslim community is organizing themselves in order to achieve political goals.

INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2002, the one-year anniversary of the tragic terrorist attacks on the United States, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was initiated by the federal government in order to detect terrorists amongst those traveling into and out of the United States. More commonly known as special registration, this government-sponsored system of documentation and surveillance required all non-immigrant males over the age of 16 years in the United States who had citizenship from nations with suspected links to terrorism to be interviewed, fingerprinted and photographed by the Department of Justice (Bayoumi 271). Initiated with five nations (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Sudan) the list was expanded to include 25 nations, and with the sole exception of North Korea all of the states were characterized by having a majority Islamic population. Individuals failing to register in the program faced possible incarceration or deportation, however, even those who registered were not safe with approximately 16.5% of registrants being served with “Notices to Appear” subpoenas, meaning that deportation proceedings had been initiated against them (Bayoumi 272). While the program was launched as a measure to counteract potential terrorism, these deportations were not due to the registrants’ affiliation with terrorist activity, but instead were based on minor immigration violations. In fact, the special registration system has not been able to exact even a single charge of terrorism (Bayoumi 271). The special registration program, as implemented and executed by the federal government, exemplifies not only the disruption to the lives of tens of thousands of people in the United States, but also shows that the United States framed its response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 around Islam and the issue of religion.

The targeting of individuals on the basis of religion has continued to determine the nature of strategies, policies, and laws that enable police authorities to single out Muslims in the search for terrorists. While some groups, such as non-citizens bear a greater burden, all Muslims have been deemed suspect by the state with respect to terrorist activity and have therefore been a major target in scrutiny and surveillance by the state. Such policies and initiatives include enhanced screening by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at airports, the creation of the Terrorist Screening Center's No-Fly list that lists "suspect" people who are subsequently not permitted to board commercial aircrafts traveling in or out of the United States, and the enactment of the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001). The USA Patriot Act was adopted by Congress soon after September 11, 2001 and has allowed extensive surveillance operations to be carried out within the United States, as well as the collection of data and evidence such as secret searches of homes without the obligation to inform those who were being searched (Dworkin 25). Although laws like the USA Patriot Act do not single out Muslims per se, since the issue of terrorism in the United States has been framed around Islam the extension of surveillance capability and laws that enhance data collection and policing capabilities automatically affect the Muslim population disproportionately.

In addition to public policy initiatives to target Muslims, more secret undertakings have been used to discretely survey and infiltrate Muslim communities in the United States. A 2011 investigative article by the *Associated Press* exposed the NYPD Human Mapping Project, which targeted potential Muslim terrorists by tracking the public displays of Islamic religious practice in New York City, including attending mosque, wearing hijab,

engaging in community gatherings, or donating money to religious organizations (Grabar). Similarly, the F.B.I. initiated a Mosque-Outreach program to allegedly reconcile trust with the American Muslim population, but in fact was uncovered by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to be a covert surveillance program to infiltrate Mosques and Muslim religious communities in order to gather data. While only two examples, numerous other instances of Muslim surveillance and targeting have recently been reported, with new issues continuing to be uncovered and reported.

The treatment of Muslims in the War on Terrorism is reason for great concern since it relies on racial and religious profiling practices targeting those who are Muslim but also those who appear to be Muslim. This development is commonly referred to with the neologism Islamophobia, which is the “discrimination, bigotry and other practices that are specifically directed toward the Islam and a group of people including Muslims” (Love 2007). It is important to notice that not only Muslims are targeted in these religious profiling practices, since the oversimplification and misrepresentation of the Muslim community also leads to the discrimination of those who are “thought” to be Muslim, which explains the increased frequency of discriminatory attacks against Sikh individuals in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. The implications of these profiling practices are the racialization, criminalization, and more generally the misrepresentation of a group that in reality is defined by a high degree of diversity with regard to race, ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation, as well as multiple other identities.

While Islamophobia is a byproduct of the War on Terror, it is also evident in the more general public discourse of Islam as highlighted by conversations in the mainstream media. As Ervand Abrahamian found in his study, immediately after September 11, 2001,

major newspapers such as The New York Times participated in and shaped the discourse around the “‘Muslim rage’ against Western civilization” in which Muslims were contrasted to the United States as ‘the others’ (532). The implication of creating ‘the other’ is again the oversimplification of the Muslim community, whereby only aspects that fit into the greater narrative are highlighted. Abrahamian argues that this greater narrative has been defined by analyzing “international politics without discussing real politics” and instead using religious-cultural explanations for the terrorist attacks of 2001 (535). This led to the publishing of ‘The anger of the Arab youth’, ‘Jihad 101’, ‘Yes, this *is* a religious war’, ‘Dictates of faith’ and other articles that were supposedly searching for the causes of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (531). By framing this crisis within the context of Islam, both the media as well as the U.S. government have established and reinforced an association between Islam and terrorism that has created damage for many Muslims living in and visiting the United States.

Given the stark oversimplification of the U.S. Muslim population and the association of Islam with terrorism, there is a need to remedy the representation and use empirical data rather than grand discourses that stem from an emotional interpretation of the terrorist attacks of 2001. While some recent studies have provided more accurate data on the U.S. Muslim population as a whole and aggregate characteristics of their identity, little is known about the Muslim American community. The misrepresentation and oversimplification of Muslims as a group creates a need to define the community through a new lens, and this research attempts to answer this question by looking at the local Muslim community in Oakland, California. Additionally, this study attempts to understand the ways

in which Muslims have been impacted and organized themselves in the face of Islamophobia. In summary this thesis tries to answer two questions:

1. How can the Muslim community be defined given the diverse backgrounds of its members and the contrasting misrepresentation by the government and media?
2. How is the Muslim community organizing itself and adapting to the fear of surveillance and scrutiny by the state?

In order to achieve this goal I will first provides demographic data on the Muslim community in the United States as well as in the San Francisco Bay Area, followed by a literature review and analysis of secondary data that I've used as a theoretical foundation for this research. The theoretical section is followed by a case study of the local Bay Area Muslim community, which I analyzed through human interactions in an around mosques in Oakland, California, as well as through interactions on the social media platform Twitter.

DEMOGRAPHIC

A primary concern when addressing the Muslim community in the United States, and more specifically in the San Francisco Bay Area, is to define the population that is actually being examined. The first difficulty in doing so is a lack of reliable data, which is mainly a result of the U.S. Census Bureau's policy not to collect information about religious affiliation. Although some recent surveys have independently collected data about the Muslim American population, such as the PEW Research Center in their report *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*, information about the U.S. Muslim population should be read as an "educated approximation, at best" (9).

Another difficulty in collecting accurate demographic information is the extreme diversity of the Muslim population, which ranges widely in terms of ethnicity, origin, race, denomination, and migratory status, with no single group constituting a majority. Multiple religious beliefs categorize Islam, both in terms of denomination including Shi'a, Sunni, or Sufism, as well as in practice with certain minority communities adhering to more conservative and traditional practices such as the visibility of the hijab. One of the groups most associated with Muslim culture and targeted in the war on terror are people of Arab origin. The definition of this group is again subjective, but more reliable data can be found on this group. The U.S. Census Bureau's *American Community Survey Brief: Arab Households in the US: 2006-2010* labeled any respondents as of Arab ancestry, "who reported being Algerian, Bahraini, Egyptian, Emirati, Iraqi, Jordanian, Kuwaiti, Lebanese, Libyan, Moroccan, Omani, Palestinian, Qatari, Saudi Arabian, Syrian, Tunisian, and Yemeni" (1). Based on this report the Arab population in the United States has grown steadily from a small number of 850,000 (.35% of total population) in 1990s to 1.5 million (.5%) in the most current estimates, a 76% increase since the 1990s (1), but still a small minority of the total American population.

The challenge to depicting a realistic demographic of the Muslim community is particularly difficult in areas such as the San Francisco Bay Area, which is already defined by a dense and highly faceted population in general. However, recent research has shed some light on the identity of the local Muslim community, as published in *The Bay Area Muslim Study: Establishing Identity and Community*. The study was commissioned by the One Nation Bay Area Project, and published in May 2013 by UC Berkeley Professor Bazian and Professor Senzai from Santa Clara University. The researchers found that 250,000

Muslims live in the Bay Area, which constitutes 3.5% of its total population and, therefore, makes it one of the largest Muslim communities in the United States (Bazian and Senzai 8). Ethnically, Bay Area Muslims are broken down as 30% South Asian, 23% Arab, 17% Afghan, 9% African American, 7% Asian or Pacific Islander, 6% White, and 2% Iranian (Bazian and Senzai 8). Finally, 37% of the total Muslims in the Bay Area are located in the East Bay county of Alameda (Bazian and Senzai 9). As one of the highest concentration of Muslims in the country, the population in the Bay Area has grown substantially over the past 30 years resulting in a proliferation of mosques and community organizations (Bazian and Senzai 7).

The focus of this study is centered on the San Francisco East Bay Muslim community, which is differentiated from other American Muslim communities in both its size and diversity. The Bay Area Muslim community is estimated at 250,000 people, constituting 3.5% of all Muslim Americans, with 37% of the Muslims in the Bay Area (approximately 92,500 people) living in the East Bay county of Alameda (Bazian and Senzai 9). The community itself is made up of numerous backgrounds including South Asian, Arab, Afghan, African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, White, and Iranian, with no one group constituting a majority. The strong growth the East Bay Muslim community over the past 30 years has resulted in a proliferation of mosques and community organizations (Bazian and Senzai 7). Muslims started organizing themselves already as early as 1965 with the founding of the San Francisco Islamic Center and the Nation of Islam (NOI), however the community was extremely small with Oakland being one of its main hubs (Bazian and Senzai 25). Oakland also has one of the oldest and most longstanding African American Muslim communities and “pioneered Islamic education in an American setting” (Bazian and

Senzai 27). In the past 30 years the South Bay region has seen a substantial increase in the migration of Muslims due to the increasing demand for highly skilled tech workers. The South Bay Islamic Association (SBIA) and Muslim Community Association (MCA) in Santa Clara, both founded in 1980, reflect this shift and the burgeoning South Bay Muslim community. However, even with migratory patterns shifting south, religious organizations continued to flourish in the East Bay. During the 1990s, Oakland saw a total of 15 new mosque openings, and even though growth slowed in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001 it was recently found that growth has resumed (Bazian and Senzai 34).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to bring context to the subsequent study of the Muslim community, I looked at multiple frameworks for understanding community and relate this to the San Francisco East Bay Muslim community. There is no single definition that can encompass all the facets of community meaning, and in this sense there are multiple theories that try to explain how community is organized and functions. A community is a collective of people that either live in the same place or has some common characteristic or interest, however how exactly the association connects individuals, and how it affects the individual or group behavior is the reason that theoretical frameworks of community are so highly debated. Most notably, there are two main distinguishable conceptual frameworks of community that contrast each other. First, communitarian theorists, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel or Michael Walzer have argued for a “thick” definition of community, which author Steve Herbert explains in his study of the effectiveness of community policing *Citizens, Cops, and Power* as the version of community that highlights the benefits that come with “communal

connection” (p 22). British theorist Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, argues that community traditions, social roles and narratives are the only way to acquire virtue (Chochran 425). As other communitarians, MacIntyre places considerable significance to the potential of community, and as Herbert describes it, sees it as an “important social arena” (Herbert 22). Within this “thick” vision of community, Herbert defines two distinct sub-visions, the first sub-defined “thick recovered” and the other as “thick discovered”, with the main difference being the flexibility of values within the communities. Whereas the “thick recovered” community holds pre-existing values that sustain the group’s morality, the values in the “thick discovered” community are derived through ongoing communal politics, and therefore are variable. Hence, the “discovered” community distinguishes itself by values that are derived from political participation and self-determination by community members, in contrast to the values of the “recovered” community that are preordained and fixed.

While it is crucial to distinguish between these two “thick” versions of community, it is also important to note that in both of these versions the community is placed over the importance of the individual, an element of communitarian theory that has been criticized by many liberal theorists. The liberal criticism of the “thick” version of community highlights the communitarians’ failure to account for the agency and rights of the individual. Since liberalism is a defense of freedom of choice, its supporters refrain from an emphasis of communal values in order to protect the individual from public domination (Cochran 431). The liberal definition of community, highlighting the individual’s capacity to choose any form of life and association with any group, is therefore, best described through a “thin” version of community. The “thin” version assumes that while community

values are important they do not have an overwhelming impact on an individual's behavior, as well as their "political and moral grounding" (Herbert 27). In Morris Jankowitz's terms this vision would be called a community of "limited liability", in which the group members' affiliation and connection varies from person to person, from place to place, and from time to time, and their political and moral values are dependent on the individual's personal choice (Herbert 27). In this sense, the "thin" version of community is a community in which differences are tolerated, fundamental human rights are protected, and tyranny by the majority is prevented, all through the capacity of the group members to choose amongst a variety of values and identities.

Using these three visions of community to study several neighborhoods in Seattle, Herbert found that while these competing visions are valuable normative ideologies, they do not have much relevance for the actual citizens. According to Herbert, "thick" versions do not resonate to people while at the same time they expect a security and familiarity from their neighborhood community that indicates a deeper connection than the "thin" version provides. Herbert's study is of great value for the effectiveness of community policing and shows the limits that come with normative definitions of community. As Herbert's study focuses on neighborhood communities, its outcomes have limited value for an inquiry of religious community, however the distinction between "thin" and "thick" community is still helpful in the analysis of the representation and treatment of the Muslim American community. In fact, I argue that Islamophobic discourse in the United States relies on a "thick" vision of community.

Viewing community as "thick" reduces it to an abstract entity with inherent collective values rather than being defined by the individual. With this definition, the state's

treatment of Muslims can be seen as relying on a “thick” vision of community through broad reaching programs such as Special Registration. The result is an acceptance of stereotyping and generalization, which puts the state at risk of discrimination and racial profiling. Nowhere is this as clear as in the War on Terror, with both the state and the media seeing the Muslim community as “thick”, which reinforces and helps facilitate racial profiling. Viewing the Muslim community as “thick” also leads the general population to believe that there is not a problem with discrimination because of the “sameness” of the individuals highlighted through this vision of community. While the traditional aspect of religion would by definition seem to indicate that every religious community could be classified as “thick”, the definition of “thick” and “thin” is highly debated between communitarians and liberals and in the end it is more of a political question in which answers depend on the perspective. In order to understand how we can view the Muslim community today as situated in a diverse metropolitan environment such as San Francisco Bay Area I’ll be using the theoretical work of Michael Hechter and German philosopher Ferdinand Toennies.

One perspective for understanding religion and community structure can be found in the work of Michael Hechter. According to Hechter, religion is defined by extensive obligations, which in turn influences behavior. Additionally, the “threat posed by outsiders can provide a motive for increased solidarity among members of any group”, and “small groups can easily organize and obtain relatively high control capacity“. Conversely, “as the size and spatial dispersion of a group increases, its control costs rise, in consequence, solidarity becomes more difficult to attain” (Hechter 56). Hechter looked at Catholicism, Judaism and Protestants and their extensiveness of obligations, noting how Protestants

asked for less extensive obligations in medieval Europe as they tried to lure away Catholics through the elimination of the sale of papal indulgences as well as more individual freedom of worship (Hechter 57). Similarly, when Jews in Europe were spatially confined to the *shtetl* (Yiddish for “little town”) they subscribed to extensive obligations, but once they were granted full citizenship they became less dependent upon their coreligionists, and Orthodox Judaism shifted toward Reform Judaism, which can be seen as a modernized less “thick” version of community.

Toennies also looked at the relationship between religion and society, making a distinction between two types of social grouping which he calls *Gesellschaft* (associations) and *Gemeinschaft* (community). Writing in the late 1900s when industrialization and urban growth spurred him to rethink notions of community. Although he considered religion to be part of the *Gemeinschaft*, his perspective and idea of religion is framed by his small-town roots, arguing that with the increase in the size of cities and urban dwelling the social connections between individuals become more impersonal and thus belong as part of the *Gesellschaft*. Where Toennies saw religion as a key element to small-town and close-knit communities, he did not see religion as strong enough to create solidarity or community in urban environments (Toennies 23).

As a result of Hechter and Toennies frameworks for understanding religion and community structure, I argue that the San Francisco East Bay Muslim community is actually a “thin” version of community. The size, diversity, and geographical dispersion of the East Bay Muslim Community, combined with individual freedom of worship provide a basis for the community not to be viewed as “thick”. Similarly, Toennis tendency to see more urban and metropolitan places as less likely to be a *Gemeinschaft* than a *Gesellschaft* reinforces

this notion and suggests that the East Bay Muslim community would more appropriately be viewed as “thin” instead of “thick”. The impact of viewing the Muslim community as “thin” directly challenges the United States government’s foundation for extensive scrutiny of the Muslim population.

ACTIVISM

Given that the Muslim community is best described as “thin”, the question then becomes how individuals in the Muslim American population are responding and adapting to the fear of scrutiny and state surveillance. Eric Love explores the topic of Islamophobia in his book *Confronting Islamophobia in the United States: Framing civil rights Activism*. Love looks at anti-Islamophobia civil rights activism from the Middle Eastern perspective, which means that his analysis includes a more racialized group that faces more distinct racial discrimination. However, Love also admits that Islamophobia targets more than just the Middle Eastern community and acknowledges the other identities and space constraints “do not permit a full discussion of the contemporary demographics of these groups” (197). With Islamophobia targeting such a wide array of individuals, Love presses how there is an urgent “need for general research” into how these groups have organized themselves in order to confront Islamophobia (p 208).

Although Love only studied the Middle Eastern Muslim community, he identifies three avenues to which their activism could shift, all of which are applicable to the greater Muslim American population as a whole. First, Love suggests activism may follow the African American avenue as demonstrated by the Civil Rights movement of the mid-twentieth century. In this model of activism, African Americans used marches and civil

disobedience in order to achieve their political objectives. With the potential limited capacity for grassroots movements and sporadic civil disruptions and protests on American college campuses, Love believes it unlikely that the American Muslim community will engage in a widespread civil rights movement in line with the African American avenue, particularly because it was not evident during the decade immediately following 9/11 when hate crimes and state scrutiny were at their height. The reasons for this, Love speculates, is that Muslims have not experienced the same level urgency as African Americans experienced when faced with Jim Crow laws, a level of discrimination that not been reached in the era of Islamophobic policies and laws (208). An additional obstacle to a widespread disruptive movement is the diversity of the Muslim population, in particular the large number of immigrants who would be less likely to engage in disruptive activism in the face of possible deportation.

The second possible paradigm for activism that Eric Love proposes is demonstrated by the “pan-ethnic identity formation model of political advocacy”, evident within the Asian American, Latino/a American and Native American communities (210). In this model, the primary reaction to racialized discrimination is ethnogenesis, in which minority ethnic groups develop a sense of common identity due to racialized discrimination on the institutional level (210). This movement relies on socially constructed racial categories in order to create a collective and gain recognition by the public, and has proven to be successful for minority groups in order to remedy racial discrimination. As with the African American model, the challenge for this model to emerge within the Muslim American population is the diversity of the community, which does not allow for complete racialization. While some scholars have suggested that such pan-ethnic identity is emerging

within the Middle Eastern community, the overall Muslim community is comprised by many other ethnicities and races, which would make it difficult for them to form a sense of common identity based on race. However, I believe this model is useful for an analysis of the Muslim community since it recognizes an identity-formation based on common interest and common hardship that can lead to activism among several groups of various backgrounds.

The third and last paradigm proposed by Eric Love, and developed by scholar Debra Minkoff, is less confrontational and race-neutral including legislative lobbying, cooperation with law enforcement and outreach through the media (Love 213). Some scholars believe that this approach has in fact been emerging in communities advocating against Islamophobia, in particular in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Debra Minkoff sees a shift in Muslim organizations from a focus on education and culture towards political lobbying and judicial activism, however, as Love points out, additional research is needed to clarify the strategic decisions made by advocacy groups and organizations. Additionally, the question remains about the effectiveness of this approach, since Minkoff suggests that less confrontation with the state often leads to co-optation and failure (1697). Although my research is not an attempt to clarify the question of advocacy formation on a national level, these three paradigms of activism are used to inform my observations and analysis of data at the local level.

SOLIDARITY

While there does not appear to be a communal bond that ties all Muslims in the East Bay together, the issue of solidarity is a key element in understanding how groups identify

themselves and come together. Hechter argues the importance of studying groups in stating that “the behavior of any group is not reducible to the actions of its individual members” (2), and furthermore that “environmental conditions...have the effect of narrowing the individual’s choices, and hence, actions”. The impact of this is that differences between individuals “do not significantly affect their behavior” (4). Thus from a religious perspective, when the Muslim community is treated as “thick” there is a greater chance that individual differences will fade and behavior will align with that of the community.

Hechter provides two explanations for understanding solidarity labeled Normativist and Structuralist. The Normativist category looks at groups such as families where solidarity is higher due to internalized and extensive norms. This approach suffers from two problems in that it is both difficult to measure and unclear why some groups are more effective at creating solidarity than others. The Structuralist category looks at class or ethnic groups where solidarity is created not by carrying group norms but because they share common individual interest. Hechter defines group solidarity as a function of the extensiveness of its corporate obligations and the degree to which individual members actually comply with them, which highlights the difficulty of measuring solidarity empirically. This definition also contains elements of Toennies’ distinction between *Gesellschaft* (limited normative obligations) and *Gemeinschaft* (considerably more extensive obligations), again a dichotomy that is likely to be conflated in real life.

In addition to the theoretical foundation of Hechter and Toennies, it is important to understand how the notion of solidarity affects individual behavior. Community is not just behavior towards others in the group, as group solidarity is evident through displays of

support, donation, community organization, and giving. Islam, as with most religions, places a high value on such group solidarity that creates sense of *Gemeinschaft* rather than *Gesellschaft*. However, a “thick” version of community assumes a greater extension of community, and one that affects behavior outside of religious obligations and limits the capacity to choose association with other groups. While the Structuralist explanation of solidarity “rests on the ability to account for sources of interest homogeneity” (p 26), it overestimates the occurrence of solidarity since membership itself encourages individuals to comply with group obligations. The pressure to conform not only blurs individual interest and belief, but also lays the foundation for stereotyping.

Thus, while solidarity is desired as a means to increase group involvement and engagement, it acts as a double-edged sword in that it also leads to increased profiling at the group level. In order to counteract this a more liberal viewpoint with regard to group association must be promoted. Political entities may be a good example of such liberal group solidarity, since political communities have members they are analogous to other forms of community. Additionally, political parties have boundary and membership requirements, however with free admittance and exclusion as the core of communal independence it allows for the group to “recognizes a number of communities and roles and therefore multiple options for personal identity” (427).

TWITTER

The notion of what exactly community is and how it is organized becomes even more pressing during a time in which all traditional definitions and concepts of community are challenged by the prevalence of social media and interactions on social networking

platforms. While religious communities were historically envisioned as “thick” and centered around a local physical place of worship, today all kinds of communities find themselves interacting globally on social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. While online ties may be seen as weaker than those traditionally established in historical communities, they still can create a semblance of community.

Twitter, established in 2006, allows users to send short 140-character messages referred to as “tweets”, with each account on the platform being associated and referable by a unique Twitter handle. The important information or subject matter of a tweet is highlighted by a preceding hash tag, which allows users to search and discover similar tweets being written under a similar context or theme. Tweets themselves are public and readable by anyone on the Internet, but mainly get distributed to a network of individuals, known as “followers”, who have opted-in to seeing a particular user’s tweets on their own Twitter homepage, called a user’s “home timeline”. Since tweets are public, any follower can choose to forward and share a specific tweet with his or her own followers, in what is known as a “retweet”. Twitter content is unfiltered and direct, meaning followers see tweets in the order that they are created, with no relevance or importance classification. Finally, Twitter is free for anyone to sign-up and use, and consists of approximately 255 million monthly active users across the globe. While networks of close personal acquaintances define most social networks, for example Facebook and Instagram, the public nature of Twitter has instead led to connections based more on interest and expertise, and less on personal acquaintance. As a result, Twitter links a vast amount of people that otherwise would not be connected, from renowned individuals and celebrities to organizations and governments. The resulting interest graph allows for barriers in

communication to be broken down and a democratization of information sharing and conversation. While there is not necessarily a personal relationship between online followers, and connections are defined by weak-ties, social media can still be seen as a community since these connections are based on similar tastes, preferences, or fields of interest.

The example of Black Twitter exemplifies how community can be established on modern day social media. Black Twitter is the name given to the online community of activists, writers, and community leaders who generate political engagement surrounding issues of African American racial discrimination through the Twitter social media platform. Evolving organically, the community has grown to become a powerful tool in promoting awareness and forcing change, particularly with regard to continued issues of racism against Blacks in America. The influence and reach of the community has led localized issues to become part of the national conversation. Even though the community has no physical location, it has managed to create an identity and achieve tangible political results (Brock).

As with real world physical communication networks, it is important to note the distinction between national organizations and local or individual accounts with respect to online media presence. Similar to the trade-off between a national institution and grassroots level organization in real world communication networks, personal Twitter accounts allow for a more open and candid expression as exemplified by the difference between the US Department of State's Twitter account and that of the US Secretary of State himself John Kerry's personal Twitter account. As reflected in real life, personal Twitter accounts allow for conversation that is created locally, and potentially more aggressively

and opinionated. Twitter itself creates a different mode of use and interaction, reflecting the same difference between organizational and local level communication in the real world, and how to use resources and engage networks to promote increased awareness and activism. As the public voice of United States foreign policy, the Department of State is markedly reserved with a clear risk level associated with sending tweets too quickly or without the proper safe-guard. In recognition of this risk, John Kerry was required to give-up his personal Twitter account during his first year as Secretary of State, however regained the account in early February 2014. John Kerry's personal account allows for him to opinionated, to speak freely, to react quickly, and generate increased engagement and interesting responses than the Department of State could do. While it is an increased risk, it also puts a human face to a large organization, making it easier to associate with (Landler).

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand Muslim American adaptation to fear of scrutiny and surveillance by the state I looked at two modes of networks of communication that are frequented and used by Muslims in order to congregate, discourse, and engage with people of similar cultural, social or political interests. The two main modes of communication networks, but not sole sources of data collection, were human interactions and assembly in and around Mosques in Oakland, California, and interaction on the social media platform Twitter. These two modes of networks were chosen since they both represent central forms of communication among the Muslim community, the Mosques representing the more formal and traditional form of communication vital to the expression of their religious self, and online social media representing a form of communication of the modern

age being widely used for the discussion of news events, social and cultural topics of interest, and other “trending” topics that are important to its users.

The first mode of communication network studied, human interactions in and around Mosques, included places of worships and their geographically surrounding areas, as well as places associated with the Oakland Muslim community such as conferences, lectures, protests or other gatherings attended by Muslims or addressing issues pertaining to them. Such gatherings took place sporadically and were attended by a wide variety of people, both Muslim Americans and groups of activists who were in opposition to the Muslim community being singled out for state surveillance and policing. Therefore, my data collection at this level is defined by a multitude of methods as well as units of observation. Whereas my primary units of observation were individuals of the Oakland Muslim community, due to the diversity of attendees at observed events non-Muslims are included as well. Therefore, the sampling strategy of my units of observation was based on convenience sampling within the pre-selected places of worship and the gatherings I attended. While this methodology provided an extensive sampling pool, it allowed for the observation of individuals without any initial restriction. In fact, my intention in carrying out this research was to understand the Muslim community in the Bay Area as a varied and diverse group of people, and narrowing down my sample pool too much could jeopardize the unbiased collection of data.

The informal conversations were similar to personal interviews but were shorter with fewer questions asked. Participatory observations included impressions, analysis, and descriptive observations of gatherings and events that I attended that were relevant to the Muslim community both religiously and politically. This included prayers at mosques as

well as political gatherings and events that were either led or attended by members of the Muslim community in Oakland. Participatory observations and informal conversations were usually gathered at the same time, and notes were taken either during or after the event. Although prayers were usually in Arabic, all other conversations and discussions were held in English in order to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of the various members attending the events.

The data collection at this level was defined by a variety of methods. First, I collected qualitative data through participant observation at congregational meetings at mosques as well as activist meetings in Oakland. The collection of data was done primarily through taking notes during and after meetings with regards to content of presentations and conversations, as well as my own impressions and qualitative observations. In addition to participant participation, I also collected data through in-depth personal interviews with individuals who attended one of the mosques I observed.

The format of the individual interviews varied in order to comply with the wishes of the interviewees. Four interviews were conducted in person where the interviewees chose the site and mode of record. In all cases no audio recording was used, and instead I took notes both during and after conducting the interview. The in-depth interviews were informal with conversation being led by the interviewee and with open-ended questions only asked when appropriate. In-person questions were open-ended in order to facilitate discussion and conversation, which allowed me to ask follow-up questions and find out more details about the interviewee. Due to this, all interviews were unique in their content with regards to the interviewees experience and opinions, however I tried to find out more about my topics of interest by asking follow-up questions. While the interviewees knew

about the broader topic of my research, namely discrimination of Muslims in the San Francisco Bay Area, I did not reveal precise details of the study in order to avoid bias. I analyzed the interviews and informal conversation by highlighting themes and concepts that reoccurred in several venues, circumstances and conversations. Since my data collection could not be isolated to one mosque, I avoided analysis based on association with space.

The second mode of communication that was investigated for this research was interactions on the social media platform Twitter. Twitter was chosen over other social networks such as Facebook due to advantageous characteristics that make it unique for users who have political interests, namely the public nature of the platform with connections based on mutual interest. The units of observation were individual Twitter accounts, which were selected by me in a purposive manner. The method of sampling was therefore purposive sampling, choosing Twitter accounts that were valuable for the interpretation of the data collected. The tweets of each account were collected over a whole month and stored in a Microsoft Word document. Additional information about the tweets was also collected using Topsy Labs Inc., a third party online Twitter analysis tool that allows real-time searching of tweets and shows ranks and indexes based on influential topics and people (Topsy). The data was then qualitatively analyzed using categories of topics, and issues that applied to the content of the tweets. While collecting and storing the tweets, I also categorized each one of them based on their content. Such categories include topics such as “Islamophobia”, when directly addressed as an issue, or “hijab” when addressing or reporting on discrimination based on women’s headscarves, etc. The tweets were also analyzed by the activity it incited, counting replies and forwarding actions, called

“retweets”, of each tweet. This analysis gave me the ability to compare the twitter accounts with regards to activity they incited and topics that were of interest to each. In so doing, I was able to address how social interaction work on social media.

The limitation of this level of observation is first and foremost the inherently ephemeral nature of the Twitter platform. Twitter can be compared to a real-time ticker tape as tweets are only presented on the timeline when created and in a moving stream. Therefore, older messages are both less likely to be seen and lose value for the creator and viewer after a short amount of time since they lose the context in which they were created. Tweets are only available at the users discretion, so I did not have access to private accounts or tweets that had subsequently been deleted. Further limitation is represented by the small number of accounts that could be analyzed due to the scope of this research, in comparison to the overall vast amount of data that is created on the Twitter platform. However, due to the public nature of Twitter and my purposive sampling, I could create a sampling pool that showed valuable elements for the use of comparison. Additionally, the inherently global presence of Twitter allowed for a scale of analysis that would otherwise not have been possible to conduct.

EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS

Although initial research showed that mosques were aligned along religious tradition, such as Sunni or Shia, the Muslims who attended the mosques were defined by diversity, not only in ethnicity, race, age, and gender, but also with respect to their personal backgrounds. I met a range of individuals from those who had just moved to a particular area, some who travel from far away to attend mosque, some who visit a number of

different mosques, and some who have been regular attendees of the same mosque for many years. In this sense, it is hard to see the Muslim community as a “thick” community when noticing the differences that come with each individual. Even in situation where religious values aligned, the diversity of the congregation reinforced the notion that being Muslim was just one of many factors of identity. In fact, while I expected to meet Muslims mainly of Iranian or Middle Eastern descent in conducting my research, in fact I talked to diverse people ranging from white American citizens, German immigrants, Mexican non-immigrants, and African Americans among others. Such diversity within the East Bay Muslim is a clear indication that members display several other identities and values besides simply being Muslim.

The diversity of Muslims in San Francisco East Bay establish this as a “thin” community. As established by Hechter, religious groups in general can be viewed as “thick” communities due to longstanding values and traditions such as coming together in congregation and assembling for prayer. While this aspect of religion is intended to carry over and guide individuals in their personal life, the “thick” view reduces the individual to their religious self without taking into account the non-religious aspects of their identity. As the Bay Area Muslim study showed, the identity of the Muslims in the East Bay is multifaceted including differences with regard to race, ethnicity, and nationality. Additionally, demographics within the Muslim community can both be defined differently and be subject to different experiences, for example with regard to a regional traditions or suffering from varying degrees of racism.

In fact, personal interviews revealed that discrepancies in values amongst different mosques in Oakland pose a challenge to establishing a unified “thick” version community.

Both, Claire^{1*} and Sonja* explained that racism and intolerance towards others within the Muslim community is an internal obstacle within the community, which people are very much aware of (Interview, 01/23/2014, 02/28/2014). Claire had visited mosques in both Oakland and Berkeley, and explained that racism is a topic that Imams frequently address and try to counteract in order to create more understanding within the community (Interview 02/28/2014). Also Sonja, who attends a mosque in Oakland that practices Sufism and advocates tolerance and understanding toward all races, sexualities and other identities, voiced her concern about intolerance by other mosques (Interview 01/23/2014). This concern for internal challenges within the Muslim community in the Bay Area shows that values vary from place to place and from person to person, highlighting the liberal “thin” version of the community and its emphasis on the individual’s capacity to choose among different groups and identities.

Additionally, the notion of movement and space proved to be a valuable indicator of a “thin” Muslim community in Oakland. While two out of the four interviewees have been visiting the same mosque for many years, the other two interviewees were frequently visiting different mosques in the Bay Area. Whereas Claire’s reason for moving about the Muslim community was out of personal curiosity and a desire learn from different Imam’s and religious traditions, Greg* explored a variety of mosques in Oakland looking for a good cultural fit after recently relocation from a neighboring city (Interview 02/13/2014). In visiting several mosques, conferences, and meetings that were attended or organized by Muslim organizations I noticed numerous individuals attending multiple venues. In this sense, the idea of space and movement as outlined by Toennies seems to be particularly

* Names have been changed in order to secure anonymity.

relevant in the San Francisco Bay Area. Although Toennies sees religion as part of the “Gemeinschaft” (community) that shows elements of a “thick” version of community, he acknowledges that the more urban and developed cities are, the less likely it will be for people to be part of the Gemeinschaft, thus resulting in weaker ties in the community. The high degree of movement by Muslims between mosques and religious centers in the East Bay Muslim Community would thus seem to agree with Toennies’ theory of an urban cosmopolitan area producing a “thin” community.

As laid out in the Bay Area Muslim Study, my observations confirmed that the East Bay Muslim community is highly diverse with respect to race, ethnicity and nationality. This held true even in areas where my initial research showed potential ethnic concentrations. For example, in visiting a mosque widely considered to be predominantly Iranian, I still surprisingly found a diverse congregation of Africans, African Americans, and non-Iranians of Middle Eastern descent (observations in February). While there was a clear sense of religious community and cohesiveness based on the fundamentals of the Muslim religion, the group itself was not homogenous. Additionally, the reason and rationale for those in attendance seemed to differ greatly, from those visiting for the first time or those seeking individual personal understanding or spiritual guidance, to those who had been visiting a particular mosque their entire lives or chose the mosque based on religious affiliation or a personal favoring of the Imam. Instead of groupings based on ideology or nationality, it appeared that individuals grouped together for isolated incidents or goals that they are interested in, highlighting the idea of the Muslim community as a thin version since it places the importance on the individual’s capacity to choose their alignment and association with certain groups.

While it did not appear that there were bonds that united all Muslims together, over the course of my case study I found that the message of solidarity, inter-faith understanding, and a more open and inclusive membership in the community were central themes in the protest against government and policing authority. The initial meeting I attended was advertised through the CAIR San Francisco chapter, as well as the local CAIR representative Zahra Billoo on Twitter, however it was a meeting that was attended by a variety of individuals in the community. While there were Muslims in attendance, it was a diverse gathering that aimed to be inclusive of all demographics regardless of faith or background in order to maintain a united front against government oppression. Thus, activism and political engagement should be seen as a unique subset of the Muslim community, with religion playing a small part, if any, with regard to this.

Additionally, the message of solidarity was used to gather support from all demographics and warn about the potential universality of discrimination, exemplified during the period of my case study by the public resistance to the Domain Awareness Center. The Domain Awareness Center, or DAC, is a federally sponsored data collection and analysis program combining surveillance and video feeds with real time data analysis including license plate and facial recognition, with a stated intent of improving response time and coordination for city authorities. Public outcry to the program was intense, and during multiple meetings and gatherings it was emphasized that Muslim discrimination and targeted surveillance was not just a racial or religious issue that impacted a single community, but an American issue that violated fundamental rights. Even though there are groups that are disproportionately targeted by the DAC, such as immigrants, Muslims, or protestors and activists, the message of solidarity was used to reinforce how all

communities should be concerned since unchecked surveillance programs like the DAC could be extended to monitor any group in the future. In this sense, activism relies upon solidarity between all citizens, not only the minority of those who are actually experiencing surveillance and spying.

In addition to solidarity, a strong message of non-collaboration with policing authorities, in particular with the FBI, was one of the main messages of resistance given. Every meeting I attended consisted of some form of emphasis on non-collaboration, either through teaching citizens about their right to remain silent, to warnings about the dangers of collaboration. These warnings included examples of the FBI's discriminatory practices to put pressure on certain individuals that results in them turning into a soft-informant (as opposed to a paid informant), coming into people's houses and pressuring them or threatening them into voluntarily giving out information that they didn't necessarily have to give out. The message of the FBI using a strategy of taking advantage of law-abiding citizens in order to get information was mentioned at multiple meetings, and was cited as primary reason for resistance movements losing momentum, in particular by Zahra Billoo, representing the San Francisco regional office of CAIR. Namely, Billoo cited how soft-collaboration erodes solidarity within the activist community, creating fear and paranoia that undermines trust. The threat is perceived so seriously that the CAIR national organization ran a campaign urging people to "build a wall of resistance, don't talk to the FBI", a message that was pulled back in 2011 since it was not consistent with CAIR's policy for constitutionally informed cooperation with law enforcement (Slajda). The discrepancy between CAIR's pressure to renounce this non-collaboration campaign and the open message of non-collaboration from the regional spokeswoman Zahra Billoo shows the

difficulty of national Muslim organizations to maintain their image while pursuing political engagement.

As the case with CAIR national demonstrates, there is a discrepancy between the national organizational level of resistance and community organization at the local level. The issue stems from a fear of being seen in mainstream media as extremist, thus there seems to be an idea that Muslim organizations need to uphold an image of being moderate, law-abiding, and “good” in order to counteract the one-dimensional national stereotype. This requirement to uphold a positive image creates an internal barrier that limits the success of political activism, as organizations must keep their distance from those who resist, fight the law, and protest in the fear they might themselves be seen as radical. This double-edged sword can severely limit their ability to move forward with positive activism, attempting to achieve equal civil rights and defend their own rights only through acting as a model example citizen.

At the local level, the issue of the Domain Awareness Center came before the Oakland City Council spurring protests by mosques in solidarity with multiple litigation groups including the Oakland Privacy Working Group and the National Lawyers Guild, both of which were threatening to sue the city. The mosque also worked to educate the community on the project by holding meetings, lectures, and seminars, generating educational flyers and pamphlets, and actively recruiting more participants from the mosque to get involved in activism. The mosque organized for numerous members to attend the City Council vote and speak publicly about their concerns and personal experiences with regard to surveillance. With the DAC proposal actively spurring visible protests, and a call for less or no collaboration, Love’s assessment of Muslim resistance can

be argued as holding true. However, the DAC merely acted as a unifying theme bringing together diverse groups under a similar vision, thus there is no stopping another issue from being a larger catalyst for moving Muslim organization from passive to more active in the way of a stronger pan-ethnic protest movement. Even though there is not as much urgency as during the 1960's African American Civil Rights movement, I believe that social media as a tool could potentially help create this urgency by making local issues more visible on a national scale.

In studying social media I noticed a clear difference in how the Twitter platform was used by national accounts one those of individuals. While both the national CAIR Twitter account and Zahra Billoo's personal account wrote about the same general topic, namely Muslim American relations, the national CAIR account was more informational and broadcast oriented. For the CAIR account, there was primarily an emphasis on education and the promotion of mutual and inter-faith understanding. In this sense, tweets were mainly about news, articles, publications, or current events that were happening in an effort to promote understanding and provide the background for a mutual dialogue. As stated in the previous section for real-world communication networks, the national CAIR account continually portrayed Muslim and Islam as moderate and good, and being in-line with typical American values. However, the account did issue action alerts informing followers about areas of concern or calling for citizens to take immediate action or vote in a specific direction. Overall, tweets seemed to align with their mission statement, which is their vision to be a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding, to enhance the understanding of Islam, and to encourage dialogue and a mutual understanding.

While the CAIR national account has a relatively large number of followers, it is unclear how it contributes and shapes political engagement and activism. With approximately 10,000 followers, the CAIR national tweets varied greatly in their amount of interaction (measured as retweets and responses), with little conversation between followers. Looking at a total of 415 tweets during the month of February, most were related to the category of place of worship, since there were numerous accounts of vandalism or hate crimes in the Bay Area during this time period. While there were several responses with regard to a specific incident, interaction was usually in response to CAIR international with limited follow-up. Attention was instead created by keeping track of a single event, updating the information on that event, and also repeating previous tweets or action alerts multiple times to ensure they would be seen by a larger audience to counteract the ephemeral nature of a single tweet. The second largest group of CAIR tweets were concerned with Islamophobia, which largely focused on providing education and information on the religion.

In contrast with the national CAIR account, Zahra Billoo's personal Twitter account consisted of more personal tweets resulting in increased interaction and conversation. While Billoo's tweets were not necessarily personal content, which often resulted in personal conversations with followers. In addition, while the national CAIR organization was more informational, Billoo was more involved on the site both through more opinionated tweets, as well as interacting with other accounts through retweets and individual engagement with conversations and topics involving the Muslim community. Billoo's high level of interaction on the site both increased interaction with her own account as well as increased the audience for her tweets. At the same time, since her

account is not directly associated with CAIR she can be more personal and strike a more informal tone than the national account can.

Where a thin community might have less success with traditional activism due to weak ties and a weaker sense of group identity, social media can act as a complement to motivate political engagement. Where real world engagement requires a significant sacrifice, online engagement does not require significant commitment since a user can simply “like” or “retweet” to display their political activism. Malcom Gladwell criticizes social networks as being loose and leaderless, which cannot create political movements since they lack authority or leadership (Joseph 151), however, he fails to account for the sense of hierarchy created through the social media accounts of known experts and trusted organizations. Clay Shirky, who wrote about the importance of social media for coordinating protests even before the Arab Spring revolutions, cites the need for both acquiring information and using that information in debate as central to organizing protests (Joseph 154). While it is clear that social media allows for debate and discussion, again it is the presence of experts and trusted organizations that generate valuable information and content that can drive political organization and activism. The public, real-time, and global nature of Twitter and other social networks allows for this access to information to be brought to a completely new level, as it is no longer filtered as with traditional or state run media outlets, and can be made immediately available to anyone with an internet connection.

Thus, where real world activism is limited in its global reach, Twitter and other social media platforms can be used as an effective tool to increase awareness and audience. While listening to Zahra Billoo speak at a meeting in early February, I later found she had

tweeted her main comments as well as some of the key points other speakers made at the same meeting. As a result, people from around the globe were able to join in on the conversation and amplify both the debate and its audience. Billoo's example demonstrates how real world activism and social media activism are not in competition with each other, but can extend the conversation to groups that were previously not being informed or engaged. Social media connecting someone who is on the ground, with the conversational aspect brings a large thin network together through communal interest. By using it as a complement to local events it has the potential to bring national attention to local events, just as with the Arab Spring where tweets created locally can gain international and global attention. The potential for social media in the Muslim community is particularly promising, where the community is highly diverse with little national media exposure, the opportunity to take the message to a wider audience without the fear of fitting the mold of a model American could have far reaching implications for activism and equal rights.

Thus, While Love argues that the Muslim community is most likely to engage in litigation as a means to generate political results, I found examples of all three types of political activism, albeit to varying degrees. Love argues that the Muslim community is unlikely to engage in civil disobedience, as it is not faced with the severity of racial discrimination as African Americans were subjected to under Jim Crow laws. While this may be true for the Muslim population and the community in Oakland as a whole, the message of solidarity and non-cooperation with the FBI was representative of grass roots civil disobedience, albeit at a small grass roots scale. Groups where this message of resistance were often not only Muslims, but pan-ethnic communities in which all members were concerned with the impact surveillance and discriminatory policing practices could

have for the general public. The response to the Domain Awareness Center also clearly shows how the community was responding through litigation in order to achieve political goals, which again were being carried out through a pan-ethnic community of individuals. Thus, while the Muslim community as a whole in Oakland is defined by diversity and a fragmentation of individual identity, political engagement and activism in all three categories as defined by Love is being carried out at small scale and grass roots levels.

CONCLUSION

My project looked at a variety of communication mediums in order to account for the diversity of the Muslim community in the San Francisco Bay Area. In order to gain an accurate portrayal of the community I inherently had to start by casting as wide net as possible, and then started to work backward in order to establish a more formal and solidified framework. My findings revealed the “thin” nature of the Muslim community, how political activism was being carried out through civil disobedience, pan-ethnic activism, and legal activism to varying degrees, and how social media had the potential to impact solidarity and community activism going forward. Time and resource constraints limited my ability to fully explore the impact social media can play in community organizing and local grass roots political engagement, especially in communities outside Oakland, California. Going forward, I fully expect social media activism to be an area of increased engagement for the American Muslim community, and would highly suggest this as an area of further study. While I established that social media can be an effective tool to compliment local network of communication for “thin” communities, further research should be done in order to explore the impact social media can have in “thick” Muslim

communities, as well as in areas where there is little to no Muslim community to speak of. As new reports of Muslim surveillance or targeted discrimination continue to occur, the topic of how Muslim Americans can organize themselves in order to achieve political equality will only become more important in the near future. A more in-depth study into the power of social media activism to drive political change for other diverse minority groups would provide valuable insight into the future of political engagement.

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