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American Muslim Identities: A Qualitative Study of Two Mosques in South Florida

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American Muslim Identities:
A Qualitative Study of Two Mosques in South Florida

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Sociology
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abaya	loose, cloak-like over garment worn by women in some parts of Islamic countries
Alhamdulillah	Arabic for “praise God”
Aqeeqa	in Islam, feast announcing the birth of a child
Biryani	South-Asian rice dish
Chadar	a large piece of cloth that is wrapped around the head and upper body leaving only the face exposed, typically worn by Muslim women
Eid-ul-Adha	Islamic festival that falls in the Islamic month of Zul-Hajj
Eid-ul-Fitr	Islamic festival that marks the end of the month of Ramadan and the beginning of the month of Shawwal
Hadith	oral tradition, a saying of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or a report of his words or actions
Hifdh	complete memorization of the entire Quran by heart
Hijab	a veil worn by Muslim women to cover the head and chest in the presence of adult males that are not immediate family members
Inshallah	Arabic for “God willing”
Janaza	funeral
Jilbab	full-length cloak-like outer garment worn by women
Jumah	Friday
Kameez	long and loose tunic typically worn in South-Asia
Madrasa	Islamic seminary
Majlis-e-Shura	advisory council

Mashallah	Arabic for “by the grace of God”
Masjid	mosque
Masajid	plural of <i>masjid</i>
Niqab	a piece of fabric that conceals the lower half of the face, worn by some Muslim women
Ramadan	the 9 th month of the Islamic calendar when Muslims fast
Shalwar	South-Asian pants often worn with <i>kameez</i>
Subhanallah	Arabic for “Praise be to Allah”
Sunnah	actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)
Ummah	global community of Muslims

ABSTRACT

Most existing research on Muslims and transnational Islam originates from Europe. However, the Muslim population in Europe differs from American Muslims in a number of important ways. In this research I aim to address the general paucity in sociological literature that originates from the U.S. and focus on the mosque as a space where American Muslim identity forms and evolves for both first- and second-generation American Muslims. I examine two American mosques in South Florida as the sites of the development of American Muslim identities based on ethnographic data and participant interviews. I find that the research sites perform functions that are consistent with the provision of refuge, resources, and respectability as classified by Hirschman (2004). The mosques I studied demonstrate the use of educational and cultural functions to transfer religious and cultural identity to younger generations of American Muslims. I also find the research sites to be spaces that are inclusive for women and children, which is different from mosques in Muslim-majority countries, but consistent with the findings of other scholars. I find that the two mosques I studied extend institutional services to facilitate linguistic and logistical assimilation of their members, encourage members' political engagement through sermons, voter registration drives, and meetings with political candidates, and to engage in interfaith outreach efforts as means of assimilation. I find intergenerational differences in attitudes towards women's spaces and resources at the two mosques. I also find evidence of a shift in norms that indicates greater flexibility and reflection upon the norms of mainstream American society. Finally, I find that

second-generation American Muslims experience a move away from parental cultures towards textual “pure” Islam and prefer to adopt a “Muslim first” identity, as some other scholars have noted. While this study sheds light on several themes that weave to create American Muslim identities, there is a need for more in-depth research on the assimilation trajectories of members that belong to diverse or homogenous mosques. The findings from this study also highlight the need for more extensive quantitative analysis of women’s roles and responsibilities in American mosques, as well as intergenerational differences in assimilation in the American Muslim community.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2008, I immigrated to the United States after marrying my Pakistani-American husband a few months earlier. Never having lived anywhere but Pakistan prior to my move, and as a new arrival to South Florida in the summer of 2008, I knew somewhat instinctively that in order to make social connections and maintain a link to my faith, I would have to visit the local mosque. In retrospect, harboring such a notion was odd; in Pakistan, I had been to the mosque a mere handful of times for the special *Eid* prayers, two of the few occasions when women visit the mosques in large numbers. Even on the festival of *Eid*, people in Pakistan – men and women alike – tend to return home soon after the prayer as there is no other reason to stay on in the mosque. Moreover, most mosques are a male space in Pakistan, and I would often wait in the car outside a mosque while my father or brother finished praying inside. America was different, my husband had tried to prepare me, and a mosque was not just a place of worship but also a community center of sorts.

Within two weeks of arriving in our new city, one Friday afternoon my husband and I decided to go to one of the larger mosques in town for the main weekly congregation. It was my first time at a Friday prayer, and I listened closely to the sermon delivered before the prayer, along with two hundred or so others in the women's section of the mosque. It was the summer before the Presidential election of 2008, and the *Imam* had chosen to speak about the importance of Muslims' participation in the upcoming elections. In slightly accented English, staying completely impartial, the Imam reminded the worshipers of the civic duty they owed to America

in return for the comforts of life she afforded them and asked them to play a positive role in the society from which they were benefiting. After the prayer, the large crowd spilled out into a courtyard. The air of festivity that pervaded everything on an ordinary Friday stood out in sharp contrast to my dreary experience of mosques in Pakistan. There were kiosks selling a variety of homemade snacks from different countries and modest Islamic clothing of various regional styles. Squealing children surrounded an ice cream truck. One kiosk was dedicated to information about the elections and was distributing voter registration forms. Cheerful chatter in Arabic, English, Urdu, and Spanish filled the air. Though the multicultural nature of Muslim minority communities in America and Europe is much publicized and celebrated in Muslim pop culture and the media, nothing could have prepared me for the array of skin tones, languages, and fashion I witnessed in the mosque on my first visit many years ago. However, it was not only the presence of people of different ages, genders, races, ethnicities, and cultures gathered to pray that was remarkable to me. The social, commercial, and political activities that took place inside the parameters of the mosque outside the prayer hall were equally striking. That afternoon, before we found our way back to our car, we ran into an acquaintance of an acquaintance, exchanged phone numbers, and were invited to dinner the following night.

A wide-ranging 2011 study by the Pew Research Center estimates that there are approximately 2.75 million Muslims living in the United States. About 63% of American Muslims over the age of 18 were born outside the United States, which makes them first-generation immigrants. It is estimated that in recent years, about 80,000 to 90,000 new Muslim immigrants have been entering the United States annually. In some ways, the American Muslim population in the United States is different from the mainstream: it is younger than the general public, with 59% between the ages of 18 and 39, as opposed to 40% of the general public. The

American Muslim population is also found to be more racially diverse than the American public: 30% identify as white, 23% as black, 21% as Asian, 6% as Hispanic, and 19% as ‘other’. In spite of this diversity, the American Muslim population is regarded as, and indeed behaves like, a monolithic religious and cultural bloc in American society and media.

My initial experience of the mosque as a public religious space in a medium-sized American city showcased the diversity of American Muslims and piqued my sociological interest. The large number and disparate backgrounds of Muslims and the existence of relatively few places of congregation created an interesting dynamic for the American Muslims in that city. It appeared that the congregation of Muslims in a confined space produced an environment where they interacted with one another despite cultural differences and perhaps encouraged them to form a new overarching identity. As the space where American Muslims gather in large numbers consistently, I wanted to find out the role a mosque plays in the development of American Muslim identity. If mosques and Islamic Centers enable the practice and expression of religion and culture, do they help or hinder American Muslims’ assimilation into American society? Do Islamic practices and norms in America change in relation to Islamic practices in Muslim-majority countries? In this Master’s thesis, I set out to answer these overarching questions.

This thesis is organized as follows: I begin this study with an overview of the existing scholarship on the central theoretical frameworks governing my research and highlight gaps in literature that my study may be able to address. Next, I introduce my research settings, discuss the methodology I employed, and describe my data. In the three chapters that follow, I present my analysis based on three separate themes. I analyze the mechanisms of my research sites as institutions and their role in creating American Muslim identities, describe the institutional

strategies being utilized at the research sites to aid in the assimilation of American Muslim immigrants, and discuss the ways the American context appears to influence Islamic norms as they are practiced in the mosque. I then conclude the study with my findings: that the mosques I studied contribute to member's American and Muslim identities through spiritual, social, and educational resources; the research sites focused on linguistic, logistic, and political assimilation and focused on interfaith understanding; and the mosques I studied show evidence of intergenerational differences in attitudes towards women, shifts in norms that indicate acceptance of some American norms, and show a move towards a more universal practice of Islam. I conclude this thesis with a description of the limitations of my work and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the scholarship that explores the concepts and theoretical frameworks that underpin my study, and existing scholarship on Muslim immigrants and mosques. I begin by outlining literature that pertains to the study of Islam as a religion. Next, I summarize the study of Islam within the theories of transnationalism, migration, and identity. I explore the role of ethnic and immigrant religious institutions in the formation of immigrant identities. I then describe the research questions that guide this study.

I start with an introduction of the faith system under discussion. What is *Islam*? Islam is most readily defined as a theology and one of the three major Abrahamic religions of the world (Oxford Dictionary of Islam, 2003). However, a more nuanced view of Islam draws attention to its theological as well as anthropological aspects. Increasingly, Islam is seen not only as a belief system but a systematic way of experiencing the world through shared meanings and thus, a cultural tradition in addition to being a religious tradition (Werbner 1999, El Zein 1977). Islam was first treated as a subject of academic research by European Orientalist scholars and, over time, has been studied through the lens of the sociology of religion, sociology of migration, anthropology, and religious studies (Cesari 2009, Allievi 2005, Alsayyad and Castells 2002). The majority of research so far has focused on Islam as an immigrant identity, often as one that resists the common route to assimilation (Cesari 2009, Sirin and Fine 2008, Alba and Nee 2005). Consequently, the attention garnered by Islam both as a rapidly spreading belief system and the faith of a large subset of the world population has historically focused on controversy. It is only

in recent scholarship that Islam has come to be recognized as a *transnational* phenomenon - as the driving force as well as a manifestation of migration and diasporic formations (Levitt 2003 and 2001, Vertovec 1999, Werbner 1999).

Research on transnational Islam is situated within the greater debate on transnationalism, migration, and diaspora. The concept of transnationalism in the social sciences is constantly evolving due to its emergence and popularity in current scholarship. In common parlance, the terms ‘globalization’ and ‘transnationalism’ are often used interchangeably. However, these are two distinct concepts. In scholarship, ‘globalization’ is defined as a socio-spatial concept and a ‘space of flows’ of people, goods, and ideas that enables human activities to transcend national boundaries (Berking 2003).

“Transnationalism” is identified as a product of globalization (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). It is the emergent pattern of migration that is a consequence of globalization-spurred travel and communication technologies that have diminished the importance of geographic boundaries. Even so, transnationalism is firmly rooted in the notion of place and the state since it is in the nurturing of multiple belongings in different countries that transnationalism is created. To be transnational means to inhabit multiple social fields at once and embody ‘simultaneity’ in place (Kastoryano 2002, Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). In its most literal sense, transnationalism refers to the physical movement of migrants and related flows of goods and ideas (Portes 1999, Vertovec 1999). However, transnationalism is also created in exchanges with the ‘sending’ country through occasional travel, closeness to other travelling transnationals, and communication technology (Levitt 2009, Phinney and Ong 2007, Espiritu 1994). As a global occurrence, transnationalism and transnationals permeate every aspect of life by diversifying and enriching mainstream societies and therefore, theories of transnationalism are grounded in many

different disciplines. As an abstract and conceptual space, transnationalism in academia is understood as the shared structures of meanings that are carried through social networks (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). In this sense, transnationalism is a type of consciousness, a mode of cultural reproduction, a site of political engagement, and a reconstruction of place or locality (Vertovec 1999, Hannerz 1992). *Transnational Islam* then moves beyond the physical migration patterns as defined by Portes (1999) to create a global space that enables debate and provides points for normative reference for the community. The self-defining quality of the Muslim diaspora, the shared consciousness of the Muslim community, and the creation of a Muslim *transculture*, particularly in the American case, elevate transnational Islam from discussions pertaining exclusively to religious movements as well (Peek 2005, Bowen 2004, Levitt 2001 and 2003, Werbner 2002).

The idea of transnational Islam is closely connected to Muslim identity, which in turn is theorized in a number of ways under the wider frameworks of immigrant identity, assimilation, and acculturation. Ethnic identity formation is dynamic over time; it waxes and wanes over the life course in addition to being inter-generationally variable. An ethnic and cultural identity comes about in conversation with, and as a reaction to inequalities and social structures of the dominant culture (Phinney and Ong 2007, Espiritu 2004). Ethnic immigrant identity, like other types of self-identities, is formed and solidified through adolescence and young adulthood, and encompasses ways of being and ways of belonging - actual social relations and the identification with a group or collective form (Sirin and Fine 2008, Phinney and Ong 2007, Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004, Haller and Landolt 2005, Vertovec 1999). Important as self-attribution and socially defined conditions are to the creation of cultural identities, the first acquaintance with culture is typically made at home. The transfer of cultural ideas and practices by parents, travel

to parents' 'sending' countries, and cultural references at home in the 'receiving' country are fundamental to forming a strong cultural identity in second and third generation immigrants. The transfer of such ideas is made easier by the global flows of artifacts that have re-contextualized material culture and cultural knowledge and made it more readily accessible (Berking 2003, Espiritu 1994). Ethnic and cultural identity finds expression in immigrants' self categorization as ethnic, understanding of cultural practices, engagement in ethnic behaviors, association with co-ethnics, and positive feelings about ethnic group membership (Phinney and Ong 2007, Berking 2003, Espiritu 1994).

As their ethnic identity is threatened by the dominant culture, immigrants face pressure to assimilate or acculturate. The dynamic debate on immigrant assimilation in scholarship has evolved with the changing patterns of immigration to the U.S. Based on the first wave of European immigrants, Herbert Gans' "straight-line assimilation model" fell into disrepute as assimilation began to be viewed as negative and ethnocentric pressure on minorities (Gans 1992). Gans then devised the 'bumpy line model of assimilation' to reflect the changes in the educational, socioeconomic, and ethnic retention trends demonstrated by the second wave of immigrants of Southeast Asian, South Asian, and Caribbean origin, and later attempted to reconcile assimilation and pluralism (Alba and Nee 1997, Gans 1992). Scholarship subsequently began to favor a pluralistic model of assimilation, one that reflected the proclivity of American society to embrace various types of ethnicities into a widened mainstream. Some researchers such as Zhou and Xiong (2005) found evidence of segmented assimilation and noted that with strong connections to their parental generation and ethnic communities, some second-generation immigrants adapted to particular aspects of the mainstream society but not others, and generally experienced upward mobility. Other researchers such as Portes and Hao (2010) and Portes and

Rumbaut (2005) determined patterns of consonant acculturation where immigrants assimilated through the maintenance of strong ethnic relationships, dissonant acculturation where immigrants integrated with an existing social underclass of the mainstream society, and selective acculturation.

Over time, pluralism in American society has become more pronounced and differentiation is accepted to an ever-increasing degree (Hall 2000, Alba and Nee 1997, Gans 1997). However, assimilation and acculturation have not ceased to take place. Some research reports a distinct loss in ethnic identification for second-generation immigrants when first-generation immigrant parents pursue assimilation aggressively. The resulting cultural void then fuels the desire of the second generation to cultivate active ties with the original 'sending' country, and an ethnic revival can take place in the third generation (Phinney and Ong 2007). However, not all second-generation immigrants lose cultural affiliation. Highly educated immigrant groups and those connected to a cohesive group of co-ethnics are able to transfer culture to their second-generation children effectively (Portes and Rumbaut 2005). Acceptance of immigrant group depends on government, public perception of immigrant group, and existing networks.

For transnational immigrants, multiple belongings create multiple identities. There are several points of reference and categories on which to draw to constitute identity that range from national, diasporic, ethnic, racial, faith-based, and virtual community influences, in addition to individual personal traits and interests and political leanings (Haller and Landolt 2005). For immigrants, a strong ethnic and cultural identity serves as a barrier against the pressure to assimilate. Particularly for second-generation immigrants, intensified links with their ethnic community are sometimes the means to self-determination, and alignment with the group lends

individuals a voice. Often, the only avenue to social representation available to immigrants is self-categorization with their ethnic and cultural group (Salih 2004, Berking 2003, Vertovec 1999).

Ethnic and immigrant religious congregations have been examined as a vehicle for assimilation in the West. Herberg (1955) presented one of the first analyses of immigrant religious congregations and found them to offer spiritual, social, emotional, and economic resources to immigrants. In addition, he put forth the argument that in America, immigrants' various religious identities enabled them to find a common thread among disparate groups. Foley and Hoge (2007) and Hirschman (2004) has highlighted the increase in social capital that members benefit from as a result of membership of an immigrant religious congregation and framed them within his three- R model that encapsulated refuge, resources, and respectability. Min and Kim (2005), Kurien (2004) Min (2001), and Warner (2001) have found that ethnic and religious immigrant congregations are instrumental in transferring ethnic and religious identity to second- and third-generation immigrants. Kurien (2004) has also asserted that a stronger religious identity enables immigrants, particularly second-generation immigrants, to participate more fully in the multiculturalism of American society. While Min (2001) studied ethnic Korean churches in New York to arrive at his conclusions, Kurien (2004) studied Hindu congregations on the West coast. Warner (2001), meanwhile, has overviewed a variety of congregations to study outcomes in terms of assimilation.

A body of research also suggests that a strong affiliation with ethnic or religious immigrant institutions increases political and civic integration among members (Levitt 2009, Portes and Rumbaut 2008, Foley and Hoge 2007). Jamal (2010) and Takim (2004) studied Muslim participation in the political and civic arena, respectively, finding that mosque affiliation

influences political participation, civic engagement, and participation in interfaith activities.

Takim (2004) finds evidence that for immigrants, a collective ethnic and religious voice can be more effective in the socio-political arena, and that cohesive immigrant religious institutions can prove useful in organizing members to take civic or political action . A body of research suggests that Muslims as a minority community seek political integration while rejecting complete assimilation and are able to do so by maintaining cohesion within the ethnic group (Cesari 2009, Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003, Alsayyad and Castells 2002, Kastoryano 2002).

Some Muslim scholars in the 1960s predicted that Muslims who immigrated to America in the '60s and '70s – the first significant flow of Muslims into the U.S. - were likely to follow the 'melting pot' model and assimilate completely (Elkholy 1966). However, the set of unique qualities that American Muslims possess as a group disproved these predictions of assimilation and has led to much debate among scholars of Muslim identity. As such, the category 'Muslim' is made to encapsulate ethnicity, culture, and religion all at once.

For Muslim immigrants, the need to cultivate a cultural and ethnic identity is manifold. Muslims – particularly first generation immigrants – turn to the Islamic community to grapple with the displacement and marginalization they experience in the non-Muslim society to which they have emigrated, a trajectory similar to those of other ethnic and religious groups (Stepick and Stepick 2010, Portes and Rumbaut 2005. baugh and Chafetz (2000) have included mosques in their study of the structural make up of immigrant religious institutions and their importance to immigrants.

Interestingly, second-generation Muslims' view of their communities has led to increasing transnational tendencies of socio-political Islamic organization. Younger Muslims find local and national Muslim communities to be fraught with localized issues that are limiting and restrictive.

Therefore, they increasingly engage in a post-national, transnational Islam where the political dialogue and engagement is at a higher intellectual level. Religion still persists in importance as a crucial transnationalizing factor and is the impetus for altruism and travel (Haller and Landolt 2005, Salih 2004). A small but growing body of research has emerged that focuses on immigrant Muslims' search for a universal, global Islamic community as an *ummah*. Numrich (2012) finds that American Muslims' minority status and internal diversity gives rise to the rhetoric of a global Muslim *ummah*.

Most existing research on Muslims and transnational Islam originates from Europe. However, the Muslim population in Europe differs from American Muslims in a number of important ways that facilitate research and analysis of European Muslim populations (Voas and Fleischmann, 2012, Cesari 2009, Foner and Alba 2008). Muslim migration to Europe occurred in high numbers, and Muslims in Europe tend to self-segregate and develop ethnic enclaves that allow the establishment of designated religious spaces to cater to specific ethnic populations. Most mosques in Europe tend to be racially and ethnically homogenous (Foner and Alba 2008). Therefore, European research on Islam is better able to recognize the role of the mosque as a decidedly social and political organizational space (Allievi 2005). In the American case, the ethnic diversity of the Muslim population and the lack of concentrated Muslim residential spaces have resulted in fragmented academic research. Foner and Alba (2008), Cesari (2009) and Vaos and Fleishcmann (2012) provide an overview of the differences between the scholarship on Islam originating from Western Europe and the U.S. The study of contemporary Islam is absent In Western Europe, Islam has been the subject of study for over three decades, whereas in the U.S. it has increased manifold only in the post 9/11 era (Cesari 2009). Islam in Europe is studied primarily as a 'challenge to integration' to the vastly secular society (Cesari 2009). In secular

Western Europe, religion, particularly Islam, can cut a stark contrast akin to race in America (Voas and Fleischmann 2012).

A small body of literature focuses on the intra-racial and ethnic tensions felt within Muslim minority communities and efforts by second and third generation American Muslims to move away from cultural practices and adopt a unified ‘Muslim’ identity (Grewal 2009, Karim 2009, Naber 2005). Grewal (2009) has studied intra-racial and inter-generational tensions among American Muslims through the lens of marriage, and found that second and third generation American Muslims prefer their unifying ‘Muslim’ identity to the ethnic identities of their parents’ generation and aim to practice a version of Islam that is free from cultural influences. Karim (2009) studies racial and ethnic tensions within American Muslim communities through female friendships that consciously focus on Islam as a unifier among ethnically and racially disparate communities. However, research on American Muslims has historically neglected the ways the American Muslim community organizes itself within mosques, resolves internal debates regarding pressures of the greater society, and reflects on the role of Islam in the context of their Western lives (Cesari 2009, Bowen 2004). Bowen writes:

This emphasis (on purely diasporic religious movements) within sociological and anthropological studies has led to the relative neglect of a third form of transnational Islam: namely, the development of debates and discussions among Muslims about the nature and role of Islam in Europe and North America. These debates and discussions have led to the creation of networks, conferences, and increasingly formalized institutions for systematic reflection among scholars. These activities and institutions focus on the dilemmas faced by Muslims attempting to develop forms of Islamic life compatible with the range of Western norms, values and laws—in other words, how to become wholly ‘here’ and yet preserve a tradition of orientation toward Islamic institutions located ‘over there’. (2004:3)

Scholarship that focuses on American Muslims studies the structure of the mosque as an immigrant religious congregation, or on identity formation of American Muslims in conversation with the greater society. This research aims to address the general paucity in sociological

literature that originates from the U.S. In addition, there is a distinct lack of scholarship that focuses on the mosque as a space where American Muslim identity forms and evolves for both first- and second-generation American Muslims. This research aims to study two American mosques in South Florida as the sites of the development of American Muslim identities and answer the following three questions:

- 1) What is the role of an American mosque in the identity formation of members, with a particular focus on second-generation American Muslims?
- 2) If, and how do American mosques influence first- and second-generation members' assimilation?
- 3) Does the American context impact the practice of religion for Muslims?

CHAPTER 3

SETTINGS, RESEARCH METHODS, AND DATA

In this chapter, I describe the physical settings and brief characteristics of the two research sites selected for my study and provide an overview of the methodology and data that form the basis of this study.

International Islamic Center

The International Islamic Center is the larger of the two Islamic centers that I studied. The International Islamic Center is located on over 35 acres of land nestled between an industrial zone and a quiet lower middle class residential neighborhood. There are several woods and creeks in the surrounding area due to its proximity to a river. There are two gated entryways to the compound, which are usually open during daylight hours. The campus is monitored with security cameras. Although the total acreage of the Center is vast, buildings occupy only a small section of it. The buildings in the compound include a thrift store, a food pantry, a free medical clinic, a modest library, a day care center, a playground, and basketball courts. The buildings form a semi-circle around a paved area about 40 meters wide and 30 meters long, which serves as a courtyard and an informal gathering area before and after prayers.

Each Friday, several vendors set up tables offering food, books, and clothing to the worshipers. An ice cream truck parked on the pavement behind a cluster of trees and children played on the less crowded edges. On *Eid*, a carnival with children's rides and games was set up

around the trees. An outdoor eating area was also set up. The courtyard was thus utilized as a place for families to relax and socialize.

International Academy, a private school associated with International Islamic Center, is located across the street from International Islamic Center. Although the school is a separate entity and operates under a separate board, the same members of the community that established the Center conceived it. While the Center and school operate independently, students attend afternoon prayers at the Center mosque regularly and the Center uses the school parking facilities as overflow parking on occasion. The facilities and activities at the school did not pertain directly to the research for this thesis, but its role as an accessory to the Center could not be ignored and I discussed the role of the Islamic school in the community while conducting my interviews with community members.

The International Islamic Center was the first mosque that was established in the South Florida city where I conducted my research. In 1976, a small group of Muslim families that had settled in South Florida purchased the land and building for a mosque. Prior to the establishment of the International Islamic Center, the group prayed in various residential, school, and university facilities that accommodated a small congregation.

As of 2012, the Center boasted a formal membership of about 2,000 families and *Eid* prayer attendance of approximately 10,000 individuals that were varied in ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. An 11-member board of governors called the *Majlis-e-Shura* administered the Center. Board members were elected for two-year terms. In 2012, Board members represented backgrounds from India, Pakistan, Trinidad, Egypt, and Syria. The Center employed 20 individuals in various capacities such as office management staff, janitors, and landscapers.

Attendance of prayers at the mosque was not restricted to formal members because the mosque was open to Muslims of every origin. However, families who frequented the mosque were encouraged to register with the mosque offices to ensure effective circulation of community information and ability to vote in mosque elections. During the course of my research at the International Islamic Center, I encountered Muslim men and women from various countries of the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia. I also saw Caucasian, Hispanic, and African-American people. American born Muslims, converts, as well as first generation immigrants frequented the mosque. Attendees appeared to be assimilated to various degrees.

Salaam Society

The second location where I conducted research, Salaam Society, is the smaller of the two sites but still one of the larger mosques in South Florida. Similar to International Islamic Center, the total land area of Salaam Society is sizeable at about 28 acres. However, the area occupied by buildings is approximately three acres while the rest is undeveloped wooded land. Salaam Society is located in a busy mixed-use urban area. The nearby main road has a gas station, a church, a real estate office, and a medical office. Salaam Society is not enclosed within a boundary or fence. The campus is a collection of modest buildings that house the mosque administration office, prayer areas, a day care, a picnic area, and play area for children. The Florida Islamic Preparatory, a private school associated with Salaam Society, is located across the street from the main buildings of the mosque. The school cafeteria is a standalone building that is built very close to the mosque buildings and is routinely used as overflow space for

worshippers on Friday afternoons. The buildings at Salaam Society are arranged in a square on the perimeter of a courtyard of about 20 square meters.

Salaam Society was formally established as a mosque in the year 1988. It began as a congregation that used to gather in the garage of a house that was later replaced with the current building of Salaam Society. Over time, the land and buildings surrounding the garage were purchased to accommodate a growing congregation. According to the information posted on its website, Salaam Society serviced a community of 400 Muslim families. Typical Friday prayer attendance was about 800 people, while *Eid* prayer attendance was estimated at close to 2,000 individuals. Salaam Society had three full-time employees: the Imam, an office manager, and a maintenance engineer and cleaner. Volunteers helped run many daily affairs of the Society and also assisted in the arrangement of other events and functions. Salaam Society was governed by a *Majlis-e-Shura* of 13 volunteers elected every two years. Although the original by-laws set the number of board members at nine, four additional board members were elected on the basis of affirmative action in order to include women, non-Arabs, and individuals from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

During the course of my research, I noted that the overwhelming majority of members at Salaam Society appear to be culturally and ethnically homogenous, with a Palestinian background. The members appeared to belong to middle- and lower-middle class backgrounds.

Research Methods

In order to study two American mosques as religious and cultural centers, I designed a qualitative framework of research. I collected data over the months of February and March of 2010 and September and October of 2012 while enrolled as a Masters student at the University

of South Florida. I conducted research at two Islamic centers in South Florida that I gave the pseudonyms of “International Islamic Center” and “Salaam Society”. I used ethnographic field observations to collect data from the two mosques. In addition, I conducted 11 in-person interviews. I secured approval from the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board to conduct this study. The approval letters are attached as Appendix A. I had free and full access to all areas of both Islamic centers including offices, men and women’s prayer areas, and community rooms, as do all Muslims, regardless of ethnic or cultural background. I requested formal permission from the management officials of both organizations to conduct research on the premises, which was granted.

Ethnographic Fieldwork

I elected to use an ethnographic approach to data collection, as the areas I wanted to study were large, animated with sizeable numbers of people, with several activities occurring simultaneously. I spent a total of 16.5 hours in the field making participant observations. I conducted most of my observations on Friday afternoons. The afternoon congregational prayer on Fridays is the largest gathering of Muslims during the week. Muslims believe that offering Friday afternoon prayers collectively holds additional significance and reward compared with regular congregational prayers. All practicing Muslims are required by their faith to set aside their daily activities to attend these prayers. Friday afternoon prayers are the only prayers during the week that are preceded by a sermon, which makes them an optimal time to disseminate important ideas and make announcements.

The courtyard of a mosque is the main area of informal social activity. Visitor and worshiper traffic flows from the parking lot towards the mosque before the prayers, and in the

opposite direction after the prayers. On Fridays, time spent in the courtyard by the average individual visiting the mosque to offer prayers is shorter before the prayers as people usually hurry to enter the mosque and listen to the sermon. After the prayer is over, however, the courtyard is a more relaxed space. Worshippers come out on the paved area after the Friday prayers and meet with friends and get a bite to eat. Adults and children socialize and visit the various stalls and kiosks dotting the courtyard. The atmosphere is usually cheerful and lively. The area is abuzz with activity on Saturdays as well when women and children attend weekend classes. Therefore, at both research settings, I collected data by conducting observations in the courtyard and watching activities and events as they unfolded.

I visited International Islamic Center on seven occasions. I attended congregational afternoon prayers on five Fridays and made observations both before and after the prayers. I also visited the Center on one Saturday to observe the weekend Islamic school in progress. I also attended one community meeting that was held at the Center on a Sunday. Each Friday visit lasted between one to one and a half hours. I usually took a break from fieldwork for about 15 minutes to offer my own prayers with the congregation. The community meeting that I observed lasted for three hours. Of the total 11 hours of observations at the International Islamic Center, I documented six, which yielded 52 pages of single-spaced notes.

I visited Salaam Society on five occasions. During four of these visits, I attended the Friday prayers and conducted observations before and after the service. I made one visit specifically to explore the Center and acquaint myself with the campus. I made observations for a total of five and a half hours and documented four, which resulted in 24 pages of single-spaced notes. I attribute the difference in the volume of notes between the two sites to the difference in languages spoken. Since Arabic was the predominant language of communication at Salaam

Society and I neither speak nor understand Arabic, I was not privy to most exchanges. I based my ethnographic field note writing on Emerseon, Fretz, and Shaw's processes of making "jottings" (1995:19) in the field and developing detailed field notes at a later time.

Participant Interviews

Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland have noted that "doing participant observation in another culture, as well as one's own, involves a great deal of informant interviewing" (2006:18). I conducted a total of 11 qualitative interviews, using snowball sampling to recruit interview participants. I interviewed five participants from the International Islamic Center and six from Salaam Society. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The Informed Consent Form I provided to participants is attached as Appendix B. The interview schedule is attached as Appendix C. I used an audio recording device to record interviews and fully transcribed each conversation, which resulted in 137 pages of interview data. I have replaced respondents' names with pseudonyms. I gathered age, ethnicity, and work-related data as they are pertinent to my study. All study participants were practicing Muslims and active members of one of the two Islamic centers I studied. Table 1 shows some demographic details about the interview participants. I conducted interviews at various different locations based on respondents' choices. Some respondents met me at one of the two mosques, others received me at their homes, and still others spoke with me in coffee shops and at the USF library. The interviews served as part of the background research and information into the inner workings of the mosque, and shed light on the ways in which community members utilize the Islamic centers.

Data Analysis

I took an “open coding” approach to analyze the data I had collected. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995:143) have described open coding as line-by-line coding where the ethnographer notes down “any and all ideas, themes, or issues” suggested by the data. After the first round of coding, a few recurrent themes emerged and my subsequent coding exercise became more focused. I located all recurring events and processes within the pages of my data including field notes and interviews to identify and separate them into four overarching themes of identity, avenues of assimilation, “Americanizing Islam”, and intergenerational differences.

Being a member of the International Islamic Center and an observer simultaneously presented a unique situation for me. I delve into the complexities of fieldwork in the mosque, and into the advantages and challenges that I experienced during my research in Appendix C, “Reflections on Research”.

Table 1. Interview Participants' Demographic Details

	Pseudonym	Mosque	Age	Gender	Occupation	Origin
1	Sana	International Islamic Center	31	Female	Teacher	Indian
2	Emad	International Islamic Center	33	Male	Dentist	Pakistani-Canadian
3	Samantha	International Islamic Center	45	Female	Food vendor	Caucasian-American
4	Mrs. Motiwala	International Islamic Center	62	Female	Owner of consultancy and Mosque Board Member	Indian
5	Mr. Raza	International Islamic Center	62	Male	Pharmacist and Mosque Board Member	Indian
6	Sakeenah	Salaam Society	22	Female	Graduate Student and Teacher	Palestinian-American
7	Muhammad	Salaam Society	22	Male	Graduate Student and Physician's Assistant	Palestinian-American
8	Musab	Salaam Society	30	Male	Graduate Student	Palestinian
9	Aliya	Salaam Society	31	Female	Teacher	Pakistani
10	Mr. Badar	Salaam Society	42	Male	Mosque official	Palestinian
11	Mrs. Hatem	Salaam Society	45	Female	School Official	Palestinian-American

CHAPTER 4

MOSQUES CREATE *AMERICAN* MUSLIM IDENTITIES

In this chapter, I analyze the ways mosques help create Muslim identities that I find to be uniquely American. In concordance with the findings of other scholars of immigrant religious institutions, I found that in the absence of a mainstream Muslim society in North America, the mosques I studied became Islamic ‘centers’ that served not only religious and educational needs, but also performed social and cultural functions. These functions enabled member American Muslims to practice Islam and develop a sense of identity and belonging.

In particular, I discuss the ways the research sites utilized their religious and educational instruments to develop American Muslim identities for younger generations of American Muslims. I describe how the production of culture at the two research sites differed but both provided members with cultural and ethnic anchors that helped them locate themselves in American society. As some other scholars have discussed, I also found that the American mosques I studied catered to women as well as men, which differs from the mosques in Muslim-majority societies.

Mosques as Religious Centers

Mosques at both of my research sites provided a built environment for Muslims to worship and fulfill religious obligations in accordance with Islamic principles, in a country where Muslims are a minority. Based on the National Congregation Study data, Chaves (2004) demonstrated that worship and religious education are the core functions of most religious congregations in the

U.S. As such, the religious function of the Islamic centers was one that was most readily observed. During my ethnographic visits, I noted that both of the Islamic centers had arrangements for Muslims to offer the five obligatory prayers daily, and the prescribed congregational prayers every Friday.

The mosques I studied offered extended religious services as well, at times exceeding the services provided by mosques in Muslim-majority countries. Mr. Badar, a middle-aged interview participant, described the religious functions of Salaam Society in detail. According to Mr. Badar, an immigrant who moved to the U.S. from Palestine over 25 years ago and was a member of Salaam Society, the Society makes arrangements for the special prayers for the two festivals of *Eid* each year. During the holy month of *Ramadan*, additional prayers are held at Salaam Society during the night. Mr. Badar stated that *janaza* prayers for Islamic funerals are held at the mosque and the mosque provides services for the cleaning, shrouding, and burial of bodies according to Islamic custom. Salaam Society also made provisions for social gatherings that are religiously mandated, which Muslims in Muslim-majority societies would generally host at home. The community hall at Salaam Society is utilized by families of members to host *aqeeqah* banquets to celebrate the birth of a child, hold Islamic weddings, and meet visitors for condolences when someone passes away.

Mr. Raza, a member of International Islamic Center, is a man in his mid-sixties. Mr. Raza migrated to the U.S. from India over 40 years ago. In my interview with him, Mr. Raza described the religious functions of the International Islamic Center. Similar to Salaam Society, the International Islamic Center had arrangements for daily, weekly, and bi-annual *Eid* prayers. According to Mr. Raza, the International Islamic Center had a funeral director to conduct the burial rituals for Muslims. The Center also had accommodations to host social events such as

aqeeqah and wedding parties. Additionally, Mr. Raza mentioned resources for non-Muslims and new converts such as a library at the International Islamic Center to facilitate learning about Islam specifically for non-Muslims. Scholars such as Alba, Raboteau, and (2009), Min (2001) and Abusharaf (1998), among others, have established that immigrant religious congregations fulfill important spiritual needs for immigrant communities, and I found this to be true for my research sites.

The very existence of a dedicated place of worship for my participants helped to establish their faith-based identity. Mrs. Motiwala is a petite woman in her mid-sixties who moved to the U.S. from India over 40 years ago. She is one of the founding members of International Islamic Center. In her interview, she recalled when the first building for the International Islamic Center was acquired. According to Mrs. Motiwala, for several years prior to the purchase of an old church that was converted to the International Islamic Center, the small Muslim community in the city had gathered and prayed in various rented spaces in an effort to develop fellowship and create an environment of familiarity for their young offspring. She describes her emotions when the Center began to operate formally:

I was very young but I still remember. It was so exciting for everybody! (...)It was a big achievement, to have your identity.

This quote depicts the sense of accomplishment Mrs. Motiwala felt as a young immigrant after the establishment of a proper place of worship for her and others like her. For Mrs. Motiwala, the preservation of her identity was tied to the establishment of her place of worship. In the essay “Protestant-Catholic-Jew”, Herberg (1955) wrote about the centrality of religion in immigrants’ self-identification. To Herberg (1955), immigrants tend to adhere to religion even more strictly than they would in their homelands, in order to locate themselves in a new country as well as to retain religious identity for their offspring. Warner (2000) has also noted that immigrants

establish and seek religious congregations in a bid to solidify their religious identity. Warner (2000) opines that religious congregations help immigrants transmit religious practices to their children and immigrants parents are able to explain facets of their identity to their children when the children perceive themselves to be different from the mainstream society in the host country. For Mrs. Motiwala and other founding families of the International Islamic Center, the establishment of the mosque was a step towards the preservation of their religious identity and a source of pride.

Mosques as Religious and Secular Educational Centers

In my research, I found that the mosques I studied consciously undertook the task of instilling a religious identity in the younger generations of Muslims through Islamic schools and other educational avenues. The Islamic centers I studied offered not only faith-based education in various formats, but also secular mainstream school education. In contrast, mosques in Muslim-majority countries do not generally offer secular education. Faith-based establishments are called *madressas*, and depending on the country, *madressas* may or may not be overseen by regulatory authorities. Both of the mosques included in my research have affiliated private schools. In common parlance in the American Muslim community, any private school associated with a mosque is called ‘Islamic school’, which differentiates it from regular public and charter schools. I have named the school at International Islamic Center the “International Academy”. At Salaam Society, I call the private school “Florida Islamic Preparatory”.

Mrs. Hatem holds a senior position in the administration at the Florida Islamic Preparatory. In her interview, she explained that ‘Islamic schools’ are called thus because they have scheduled breaks for daily prayers and include Quran and *Hadith* as part of the curriculum

alongside mainstream secular education. According to Mrs. Hatem, the educational institutes at both mosques took root almost simultaneously as homeschooling groups, born out of a desire to educate children in an environment where Islamic norms of dress and conduct could be observed. As the student population grew, both schools formalized and became independent of their parent organizations, with autonomous school boards. Mrs. Hatem stated that International Academy and Florida Islamic Preparatory were both accredited with Florida Council of Independent Schools. Notably, following the Islamic faith was not a prerequisite of employment for teachers at either Islamic school, and both institutions employed a number of teachers who practiced religions other than Islam.

The International Islamic Center also operated a Quran program that was focused on the memorization and understanding of the Quran, called *hifdh*. At the International Islamic Society the *Imam* chaired the *hifdh* program and held separate classes for girls and boys. Some students undertook *hifdh* part time and attended regular school in the mornings and *hifdh* classes in the afternoons. Others suspended secular education for a year or two and dedicated their time to learning the Quran, then returned to conventional school upon completion of *hifdh*. A female religious scholar ran a similar Quran memorization program at Salaam Society. As evidence of the move towards a Protestant model of congregation of mosques as noted by Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) and Abusharaf (1998), the International Islamic Center also had a weekend Islamic school program. According to Mrs. Motiwala, the weekend Islamic school was established mainly to supplement the secular education most Muslim children receive at their regular schools, and for children who did not attend Islamic schools to develop friendships with other Muslims.

A number of scholars have studied immigrant religious institutions' efforts to transmit religion to future generations. For instance, Min and Kim (2005) have analyzed the efforts of Korean immigrants in New York to transfer religiosity to the 1.5 and second generation Koreans. Min (2001) found that Korean churches held Sunday school and English and Korean language classes for Korean children in addition to religious services. According to Voas and Fleishmann (2012), for Muslims, the transfer of religion to future generations takes on increased importance upon moving to the West where Islam is rendered a minority religion.

During my interviews, some community members shared their thoughts on the role of an Islamic school in the life of American Muslim children's identity. Sana, who is a 31-year old female member of the International Islamic Center and a teacher at the International Academy explained that an Islamic school instilled a "core value system" in children by guiding their daily activities through Islamic principles, and provided an environment where Muslim children spent time together. In the following excerpt, Sana shares her concerns about focusing solely on secular education:

I think (an Islamic school) is *imperative* for the Muslim community. From what I've seen, and I've been teaching at (various) Islamic schools for 8 years now... I've seen a lot of Islamic schools, though I did all my training through public schools. I'm not worried about our children not having (secular) education; I'm worried about our children, Muslim children, not having an Islamic education. I have seen families that have changed so much because of just being in a non-Muslim environment and losing their religion and conforming to "American society". I believe that you can be American and still maintain your religion. I am more worried about our children not knowing how to pray than I am worried about them not knowing math.

This quote shows that Sana strongly felt that Islamic schools protected the religious identity of Muslim children. In Sana's opinion, families and children who were not exposed to Islamic norms "lost their religion" and assimilated completely. To Sana, the loss of religious identity appeared to be a negative outcome of assimilation and one that could be prevented with the help

of Islamic schools. Sana felt that Muslim children's secular education was not at risk by attending Islamic school, but their Islamic identity was at risk by being in a completely secular environment.

The need to safeguard the religious identity of future generations can be traced to immigrants' need for "self-identification" and "self-location" in a host society, when, according to Herberg (1955:12), immigrants must answer the question "what am I?" For Herberg (1955), immigrants' religious identity helps them navigate American society. Similarly, Kurien (1998) studied Hindu religious gatherings and argued that in pluralistic American society, religion becomes a "key symbol of identity" and enables a minority to participate in the multicultural American society rather than alienating it. Interestingly, Sana mentioned that being American and Muslim was not at odds. In their extensive multi-method study of immigrant Muslim American youth, Sirin and Fine concluded that Muslim American children who are engaged with their Muslim community "have creatively integrated aspects of their Muslim and their American selves" (2008:149). In Sana's opinion, "ways of being" (social relations) and "ways of belonging" (identification with a group) as conceptualized by Sirin and Fine (2008) are taught and safeguarded in the Islamic school environment.

Research has established that adolescence and young adulthood are critical times in the maturation of self-identities, including ethnic immigrant identity. It is during this phase of emotional and psychological development when group identification takes form based on social relations (Sirin and Fine 2008, Phinney and Ong 2007). In this sense, the private Islamic schools and the weekend school reinforced Islamic norms and provided a point of normative reference for American Muslim children, where they could interact with other Muslim youth and cement the Muslim aspect of their identity. By enabling American Muslim children to fully immerse in

their “own” identity, the Islamic and weekend schools helped American Muslim children feel anchored and secure in their ethnic and religious identities and could negotiate American society from a point of strength. In particular, the combination of secular education with Islamic social principles in Islamic schools appeared to send the message that Islam was not incompatible with American society and both streams of education could be undertaken simultaneously without compromising either the secular or Islamic education.

Mosques as Social Centers

Scholars of immigration have found most immigrant religious congregations to encompass a host of functions. Both of the American mosques I studied performed a variety of social functions that surpassed the religious functions of mosques in most Muslim-majority societies. I found that the mosques I studied provided members with social networks and resulting resources, as well as an emotional sense of belonging. In a Muslim-majority society, the mosque is a purely religious space. There exist familial and social networks in Muslim societies that operate within an overarching Islamic framework of norms to provide social support, resources, and emotional and financial support. Like many other immigrants, most Muslims lose ties of belonging such as family and friends when they immigrate to the U.S. The two mosques I studied filled social gaps in immigrants’ lives in a manner similar to other ethnic and immigrant religious institutions. For members, the mosques served as community centers and hubs for social activity with similar people. Mr. Badar described the social aspect of Salaam Society in the following excerpt:

If you compare it to the *masajid* back home... Back home, you go pray, and you go home. Here it is different because I have friends from many countries. So really it is a different feeling than back home where you just pray and go home. Here we pray, we talk about politics back home, and chit chat. There is more interaction in life here than in a *masjid* back home.

This excerpt demonstrates how Mr. Badar found mosques “back home” in Palestine to be different from his experience of Salaam Society. He described the purely religious function of mosques in Palestine, and contrasted it with the greater social interaction with his friends that occurs in the mosque in the U.S.

Emad is a tall and slim man in his early thirties and has been a member of the International Islamic Center for 15 years. Emad has Pakistani heritage and was born and raised in Canada prior to moving to the U.S. In the following excerpt, he described one of the roles of a mosque in the social life of American Muslims:

In this country we are a minority and it's not like we run into each other walking down the street or something, right? So (going to the mosque) is an opportunity for you to meet up regularly with people who share a lot of the same common beliefs as you.

Emad felt that as a member of a religious minority in the U.S., American Muslims lack interaction with one another in their day-to-day lives. He found that visiting the mosque was an effective way to socialize and connect with other Muslims with similar beliefs. Mr. Badar and Emad describe a sense of fellowship similar to what Alba, Robateau, and DeWin (2009) have noted; that immigrant religious congregations go much beyond religious functionality and serve as “social service centers”, and community building is an important aspect of such congregations.

At the mosques I studied, connections made at the mosque also translated into support that is generally provided by families and neighbors in Muslim-majority countries. In her interview, Mrs. Motiwala shed light on the various ways the International Islamic Center served the social needs of American Muslims. According to Mrs. Motiwala, when Muslim families move to the area from other countries or states, the existing Muslim community formally welcomes them and introduces them to other Muslim families. The community network at the

International Islamic Center connects unemployed Muslims with vacancies within the community, directs them to workforce offices, helps them find appropriate vocational training, or facilitates the set up of small businesses such as child-care or catering. The community also looks after members in need of other forms of help.

The following excerpt from my interview with Mrs. Motiwala shows how members at the International Islamic Center fulfilled other social duties that are usually attended to by families:

Firstly, if we see a woman is sick and in need of help and doesn't have family, we make a schedule of visiting that person in the hospital. If a young girl has a baby and doesn't have parents living here, we make a schedule of ladies to take food and don't leave the young couple by themselves. Recently there were two sisters who had cancer and were at Moffitt. We don't leave anybody alone.

In this excerpt, Mrs. Motiwala described how the community at International Islamic Center established a system to help families without extended networks and in need of social support, particularly in times of illness.

Mrs. Hatem, who is a member of Salaam Society, is in her mid-forties. She is a pleasant and fresh-faced woman who was dressed simply in an *abaya* and scarf. In her interview, Mrs. Hatem mentioned that community members at Salaam Society, too, rally together to help each other in times of need, be it "financial, illness, or death". Classical findings from Herberg (1955), and more recent studies by Alba, Raboteau, and DeWin (2009), Hirschman (2004), (Min 2001), and Ebaugh and Chavetz (2000) all pointed out the multifarious activities in which immigrant religious congregations are engaged. According to Alba, Raboteau, and DeWin, Immigrant congregations are "social spaces" where "instrumental, sociocultural, psychological, and spiritual needs" are met (2009:23). In his extensive research, Min (2001) found Korean churches in New York to offer strong ethnic social networks to members that enabled members to reap emotional and socioeconomic benefits. Similarly, Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) conducted research on 13

immigrant religious institutions in Houston, including a mosque, and found that most religious congregations followed a “Community Center” model and provided significant social, emotional, and material resources to members.

Importantly, for children and young adults growing up Muslim in America, the leadership at the mosques I studied took further steps to create a sense of community through social interaction by interweaving people through events and projects. One interview participant, Muhammad, is a 21-year-old man who was born and raised in the U.S. He attended high school at the Florida Islamic Preparatory and is in his last semester of college. Muhammad has Palestinian heritage and is a member of Salaam Society. In his interview, Muhammad shared what the mosque meant to him and young adults like him. According to Muhammad, the mosque helped the community “by making sure youth are safe” from getting involved in un-Islamic activities such as drugs or criminal and sexual activities by providing them with sound religious knowledge, alternate activities in which to engage such as sports, and opportunities to develop friendships with other Muslims through community barbecues and picnics. In Muhammad’s opinion, these efforts enabled Muslim children and young adults to create meaningful ties with other Muslims, which they might not have in the larger society.

For American Muslims who choose to visit a mosque regularly, a mosque provides a reliable social network and social resources that can substitute the organic social networks that exist outside of mosques in Muslim-majority countries, which sets it apart from mosques in Muslim-majority countries. American mosques also engender a sense of belonging among members by being a contact point for Muslim families, particularly immigrants, to develop meaningful friendships.

In their research, Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) concluded that ethnic immigrant religious congregations established by lay immigrants such as the two mosques I studied, tended to take on functionality as community centers when the institutions remained focused on the congregation rather than the clergy. In the cases of the mosques that I studied, the institutions continue to be run in a democratic and communal fashion with a focus on facilitating interpersonal ties, thus enabling them to serve as community centers.

Mosques as Cultural Centers

I found that my research sites also performed cultural functions. In my research at the two Islamic centers, I witnessed cultural practices at both sites. It is notable that the ways culture was produced at each research site differed, as I will elaborate in the paragraphs that follow. Haddad (2009) differentiated between the ethnic and religious identities of Muslims, and Arabs in particular. She explained that the category “Arab” encompasses followers of many religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism over a vast geographical area who share a language, food, attire, and ways of life. Similarly, the category “Muslim” includes a large population of the world with disparate linguistic, sartorial, and ethnic traditions. For the purpose of my analysis, I use the term “culture” to express ethnic behaviors in particular, holding constant the faith of all the members I observed.

When I conducted ethnographic observations at the International Islamic Center, I observed English, Arabic, Urdu, and Spanish being spoken, in addition to other heritage languages I could not immediately identify. I noted that the community notice board displayed advertisements in English, Arabic, and Spanish. I noted in my ethnographic field notes that the signage inside the International Islamic Center was also in English, Arabic, and Spanish. At the

International Islamic Center, I observed that worshippers attended Friday prayers in a wide range of cultural garb including Indo-Pakistani *shalwar kameez* and *chadar*, Middle- Eastern *abaya* and *hijab*, and African tunics, pants, and turbans. On several of my ethnographic visits to the International Islamic Center, I noted various kiosks run by separate families that sold Syrian-style falafel wraps, Egyptian stuffed grape leaves, and Pakistani *biryani*. In sum, I found the International Islamic Center to be multicultural. Tellingly, as a matter of policy, the Friday sermon at the International Islamic Center was delivered in English.

Interview participants appeared to have an awareness of cultural practices at the two mosques. The following excerpt is taken from my interview with Sana, a thirty-something American-born Muslim woman. Sana has Indian heritage and was born and raised in a mid-Western city in the U.S. Sana described the variety of cultures she sees at the International Islamic Center:

I like that it's a very multicultural environment. That's my favorite thing about the *masjid*. You see people wearing all different types of clothing, you hear people speaking every single language.

In this excerpt, Sana referred to the variety of ethnic languages and clothing she noticed at the International Islamic Center. To Sana, this variety showed people engaging in a multitude of cultures. Notably, multiculturalism was a positive attribute of the environment of the International Islamic Center in Sana's view. It appears that she felt that people were free to practice their cultures at the International Islamic Society.

I observed equal instances of cultural practices at Salaam Society. In my ethnographic observations at Salaam Society, I noted the use of Arabic, English, and very occasionally, Urdu in conversations. I noted that the majority of women at Salaam Society dressed in *abayas* and headscarves in a Middle-Eastern style. The Friday sermon at Salaam Society was delivered in

Arabic on each of the occasions I visited to conduct research. On the whole, I found Salaam Society to be somewhat uniformly Arab in culture.

The following excerpt is taken from my interview with Sakeenah, who was a relatively new member of Salaam Society. Sakeenah is a petite woman in her early twenties, and wore an *abaya* and *niqab*. A graduate student, Sakeenah was born and raised on the East Coast of the U.S. but moved to Florida a year ago after she got married. About the culture in Salaam Society, Sakeenah said:

I feel that Salaam Society is primarily Palestinian so there are very few people from other countries. So I guess it's nice sometimes. You feel like you're very, 'back home'. You know, the way they talk, the way they dress, the way they cook, everything feels just like back home almost.

Sakeenah found that Salaam Society had a predominantly Palestinian membership. To Sakeenah, the cultural manifestations that she saw at the mosque evoked Palestine ('back home'). At Salaam Society, members were able to recreate a world where they could continue to be 'Palestinian'. Sakeenah described how members' use of language, dress, and food reproduced a sense of 'home'. In the case of Salaam Society, when members spoke a Palestinian dialect of Arabic and dressed in traditional garb, they maintained and protected a connection with their ethnic roots.

Herberg (1995) wrote that immigrant churches helped to recreate the "old home" of immigrants. Similarly, Warner stated that immigrant religious institutions are "free social spaces" where immigrants do not have to use the English language or conform to American norms (2000: 271). According to Warner, immigrants can relax and experience feelings of "home" in their religious institutions. For Muslim immigrants in a foreign country, the research sites were a place where they found co-ethnics who spoke their language, dressed in similar attire, and prepared and enjoyed regional cuisine. As such, the mosques I studied, like other

ethnic religious institutions, enabled immigrants to recreate cultural experiences and stay connected to their ethnic roots. Scholars such as Hirschman (2004) have shed light on why it is important for immigrants to maintain strong cultural affiliations.

I found the diverse International Islamic Society to be a microcosmic representation of the larger American society in its multiculturalism. It appeared that various ethnic groups were able to maintain ties to their home cultures, and at the same time be in harmonious conversation with other cultures. At Salaam Society, cultural activities took on the highly specific “Palestinian” bent. Based on my current data, it is difficult to determine why one site developed into a more ethnic mosque than the other. Stepnick and Stepnick (2010) offer a reactionary explanation whereby immigrants, if made to feel different or like outsiders by their host society, often turn to their cultural or religious identity as a defense of their right to be different. It is possible that ideological differences or international geopolitical conditions contribute to Palestinian immigrants’ wish to establish an independent mosque.

Interestingly, despite these different mechanisms, ties to ethnicity and culture that resist assimilation do not have a negative impact on immigrants’ assimilation to American society. According to some scholars, in the pluralistic and multicultural American society, the maintenance of a strong cultural and ethnic identity enables immigrants to participate more fully and on equal footing than complete assimilation. Notably, in “Becoming American by Becoming Hindu”, Kurien wrote that “asserting pride in their Hindu Indian heritage has also been their way of claiming a position for themselves at the American Multicultural table” (1998:37). To Kurien, a return to ethnicity helps immigrants resolve identity crises, locate themselves, and negotiate greater society.

Events at the mosque that celebrate faith and culture can cultivate a strong Muslim American identity, particularly for younger American Muslims. Both of my research sites held *Eid* celebrations in addition to *Eid* prayers. In her interview, Sakeenah described a festive scene at Salaam Society at *Eid-ul-Fitr* that she had attended the month prior to our meeting. She recounted that people arrived at the mosque in festive attire, children enjoyed rides, and there were sweets and fireworks. Mr. Badar is part of the mosque administration at Salam Society and in charge of *Eid* preparations at the mosque. He is also a prominent member of the Parent Teacher Association at the Florida Islamic Preparatory. In the following excerpt from his interview, Mr. Badar explained why the *Eid* carnival is important for Muslim American children:

The carnival and the *Eid* celebration is directed mostly towards the children so the children will know that they can have fun and they, too, have a holiday. It's not Christmas and Santa Claus, but we have other things. We have our own religion, our own beliefs, and our own celebrations.

In this excerpt, Mr. Badar explains that *Eid* carnivals at Salaam Society are specially geared towards children in order to help them celebrate their own holidays and drive home their unique collective identity as Muslims. *Eid* celebrations provide them with an alternative to mainstream holidays such as Christmas, in which Muslims do not participate, and still utilize all-American entertainment activities for fun.

Warner (2000) has noted that immigrants often use religious rituals as a vehicle to transmit and communicate culture to their offspring. In a similar vein, Min and Kim (2005) have found that a high correlation between religion and culture is necessary for the successful transmission of ethnic traditions to 1.5 and second generation immigrants, and dissociation between religion and culture hinders the transfer of culture to younger generations of immigrants. I find that for the research sites in my study, mosque leaders attempt to encapsulate culture and religion together to assert ethnic uniqueness.

Mosques as Inclusive Spaces for Women and Children

I found that the mosques I studied catered to women as well as men, and were family-oriented spaces. In Islam, it is mandatory for Muslim men but not women to offer prayers in congregation. As such, mosques in Muslim-majority countries may not always have arrangements for women to worship. During my visits to both research sites, I noted dedicated prayer areas for women in addition to prayer halls for men. The women's prayer areas at both the International Islamic Center and Salaam Society were separate from men's, in accordance with some interpretations of Islamic guidelines that prescribe strict segregation of prayer areas by sex. Both of the mosques I studied had day care centers and play areas for children, accommodations that facilitate women's attendance at the mosque since women are often the primary caretakers of children. During all of my ethnographic visits to both sites, I observed men, women, and children of various ages visiting both mosques. Indeed, female interview respondents were easily recruited for this study, and represented mosque administration, Islamic schoolteachers, and a food vendor – all positions that demonstrated women's involvement at different levels in the mosques.

Women's attendance at the mosques in America contrasts with mosques in many Muslim-majority societies. Traditionally, in most Muslim-majority societies, the vast majority of mosque-goers are men and the production of religion is part of the male realm. Thus, mosques in the majority of Muslim societies are male-oriented. American society is more egalitarian in terms of the female body's movement and policing, and a Western lifestyle breaks down the traditional division of labor where women are confined to their homes as they are in many Muslim-majority

societies. For American mosques, the enhanced status of American Muslim women means that American mosques must cater to the needs of women as well as men.

The following excerpt is taken from my interview with Sakeenah and shows some of her thoughts about women in mosques in the U.S.:

For instance women going to the *masajid* is something you don't see overseas and it's ridiculous because there's a *hadeeth* that says "Do not prevent women from going to the *masjid*" so *subhanallah* it is truly a blessing for us to be able to do that here. To be able to actually have a voice and say something about it whereas overseas they wouldn't.

In this excerpt, Sakeenah contrasted her experience of American mosques with mosques "overseas", in Muslim-majority countries. She felt that American mosques were more inclusive of women than mosques in Muslim countries. She referred to a Prophetic saying that forbade the prevention of women's attendance of prayers at mosques, a *hadeeth* that is ironically not followed in most mosques in Muslim-majority countries. She juxtaposed American Muslim women's situation with that of women in Muslim societies where, according to Sakeenah, Islamic teachings were negated and women were prevented from participation.

In another participant interview, Mr. Raza underscored the importance of women's attendance and participation at the mosque since women constitute the "foundation of the family" and transfer important religious and cultural values to future generations. Mr. Raza also noted the women's classes and volunteering efforts at the International Islamic Center as positive.

Several scholars have noted the changing role and status of women in immigrant religious institutions in general, and American mosques in particular. Warner (2000) found that gender relations change in immigrant religious congregations and the status of women improves, even for first generation immigrants. He noted that in immigrant religious congregations, women begin to assume leadership roles in the organizational as well as religious realm. While Warner

(2000) did not offer reasons for these changes, Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999) argued that in the U.S., newly available educational and employment opportunities for immigrant women that did not exist in their home countries enable them to seek changes in their roles and status within their religious institutions. In turn, this improved status of women translates to higher attendance and representation in their congregations.

Haddad (2007) and Lin (2007) also found that Muslim women attend prayers at mosques in America, which is a departure from the norm in Muslim-majority societies. In her study, Lin (2007) underscored the importance of the mosque as a gathering place particularly for women who were then able to organize and volunteer within the Muslim community.

To conclude this chapter, my findings from the two research sites can be summed up using Hirschman's (2004) three-R classification. According to Hirschman (2004), ethnic immigrant religious institutions provide three Rs - refuge, resources, and respectability to members. The mosques I studied served as spaces where Muslim immigrants' cultures were remembered and practiced. While one mosque, the International Islamic Center, reproduced a multitude of ethnic cultures and the other, Salaam Society, reproduced a specifically Palestinian one, both mosques provided refuge to immigrant heritage cultures from being usurped and erased by the mainstream culture. Emerson and Woo (2008) have posited that multiracial religious congregations enable members to "bridge" their social capital and build cross-racial networks, relationships, and resources. On the other hand, racially-segregated religious congregations "bond" members' social capital where shared norms, values, and resources are reinforced. Emerson and Woo (2008) have posited that multi-racial (or multi-ethnic) religious congregations have the potential to link members across differences such as class and can bring about social change in the long-term.

I noted that religious educational activities and cultural celebrations were particularly utilized to transmit religion and culture to 1.5 and second generation immigrants, in order to help them navigate the ethnic and American aspects of their identities. The mosques I studied offered immigrants a sense of belonging, opportunities to develop social networks with other Muslims, and emotional, social, and economic resources.

Finally, the mosques I studied lent a sense of respectability to members by enabling immigrant American Muslims to self-locate in a diverse society, and allowing them to assert their differences and contribution to the mainstream American society. The mosques I studied enhanced the respectability of women in particular by increasing the participation and elevating the status of women in the American Muslim community as a result of the impact of mainstream American society. In the following chapter, I analyze the institutional strategies utilized by mosques to help assimilate immigrants.

CHAPTER 5

MOSQUES' INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES OF INTEGRATION

In this chapter, I describe institutional strategies of integration employed by the mosques in my study. I noted that members and administrations of the mosques I studied undertook several measures to provide Muslim Americans with ways to participate in American society, which is consistent with findings of other scholars of ethnic and immigrant religious institutions who have established that immigrant religious institutions in America are important vehicles of assimilation and acculturation for members.

In particular, I discuss voluntary and institutional forces at the research sites that extended linguistic and logistical support to immigrants. I also found the two mosques to be sites where political engagement of American Muslims was facilitated, much like other commentators have noted for other immigrant religious congregations. Finally, I describe interfaith outreach efforts that originated from the mosques I studied which I found to be unique to American mosques.

Linguistic and Logistical Assimilation

Immigrants to the U.S. from non-English-speaking countries are likely to face some sort of difficulty in communication. In addition to being a logistical impediment, lack of English skills can also hinder the process of integration into society for immigrants. Often the first point of social contact for new Muslim immigrants who may not always speak English, Islamic centers

can be their only source of information. For new immigrants, the language barrier and lack of access to information about basic necessities are foremost concerns. In Mrs. Hatem's estimation, about 70% of the families who attend prayers at Salaam Society are first-generation immigrants who she calls "English language learners".

The following excerpt is taken from my interview with Mrs. Hatem, who came across several immigrant families in her role as the head of Florida Islamic Preparatory. According to Mrs. Hatem, once immigrant parents made contact with school officials for the enrolment of children, they relied on these contacts for help with other aspects of resettlement. Mrs. Hatem described plans to help the immigrant families of students who enroll at Florida Islamic Preparatory:

We're looking at opening a language and tutoring center (...) Partly to help our students' parents. A lot of parents come from overseas. They come as students (to the local universities) with zero English skills. They go to English Language Institutes at the universities and spend tons of money, and they don't learn as much as they should. So we're looking to have some kind of English language program for them. In addition, we'd like to have an advising program for them because they come in here and ask us for all kinds of information. How can I find housing? How do I find a car? How do I apply for regular degree programs? How do I apply for different benefits?

In this excerpt, Mrs. Hatem detailed the linguistic and logistical challenges faced by immigrants when they arrived in the U.S. In her opinion, the English language courses that immigrants had access to through their universities did not equip them with adequate skills. Moreover, she described being approached by the parents of students at Florida Islamic Preparatory for advice regarding housing, transportation, education, and finances, which demonstrated the basic needs of immigrants that they sought to meet through the mosque or Islamic school due to the lack of other resources. According to Mrs. Hatem, it was one of the goals of Salaam Society to establish an affiliated but independent resource center with the specific goal of helping immigrants settle into the U.S. In her interview, Mrs. Hatem stated that through the years, volunteers from the

mosque or Florida Islamic Preparatory assisted Muslim immigrant families to find language classes, employment, and housing. According to Mrs. Hatem, Salaam Society intended to formalize these efforts.

At the International Islamic Center, Mrs. Motiwala, who leads the women's program, described in detail the help teams of volunteers extended to new Muslim immigrants. In her interview, she stated that the International Islamic Center had established a women's committee that was tasked with assisting immigrant families, finding English language courses, employment, and housing, among other responsibilities. While Muslims are required to offer obligatory prayers Arabic, sermons are generally conducted in the native language of the congregation. In case of the International Islamic Society, it was the policy of the mosque to conduct Friday sermons in English. The Center also offered religious classes and hosted reading circles in separate sessions in Arabic and English.

It appeared that mosque officials at both of my research sites actively facilitated linguistic assimilation and logistical integration for immigrants. Although these efforts were not formally institutionalized and relied on volunteers to be realized, the mosques provided resources to help immigrants settle into the U.S. The availability of resources and the institutionalization of linguistic and sociocultural assimilation efforts have been noted across a variety of faith-based congregations in the U.S. Commentators like William Herberg noted as early as 1955 the ability of immigrant religious churches to provide the social resources needed for settlement in the U.S. Kurien (1998) found that voluntary faith-based Hindu groups sought to organize informal training sessions for members to be informed about legal, financial, medical, and childcare systems in America in order to function more efficiently as Americans. Hirschman (2004), too,

highlighted that members benefited from immigrant religious institutions' provision of services such as information about housing and economic opportunities.

Importantly, Warner (2000) noted that immigrant religious congregations that provide services in English positively influence immigrants' assimilation. Conversely, Min (2001) found that Korean immigrant churches in New York provided Korean immigrants all the services they needed to thrive, but the focus on Korean language and the subsequent development of fully functional Korean language media contributed to the continued segregation of Korean immigrants.

Political Engagement

Like most mosques in the U.S., both of my research sites are registered as 501(c) non-profit organizations and cannot undertake partisan activities. Although I did not set out to collect information about political activities at the mosque as part of my research, during the course of the study I noted that the members and administrations at both of the mosques I studied encouraged members to be politically engaged without siding with any political party or candidate.

At the International Islamic Center, I noted a voter registration kiosk run by American Muslim volunteers on two separate ethnographic visits. On another occasion, I noted a kiosk run by United Voices, a “non-partisan organization that seeks to engage, educate and empower Muslim, South-Asian and Arab-American communities through educational events, voter initiatives, and leadership development for the purpose of creating a community of equitable, knowledgeable and motivated citizens”, according to the flyers United Voices volunteers passed out to community members that day. As part of my research, I also attended a town hall meeting

at the International Islamic Center where community members discussed national and domestic political issues, prioritized their political agenda, and prepared presentations for government representatives in Tallahassee for “Muslim Capitol Day 2012”. In his interview, Mr. Raza stated that during election years, the International Islamic Center occasionally held “Meet the Candidate” events. Independent of my research, on a number of occasions when I attended prayers the International Islamic Center as a visitor, the Imam or guest speakers exhorted members to participate in the democratic process during Friday sermons.

At Salaam Society, on a visit as a worshiper during the 2012 election cycle, I noted a voter registration table being run by Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) volunteers.

During the Friday sermon on the same day, the Imam encouraged the congregation to recognize their importance in the democratic process, exercise their right to vote, and register to vote with the CAIR volunteers in the courtyard. During the course of his interview, Mr. Badar described a number of activities at the mosque that were not related to worship. In the following excerpt, Mr. Badar explains how Salaam Society highlights Muslims as constituents to local politicians:

(Now and then) we invite the local politicians here and show them the Islamic community. We tell them what we need, or that our needs might be different from others, or just to show them that us Muslims are ordinary and normal. We contribute to society and we are all educated. We are not just on welfare or homeless people. We contribute to society as much as any other people.

In this excerpt, Mr. Badar described the effort made by the leadership at Salaam Society to increase the visibility of American Muslims to local politicians and to communicate their needs as part of the politicians’ constituency. He emphasized the ordinariness of Muslims and their professional and tax-paying status to demonstrate their similarity to the greater American society and gain currency in American politics.

The administrations and volunteer members at both mosques made efforts to enhance American Muslims' participation in American politics. These activities showed their recognition of the importance of American Muslims' political engagement. However, the mosques did not collect details about Muslim voter turnout for local or presidential elections. A quantitative measurement of political engagement is therefore difficult to make. It is also not possible to determine if the events I witnessed translated into actual increase in the political participation of the members at either of my research site. However, researchers such as Levitt (2008) have suggested that for immigrants, religion is a path to politics. According to Levitt (2008), faith-based communities wield powerful influence and can shape the way people think about changing the world. Levitt (2008) asserted that a political agenda is not necessary for religious congregations to groom members for political participation and found that members acquired important political skills such as community organization and volunteerism through their religious organizations. In a similar vein, Min (2001) argued that for American minorities, strong affiliation with ethnic or immigrant religious institutions is correlated with increased and effective political participation as in the case of Korean congregants in New York, where ethnic resources bolstered political activities. According to Foley and Hoge, increased political engagement demonstrates higher integration: "The worship communities most committed to the problems of their immigrant members and the countries from which they came are the most thoroughly integrated into American life and politics" (2007: 11).

Some researchers have studied American Muslim political participation in particular, which underscores the probable efficacy of the political efforts at my research sites. Jamal (2010) conducted a survey study based on American Muslims and concluded that mosque involvement influenced political engagement in wider society for Arab Muslims and increased civic

engagement in Arab and South Asian Muslims. Portes and Rumbaut (2009) opined that several Muslim-identifying organizations such as the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Arab-American Anti-discrimination Committee (ADC), the Arab American Institute (AAI), and the American Muslim Council (AMC) to name a few, work to seek social legitimacy for American Muslims as constituents. According to Portes and Rumbaut's (2009) analysis, these organizations attempt to iron out the internal differences of the diverse American Muslim community and present a unified front to be able to participate in the American political arena. Lin (2009) found evidence of Muslims' assimilation as a result of political participation in America. In Lin's (2009) research, her politically active American Muslim participants became well-versed in American politics and declared that they voted on domestic political issues rather than the proposed foreign policy of political candidates, indicating that participating American Muslims held their American identity to be most important.

Interfaith Outreach and Dialogue

In Muslim-majority countries, mosques represent the mainstream religion. However, in a Western society like America, Muslim congregations cater to a minority community. In a society with a general lack of knowledge about Islam, the burden of self-explanation falls upon Muslim congregations. Both of the mosques I studied had established formal channels for interfaith dialogue and outreach.

According to Mrs. Motiwala, the International Islamic Center hosts an annual "open house" event to invite the greater community to visit the mosque and learn about the Islamic faith. Members of the congregation are encouraged to invite their non-Muslim colleagues and

neighbors to the event. Mrs. Motiwala also described monthly interfaith meetings in the following excerpt:

Once a month, we have different churches come in or groups from different faiths come in for dialogue. It's good to have open dialogue so we live in good understanding and a pleasant atmosphere. At least once a month, the imams have scheduled meetings if not with one group then another.

In this excerpt, Mrs. Motiwala mentioned regularly scheduled meetings between the leaders of the International Islamic Center and other faith-based groups in the city. To Mrs. Motiwala, dialogue was a positive endeavor and she felt that it created understanding between people of different faiths.

Mr. Raza, a board member at the International Islamic Center mentioned that the mosque leadership regularly hosted professors and students from local universities. He stated that the *imam* periodically held educational classes for people who wished to learn more about Islam. He noted that the mosque often received members of clergy from other faiths and students who wished to observe prayers on Fridays.

Muhammad, who also serves as the youth representative on the mosque board, described Salaam Society's interfaith outreach efforts. According to Muhammad, Salaam Society, too, hosts an annual "open house" event for members of the greater society. In addition, Salaam Society hosts an annual banquet during the month of Ramadan where representatives and members of other faith groups are invited. At Florida Islamic Preparatory, Mrs. Hatem discussed strategies used to help students assimilate with American Society. According to her, one way is through mutual understanding. She stated: "We work a lot in comparative religions. We bring in priests, we take students to interfaith dialogues, and they participate in different activities starting in the 11th grade." In this instance, it appears that Florida Islamic Preparatory also focused on teaching American Muslim students about the plurality of the American religious landscape.

Portes and Rumbaut (2009) have argued that together with governmental reception and pre-existence of co-ethnic group, public perception of new comers is a major determinant of immigrants' long-term incorporation in American society. They found that the American Muslim community does not follow the predicted linear course of assimilation where religious affiliation leads to respectability and eventual upward mobility due to the hostility of the native mainstream population towards Islam (Portes and Rumbaut, 2009). Takim (2004) has found Muslim congregations to be cognizant of the issues of rejection faced by American Muslims. She noted that in the post 9/11 era, mosques in the U.S. began efforts to increase interfaith dialogue with other faith-based communities to demystify Islam and Muslims. Takim (2004) also noted that mosques' outreach activities changed from proselytizing to increasing physical and intellectual visibility and mutual understanding. According to Takim (2004), for first generation Muslim immigrants, learning about other faiths and engaging in interfaith dialogue and collaborative activities can be an effective step towards integrating into the pluralistic American society. The various outreach activities at both of my research sites are consistent with these findings and demonstrate an understanding of the need for interfaith dialogue.

To conclude, I found that members and leadership at both research sites gave importance to immigrants' assimilation. At both research sites, I found evidence of institutional strategies of integration that aimed to provide immigrants with assistance and resources. At the mosques I studied, voluntary as well as leadership-sanctioned efforts helped in newcomers' linguistic and logistical incorporation. Mosque leaders at both sites encouraged political participation through sermons and enabled it with the provision of space to non-partisan volunteer political organizations. Both mosques also established relationships with local political figures and engaged with them as constituents. I also found both research sites to be engaged in interfaith

dialogue with a view to achieve harmony and greater understanding among faith-based communities in their surroundings. One of the two Islamic schools also undertook efforts to educate students about other religions and engaged them in interfaith dialogue. In sum, I found that the research sites offered American Muslims “cultural toolkits” as imagined by Levitt (2008). Levitt (2008) asserted that religious networks furnish immigrants and their children with the “cultural toolkit” of their host country, which helps immigrants acquire linguistic skills, as well as political and civic competence – an argument that is consistent with my research. In the next chapter, I discuss identity changes for American Muslims that result from intergenerational differences in practices, and interactions with the larger American society.

CHAPTER 6

IDENTITY CHANGES AND FORMATION IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

In this chapter, I discuss changes to practices of Islam and Muslim identities that result from the greater context of pluralistic American society that I found at the two research sites. In particular, I find that more women attended prayers at the mosque as compared to mosques in Muslim majority countries, which is similar to findings of other researchers. However, in my research I note intergenerational differences in opinions on regarding women's resources at the mosque. I describe evidence of subtle shifts towards mainstream society in the norms of American Muslims, particularly with respect to attire and gender-segregation that I found at the two mosques I studied. Finally, I describe the move towards a "real" Islam that members from one of the sites experience. I argue that these processes at the American mosques I studied demonstrate incremental steps in the evolution of American Muslim identity.

Women's Spaces in the Mosques

As mentioned in Chapter 4, both of the Islamic centers that I studied had dedicated spaces for women to pray. Several commentators such as Haddad (2009), Warner (2000), and Abusharaf (1998) have noted women's attendance at mosques as a positive development for Muslim women as a result of immigration to the West. The physical spaces at the two research sites were similar to others that Haddad (2009) has written about: "In some mosques, women's allotted space is located at the back of the prayer hall behind the men. At other mosques, they are

at the side, often separated by a barrier or curtain. Occasionally, women pray in a separate space such as a basement, a loft, or an auxiliary room where they can watch the service on closed-circuit television. Most women interviewed found the separation helped them to concentrate on prayer rather than on members of the opposite sex.” (2009:257). However, I noted a distinct difference in the quality of facilities provided for men and women at both mosques.

At the International Islamic Center, women prayed in a loft area that was built above and overlooked the men’s prayer hall from behind a floor-to-ceiling glass wall. The women’s section was about half the size of the men’s area. To reach this room, women entered the prayer area from a side entrance to the main building that was smaller than the entrance for men. Due to the physical separation and distance, women at the International Islamic Center could not hear the Imam speak. Sermons and prayers were broadcast on several TV screens that were attached to walls and pillars in the women’s section.

At Salaam Society, the over all size of the mosque was much smaller than the International Islamic Society. In the main prayer hall, a section was marked on the floor as the “sister’s area” which accommodated about 20 women in a hall that had a capacity of over 300 worshipers. As such, women could use the main prayer area only when attending prayers in very small numbers. In reality, women who attended daily prayers at Salaam Society offered their prayers in an adjacent room, which was the community hall. A glass wall and curtains separated the community room from the main prayer hall. At Salaam Society, women who prayed in the community hall could not see the men’s prayer area or the imam at all. The community hall received audio broadcast of prayers and sermons. On Fridays, because of their more numerous attendance, the community hall was used as overflow for male worshipers. Female mosque goers at Salaam Society offered Friday prayers in the school cafeteria with tables and chairs

temporarily pushed against the walls and a smell of food in the air. Moreover, at both mosques, children of all ages were corralled into the women's section where their noise often overpowered the Imam.

When asked about women's facilities at the mosque, I noted marked disparities in the responses from first- and second-generation participants. In general, first-generation immigrant men and women expressed positive feelings about women's facilities and women's involvement at the mosques. Second-generation men and women expressed negative feelings about the facilities for women, but positive feelings about women's involvement and attendance at the mosques. I found these ideas to be consistent across generations at both mosques. .

At the International Islamic Center, Mrs. Motiwala described her favorite part of the mosque in the following words:

I love going upstairs (to the women's area) and praying peacefully, forgetting about the world. It's my favorite part.

For Mrs. Motiwala, praying in the women's section at the International Islamic Center was peaceful and enjoyable. As a first-generation American Muslim woman, who migrated from India, Mrs. Motiwala did not grow up attending prayers in mosques. For her and other first-generation American Muslim women, the very experience of becoming mosqued appears to a desirable outcome of immigration that demonstrates an elevation in the status of women. Voas and Fleischmann (2012) found that as Islam moved West, women became as active in mosque attendance as men. Warner (2000) noted that the increased attendance of women in American mosques, when compared with the lack of attendance in Muslim-majority countries, in itself indicated an improvement in the status of Muslim women.

Speaking about the same women's prayer hall at the International Islamic Center as Mrs. Motiwala, Sana, who is a second-generation American Muslim, described how she felt when she approached the women's section at the mosque:

There are a couple of thoughts that go through my mind. I wish that when I walked in the women's section, it didn't feel so claustrophobic. I wish it were brighter and more welcoming. There used to be some old carpet on the staircase up to the women's section and they removed it. And I was glad (that they removed the dirty carpet) but then at the same time I am, like, well they didn't finish the stairs!

In this excerpt, Sana described that she found the women's prayer area to be dark, cramped, and poorly maintained. In her interview, Sana also mentioned that many women tended to lose focus and talk during the sermon and the announcements after the prayer, and cause disturbance. For a second-generation American Muslim woman who has grown up with access to mosques in America, the quality of the experience of prayer is important to Sana.

In his interview, Mr. Raza, emphasized the importance of women's participation at the mosque as "the foundation of the family". The following excerpt shows Mr. Raza's response when probed about what appeared to be inferior arrangements for women at the International Islamic Center:

Well, you know we can't change things overnight. We still carry that baggage from back home. When our generation goes and the kids take over, hopefully things will change. In this excerpt, Mr. Raza did not dispute that women's facilities at the International Islamic Center were not at par with those for the men. He attributed the difference in allocation to the "old attitude" of the first-generation of immigrants from back home, alluding to the lack of importance given to women's participation in mosques in South Asia. Though he stated the importance of women's involvement in the mosque earlier in his interview, he held the younger generation responsible for making changes to women's facilities when they take the reigns of mosque leadership.

At Salaam Society, Sakeenah shared her thoughts about offering Friday prayers in the cafeteria:

I feel that women can't concentrate when they are so far (from the *Imam*) because they'll just sit and talk. I can't tell you of one day when there was a time when they give that ten or fifteen minute talk between prayers, when I could actually hear it. We would sit in the other room and the women would not stop talking!

In this excerpt, Sakeenah found the separation of women's prayer area from the Imam to be problematic. She felt that the distance from the *Imam* caused female worshipers to lose focus, which also disturbed other women worshipers like Sakeenah who tried to pay attention.

Sakeenah's concerns are similar to findings put forth by Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999). In their study based on mosques in Houston, Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999) shed light on other American Muslim women who took issue with complete visual and physical segregation at mosques that they felt led to diminished participation in worship.

Mr. Badar shared his feelings about women at Salaam Society offering their prayers in the cafeteria in the following excerpt:

Sometimes we feel really sorry for the ladies that they are praying here, not exactly in the *masjid*, and it is sometimes used for lunch for the students and there is the smell of food. We are trying our best to solve this problem and to build a bigger *masjid* but you know, we need some financial support but that's a different story. We do not like to show them like they are lower than us or to just throw them in a place that is not suitable for them. But Islamically, you can pray anywhere and your prayer is accepted.

Like Mr. Raza at the International Islamic Society, Mr. Badar appeared to be aware of the undesirable aspects of women offering their prayers in a setting that was not comfortable. Mr. Badar expressed the wish of the mosque leadership to improve women's facilities in the future. However, he felt that in Islam, prayers are accepted as valid no matter where they are offered and appeared to communicate that women offering prayers in the cafeteria did not take away from their act of worship.

Emad, a 30-something man of South-Asian heritage shed light on the push and pull between different schools of thought regarding women's facilities in the mosque in the following excerpt:

I have come across a lot of Muslims who came straight from other Muslim countries who are not used to seeing females at the mosque *at all*. So it's a source of major conflict. I can see from (a new mosque in town), which is an up and coming mosque. There was a huge blowup between board members. They were designing the mosque and just in the design of the mosque there was a big difference of opinion on how the mosque should be laid out, which would directly impact how people were mingling or socializing in the mosques. One half of the board, which is more open-minded in my opinion, called for a common entrance into the mosque for women and men and for the prayer area to only be divided by a five foot that was transparent. And the other part of the board actually wanted a completely opaque wall ceiling to floor where there is no vision of women and completely separate entrances and not even a possibility of the two sexes encountering each other.

In this excerpt, Emad described the debate surrounding the lay out of a new local mosque.

According to him, some board members were in favor of complete segregation of the sexes using separate entrances and prayer halls, whereas the opposition pushed for a common entrance and an inclusive prayer hall. To Emad, who is a second-generation American Muslim and father of two young daughters, the more inclusive approach was more desirable. Warner (2000) has overviewed a historical tension between different generations of immigrants including Jews, immigrant Chinese, and Muslims in America. He found that even after different generations of immigrants had established congregations and reached an understanding, a new wave of immigrants from home countries with ideas from "home" could reject the structure of the American congregations.

I found that in the view of the first-generation participants of both genders, the presence of women at the mosque in itself indicated the success of the American mosque for both men and women. To first-generation American Muslims, the very presence of women in the mosque was so radical that improvements in the physical environment where they worshiped were considered

secondary. It remains for the second and third generation of American Muslims to ascend to mosque leadership and institute changes based on the more egalitarian norms to which they have been exposed in America.

Shifts in Norms in the American Context

Interview participants from both Islamic centers pointed out a considered and strategic shift in the attitudes of older American Muslims pertaining to actions and behaviors of second- and third-generation American Muslims. In particular, I found indications of changes in the mindset of first-generation American Muslims in relation to interactions between the sexes and segregation by gender, and the sartorial choices of younger American Muslims. It was evident that most of these shifts in norms occurred as a direct result of the American context of the Muslim congregations.

In the following excerpt, Mr. Badar, an official at Salaam Society and head of the Parent Teach Association at Florida Islamic Preparatory, explained why it is important to adapt to mainstream culture to a degree:

In Islam we have some rules and we cannot violate them but you have to be a little more flexible. We are living in the United States here, okay? Back home, if you see boys and girls and men and women talking in front of the *masjid* there will be a big fight. But here, there is nothing wrong with that. They are sitting in a public place, maybe her husband is standing here and his cousin is standing there, so you have to be a little more flexible in order to accommodate – I am not saying to violate anything – but still, you are living in a different society. You have to make the religion flexible and fun for the people. You cannot have all these people saying ‘No, no, no! Don’t, don’t, don’t!’, If you say ‘No’, next day you will find there are no people in the *masjid*. You have to be more open.

In this excerpt, Mr. Badar specifically addressed Islamically-prescribed gender segregation. In his opinion, American Muslims should be more flexible about accepting interactions between men and women at the mosque since American society does not prohibit such communication. In

Islam, an unrelated man and woman must avoid being completely alone in order to prevent sexually inappropriate behavior. Mr. Badar pointed out that in a public setting, surrounded by family and friends or other community members, interaction between a man and woman does not breach Islamic codes of conduct. He emphasized that the norms of American society are different and underscored the fact that Muslims who grow up in America are exposed to different values than those brought up in Muslim-majority countries. Importantly, Mr. Badar felt that adherence to the strictest interpretation of Islamic regulations and being overly critical will alienate young American Muslims and deter them from being part of the Muslim community or practicing Islam. Mr. Badar's attitude reflected an understanding of the need to "americanize" Islam in order to be able to move forward with future generations that still practice the faith.

Similar to the relaxation in Mr. Badar's attitude towards gender segregation, in the following excerpt Emad pointed out lack of sanctions for not adhering strictly to Islamic dress code:

"The people (at the International Islamic Center) seem to be relatively open minded. You know, I see a lot of kids who are wearing shorts during prayers. I've been to mosques where there are some really hardline people who make it a point to say you can't wear anything that's near your knees or above that. But at this mosque it kind of seems like those things people shrug off. I noticed that a lot of times during *jumah* I was praying next to *Shia* Muslims whose arms weren't folded over their chest, but nobody seemed to care. There is just that level of tolerance there."

According to Emad, members of the congregation at the International Islamic Society appeared to be more accepting of a variety of interpretations of Islamic guidelines and different sectarian practices of Islam. He contrasted it with prior experiences he had had where boys or youths dressed in shorts were chided for not covering their legs completely. Emad's experience at the International Islamic Center, too, appeared to indicate a shift towards "americanization" and inclusivity at the mosque.

The following excerpt from Mr. Badar's interview is another example of the acceptance of a variety of sartorial choices. To drive home his assertion for the need to be more moderate in the practice of Islam in America, Mr. Badar pointed to my attire and said:

Some people think in Islam you have to wear a *jilbab*, which is thick and it shouldn't be bright. But you can be Muslim, you can cover, you can have nice *hijab*. Like you are wearing like this light purple scarf. Colorful *hijab*, there's nothing wrong with it.

In this excerpt, Mr. Badar argued that dressing modestly according to Islamic guidelines does not mean that women have to wear thick and drab clothes. In his opinion, Muslim women would not be going against Islamic dress code just by choosing to dress in attractive and colorful clothing. Although I did not have sufficient data to be able to determine whether these changing ideas were a reaction to the behaviors, practices, and choices prevalent among second- and third-generation American Muslims, or the reason for changes in the norms, it appeared that younger American Muslims appreciated such changes at the mosque. The following excerpt from my interview with Sakeenah shows her point of view:

I think our *masajid* here implement a lot of really good principles that I think a lot of our Islamic countries don't. You find that in our Islamic countries it's really closed. It's one way and it stays that way for generations you know. I feel like our *masajid* here, it might take a few years, but I feel like they are much more open and ready to accept new stuff, new ideas and integrate new things. Alhamdulillah I think it's a blessing for us and our future generations because as new things come along, they become the trend one way or the other.

In Sakeenah's opinion, American mosques were more open to change in comparison with mosques in Muslim-majority countries. While she found American mosques to be somewhat slow to respond to new ideas, she contrasted it with mosques in "Islamic countries", which were extremely resistant to change according to her.

As American Muslims of all generations adapt to American society in order to pursue employment and education and fulfill their daily needs, they have also adapted to American

family structures. Ebaugh and Chafetz (1999) note that there has been an erosion of the gender roles of their “home” countries. Scholars have also established that American Muslim women are more active in mosques in the U.S. than they were in their home countries. As such, they hold non-clerical leadership positions in the mosques as found by Warner (2000) and do important community-building and volunteer work – often more than men - as noted by Lin (2009). The increased visibility and contribution of American Muslim women necessitates collaboration among men and women and previously held gender roles must soften to accommodate the new realities of American Muslims. In addition, younger generations of American Muslims who grow up in the relatively more secular mainstream American society are more comfortable with members of the opposite sex in comparison with most Muslim majority societies where sex-segregation is relatively more strict. For the mosques I studied, I found an understanding of, and incremental adjustment to the greater American context.

Moving Towards “Real” Islam

At the international Islamic Center, I found that participants were able to distill Islamic teachings from heritage cultures and move towards the practice what they deemed to be “real” Islam. I argue that this evolution is a particularly American phenomenon, and takes place more readily in a multicultural environment such as the International Islamic Center. The term “American Muslim” is a catch-all word that includes many nationalities, ethnicities, and a variety of schools of thought. In my research I found that when the different backgrounds and practices of Muslims merge, a conscious and nuanced practice of Islam emerges.

Born and raised in Toronto, Canada, Emad moved to the U.S. in his early teens. According to Emad, growing up in Canada he visited the mosque only occasionally due to living

at a considerable distance from it. He noticed that the congregation in Toronto was predominantly South Asian in origin. To Emad, the variety of cultures he witnessed at the International Islamic Center in South Florida was remarkable. The following excerpt is taken from my interview with Emad, who elaborated upon how his religious practices may have changed as a result of socializing and worshiping in America with Muslims from diverse multicultural backgrounds:

I think it's only increased my knowledge. I think a kind of unique thing about going to mosques in the U.S. is that ...because people are coming from so many different backgrounds, we all find common ground on pure Islam and what actually is considered, I guess the true way of practicing, devoid of cultural innovations. So, if something was taught to you, or something you learned from your parents just based on the way they practiced it, and not necessarily not what our religion says to do, you might learn praying with other Muslims from other regions that "Hey, what my parents did wasn't necessarily Islam but it was just a cultural practice." So I think it's a learning experience when people are different...then it actually becomes a discussion. If you're doing something different from me, why are we doing it differently? And then it forces a conversation and then you gain knowledge out of that. And you ask scholars and when questions are asked you get answers. In the end everyone is practicing a more pure type of Islam.

In this excerpt, Emad highlights the crystallization of Islamic beliefs and practices he has experienced as a result of being a member of a diverse American mosque. He explains that the divergent practices of Muslims who hail from different parts of the world necessitates referring to the undisputed primary sources of Islamic teachings to determine what constitutes the correct practice. Emad uses the phrase "pure Islam" in a positive manner to indicate that cultural innovations are cast off in light of better knowledge resulting from discussions and scholarly opinions. According to Emad, the presence of and the debate within Muslims from different backgrounds helps to question the differences and seek commonalities.

Another member at the International Islamic Center, Mr. Raza, echoed these sentiments. In the following excerpt, he described children from different backgrounds coming together to attend Islamic school:

I think at the Islamic school they know the value because different cultures come in, it's not just India and Pakistan. Different cultures come in and they learn a lot. Basically it's the true Islamic culture that they get. Not "culture" but "Islamic dealings", I should say. It's a true Islam that is coming up with the school.

In this quote, Mr. Raza pointed out that at the Islamic school, children were exposed to many more cultures than just South Asian or any other culture of origin. As a result of learning from and exposure to several different heritage cultures, they reflect and "come up with" a "true" version of Islam.

A number of scholars have traced the emergence of "pure" Islam in the West. Peek (2005) noted that post 9/11, the increased scrutiny on the younger generation of American Muslims led them to adopt Islam as their chosen and declared identity. According to Peek (2005) this identity was cultivated consciously as a result of reflection and study of Islam, developed in conversation with multiethnic peers, and replaced other ethnic and cultural identities of second-generation American Muslims. In Europe, Cesari (2009) overviewed a rejection of parental cultures by second-generation Muslims in favor of a "true" Islam, a move that she found often surprised first-generation Muslims. Similarly, Vaos and Fleischmann (2012) found that second-generation American Muslims that tend to be educated and exposed to Western individualism found "defects" in the practice of Islam within parental cultures and moved towards a "purer" Islam. To scholars of global religious movements, Islamism, pan-Islamism, and political Islam, the development of "pure" Islam can have deeper connotations. However, in my research I found participants to be individually and internally motivated to search for and ascribe to a "purer" form of Islam with a view to improve their personal religious practices.

Although some participants indicated the ability to distinguish between cultural practices and "true" religion and appeared to favor the latter to the former, I found that worshipping collectively at the International Islamic Center appeared to engender a greater sense of

acceptance among participants at that site. For instance originally from India, Mrs. Motiwala brought up tolerance and open-mindedness as a consequence of exposure to diversity in the following excerpt from her interview. When I asked her how her worship had changed as a result of migration from her native India to the U.S., she responded:

We have very knowledgeable teachers at the mosque. When we were in India we were told to pray a certain way, and that the other way is not right and this and that. After going to my classes, I realized that's not true. There are several ways of praying *salah* and we are not to judge anybody because the prayer is between the person and God. (...) I have friends from different Islamic countries. At our mosque it is an amazing thing that we are from all corners of the world and we are united, talking in different languages but when it comes to pray we all pray together.

In this excerpt, Mrs. Motiwala noted that her teachers at the International Islamic Center had greater Islamic knowledge than those in India. According to Mrs. Motiwala, her teachers in India adhered to a certain way of prayer and rejected other methods. For Mrs. Motiwala, greater knowledge about Islam creates greater acceptance of diversity rather than a rejection of other forms of practice. In Mrs. Motiwala's experience, diversity in culture and exposure to Islamic teachings compelled her to overlook minor differences for the greater purpose of unification. In the following excerpt, Emad, too, described a sense of unity that resulted from being a member of a multicultural mosque:

You learn... true Islam teaches us that Islam is colorblind and you'll notice even in our community that people who've gone to school here and grown up here, there's tons of people now who are married to people who are outside of their culture and race. And that's a by-product of people being more open-minded. And that wouldn't have happened in any other situation.

According to Emad, a multi-racial and multicultural mosque normalized differences and made members more accepting of one another. He used the example of American Muslims' interracial and intercultural marriages to point out the move away from the conventional model of endogamy of the first-generation immigrants and Muslims "back home". Himself of Pakistani

heritage, Emad is married to a woman of Indian origin. Although they share some broad similarities because of their roots in South Asia, such cross-cultural marriages were not as common among first-generation immigrants.

Interestingly, Emad had earlier pointed out a move away from culture and toward “pure” Islam. It appeared that for Emad, practicing “pure” Islam was not at odds with the acceptance of cultural and racial differences among American Muslims. Indeed, some of the participants in this study had non-traditional marriages. In one young couple that participated in this research, a woman who was American by birth and had Pakistani heritage was married to a first-generation Palestinian immigrant. Another participant was an older Caucasian American woman who was married to a first-generation Syrian immigrant. I did not collect data regarding interracial or cross-cultural marriages. However, I find them noteworthy. Mrs. Motiwala and Emad’s comments are in agreement with Naber’s (2005) assertion that second-generation Muslims increasingly adopt a ‘Muslim first’ identity to confront cultural differences within the Muslim community in order to unify the community. In particular, Grewal (2009) conducted a study of second-generation American Muslims who wanted to choose spouses across cultural and racial divides. Grewal (2009) found that the American Muslim children of immigrants drew on primary religious sources to distill “true” religion from culture and challenged practices of older generations that hindered cross-cultural and interracial marriages among Muslims. To the second-generation American Muslims in Grewal’s (2009) study, the creation of distance among Muslims based on race or culture was un-Islamic.

In this chapter, I discussed women’s spaces in the mosques I studied. I described the facilities for women and presented evidence from participants that demonstrated differences in the attitudes towards the spaces allocated for women. I found that first-generation immigrant

men and women were generally satisfied with the current facilities for women provided by the mosques. I found that second-generation American Muslim men and women felt women's facilities to be inappropriate. I found that American Muslims in my research were aware of the differences in Islamic and mainstream American norms and there was evidence of efforts by American Muslims to accommodate shifts in norms that were not at odds with Islam. Finally, I found that in a multicultural environment, participants were able to separate cultural practices from religion and found "real" Islamic practices. Participants also felt a greater sense of unity among Muslims by worshiping in a diverse congregation. In the chapter that follows, I present my conclusions and suggest future directions for research.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I present the findings from this research study. I discuss the shortcomings of my research, and suggest avenues for further research. This thesis set out to find answers to three distinct areas of inquiry. It aimed to undertake a closer examination of the role of American mosques in the identity formation of its members, sought to find if and how American mosques influenced members' assimilation, and attempted to determine of the American context of the Muslim congregations impacted members' practice of Islam. In general, the findings of my research were concordant with conclusions drawn by other scholars of immigrant religious congregations.

My study of the two South Florida mosques confirmed the conclusions reached by other scholars who have studied the structural aspects of immigrant religious congregations, and mosques in particular. I found that the mosques that I studied provided American Muslims with resources that were consistent with Hirschman's (2004) three- R classification of refuge, resources, and respectability. As others have found true for religious institutions, my research sites morphed into "Islamic Centers" that performed religious, educational, social, and cultural functions. These functions enabled old and new immigrants to convene, find fellowship in a faith-based community, and create resources for mutual assistance. Importantly, I noted that the two mosques included in my study produced culture in different ways – one site, "International Islamic Center" was more visibly multicultural than the other, "Salaam Society", which had a predominantly Palestinian membership. The International Islamic Center enabled members to

practice their own cultures in a diverse setting, whereas Salaam Society reproduced a distinctly Palestinian culture. Despite this difference, I noted that both mosques employed their religious and educational resources in a targeted manner to transmit a sense of identity to younger generations of American Muslims and sought to provide normative points of reference for children and young adults to engender in them a sense of belonging that counters the feeling of being a minority in the broader society. Drawing on arguments presented by other scholars, I found that the focus on a strong religious and cultural identity contributed to the assimilation rather than segregation of American Muslims and anchored second-generation immigrants. Similar to other scholars, I concluded that the assimilation of members was a goal of both of the mosques in my study. Mosque leadership and member volunteers adopted strategies to integrate members into the greater American society. Both mosques provided members with resources to assist in their linguistic and logistical assimilation. At both research sites, I found evidence that mosque leadership and congregations understood the importance of members' political participation in American Society. The mosques included in my study encouraged members to participate in the political process, developed relationships with local polity, and facilitated non-partisan organizations' voter registration drives. However, I was unable to make any deductions or conclusions on the impact of these measures on the political engagement of American Muslims. Both of the sites I studied were also engaged in interfaith dialogue with other faith-based communities. The qualitative data I collected did not hone in on interfaith outreach activities and therefore, I was not able to draw conclusions about their efficacy on the acceptance of American Muslims in South Florida's religious landscape.

Participants from both research sites indicated a greater acceptance of changes in behaviors and subtle shifts towards some norms of the greater American society, as long as they

did not breach Islamic norms. I found that such changes were a direct result of the American context of American Muslims. I found signs of intergenerational gap and signs of push and pull between old ideas of sending countries espoused by the older generation of American Muslims, and new ideas held by second and third generations of American Muslims informed by the larger American society as they pertained to the physical spaces allotted to women in the mosques. Although most of the women who participated in this study were professionals and active members at the mosques, in this study had I was unable to determine members' attitudes about the roles and status of women in the mosques.

I found evidence that the diverse membership at one of the research sites, compelled members of that site to question and critique cultural influence on religious practices, and delve into religious resources to arrive at a "purer" way to practice their faith. I found that members at the multicultural site constructed "Muslim" rather than ethnic or cultural identity, and also appeared to find racial differences among American Muslims to be unimportant. With the data I had, it was not possible to demonstrate the presence or absence of intercultural debate. The particular evolution towards a scripture-based true religion that I found at play at one of the mosques holds true to the findings of Voas and Fleischmann (2012), Cesari (2009), Grewal (2009), Naber (2005), and Warner (2000), scholars who find young American Muslims to be gravitating towards a "Muslim first" identity. However, I did not have sufficient data to parse out any political or militant implications of the shift to a "pure" Islam. Additionally, I was not able to make any deductions on inter-racial and inter-cultural processes at the "ethnic" mosque in my study due to lack of pertinent data.

This study contributes to the body of qualitative research on American mosques. It draws conclusions from a data that is mix of institutional and structural information and information

provided by members. While this research sheds light on some institutional mechanisms and member experiences, it also opens up many questions. At a basic level, more inquiry into the quantitative and qualitative differences between the levels of assimilation of first- and second-generation American Muslims is needed. I found that there is a lack of quantitative data on the participation of women in the mosques which can be measured by collecting data pertaining to number of women in leadership positions in mosques, the frequency of women's visits to attend prayer services, and women's organizational contributions, among other metrics.

Importantly, more comparative research based on the ethnic characteristics of mosques is needed to develop an understanding of the differences in members between diverse and homogenous mosques. Although I chose sites characterized by different kinds of membership, more extensive research into the differences and similarities between multicultural and homogenous mosques needs to be undertaken to fully study the identity formation processes, assimilation trajectories, and social capital development patterns of American Muslims. It is unclear if members of "ethnic" mosques engage in debates about culture and religion and experience shifts towards "pure" Islam as the members of the multicultural mosque reported. Similarly, issues of race within the American Muslim populations have not been studied extensively and can play into "pure" Islam or pan-Islamism. Finally, any research that is located within mosques or relies on participants chosen on the basis of mosque membership will exclude unmosqued Muslims. A segment of the American Muslim population that identifies as Muslim may not participate in mosque activities frequently enough to be deemed or self-identified as members. The lack of focus on such American Muslims means that their particular trajectories of assimilation into American society are yet to be understood. Qualitative research that includes unmosqued Muslims on the basis of snowball sampling may allow researchers to gain an insight

into this subgroup. American Muslims are a relatively younger population and are increasingly becoming a greater part of the fabric of American society as they gain visibility in the academic, political, and social arenas. More research on the American Muslims population is imperative to learn more about this important and growing part of American Society and culture and advance mutual understanding.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Letter of Approval



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
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February 01, 2011

Azka Mahmood Sociology

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review IRB#: Pro00000468

Title: Sharing Islamic Spaces: An ethnographic inquiry of two mosques

Dear Azka Mahmood:

On 1/31/2011 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on January 31, 2012.

Approved Items:

[Sharing Islamic Spaces- Thesis Proposal](#)

Consent/Assent Documents: Name

[Adult Informed Consent.pdf](#)

Protocol Document(s):

Modified 2/1/2011 12:07 PM 0.01

9/1/2010 12:48 PM 0.01

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history,

focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note, the informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D.".

John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Olivia Hart USF IRB Professional Staff



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

IRB Study Number Pro00000468

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. I am requesting you to be part of a research study as an interview respondent. This form tells you about my research project.

I am asking you to take part in a research study that is called:

Sharing Islamic Spaces: An ethnographic enquiry of two mosques

I, Azka Tanveer Mahmood, am the Principal Investigator for research for a project on the interaction and activities of Muslims in the shared public areas of a mosque. I welcome questions about the project at any time. You will receive a copy of this consent form with the Principal Investigator's contact information.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to study the ways people use the public areas of a mosque that they share with others. Through this research, I will study how Muslims from different countries and cultures interact with one another. I will study how the mosque allows Muslims from different backgrounds to understand such differences such as cultures, language, and dress. The research conducted in the mosque will be used to complete a Master's thesis in Sociology at the University of South Florida.

The purpose of interviews as part of my research is to gain a deeper understanding of individuals' personal perception of and ideas and feelings about the mosque. By talking to people such as you, I aim to get a sense of how the mosque is used and seen by members themselves.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to

- Meet with the Principal Investigator (Azka Tanveer Mahmood) at least once for an interview that will last approximately an hour and to allow for any follow up conversations that may be required.
- Respond to questions in an interview setting in a location that is suitable and convenient for you and the Principal Investigator.
- Allow your responses to be audio taped for the exclusive use of the Principal Investigator and the overseeing professors. The audio records will be held for five years in the strictest confidence and no one but the Principal Investigator will have access to them. After five years have lapsed, the audio records will be destroyed.

Alternatives

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

Risks

This study poses minimal risk to you. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Benefits and Compensation

There are no direct benefits expected for participating in this study. By agreeing to allow us to interview you, you will help us understand the Muslims community in America. The results of this study will be shared with the community at large. There will be no monetary compensation for participation in this research project. This research has not been paid for by any entity or organization.

Confidentiality

I must keep study records as confidential as possible. The data gathered during research in the mosque will be held in the strictest confidence to the extent permitted by law. The respondents, including you, will be given assumed names to conceal any identifiable information.

However, certain people may need to see these records. By law, anyone who looks at these records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are:

- The professors who oversee my research as my academic advisors,
- The professors to whom this thesis will be submitted for evaluation,
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at my research records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way.

They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. These include:

- The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff that work for the IRB. Other individuals who work for USF that provide other kinds of oversight may also need to look at your records.

I may publish what I learn from this study. If I do, I will not let anyone know your name or the names of any individuals who are part of the research. I will not publish anything else that would let people know who you or the members of the mosque are.

Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study, to please the investigator. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time.

Questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, you can call Azka Tanveer Mahmood at 813 974 0158.

If you have questions or complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-5638.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands:

- What the study is about.
- What procedures will be used.
- What the potential benefits might be.
- What the known risks might be.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix C: Participant Interview Schedule

This interview is open-ended and meant to be undertaken as a conversation. The schedule includes the questions that will ideally be addressed during the course of a conversation that should last at least one to two hours. The questions may or not be asked or phrased as they appear in the schedule but rather serve as a guide.

Note: I use the word ‘masjid’ as it is more recognizable and accessible to Muslims rather than the English word ‘mosque’.

Biography

1. I’d like to know a little bit about you first. Where are you from? How did you come to live in Tampa? How old are you?
2. Are you married? How many years have you been married? Children? Can you describe your household to me?
3. Are you employed? What kind of work do you do?
4. Are you Muslim? Were you born in a Muslim family? Did you convert?
5. Can you tell me a bit about how you met your husband/wife?
6. Can you tell me about your friends and family that you are closest to in everyday life?

Links to the Masjid

1. Can you tell me the reasons that bring you to the masjid?
 - a. How often did you visit the masjid this week? (Is this a typical week?)
 - b. What sorts of friendships do you have at the masjid?
2. How did you first come to the masjid? When?
 - a. Do you remember how you felt during your first visit (or first few visits) to the masjid?
 - b. How would you describe the environment of the masjid?
 - c. Can you tell me how you feel when you come to the masjid for work or to pray?
3. What do you like best about the masjid?

- a. Do you have a favorite part of the masjid? Can you describe it to me?
- b. Do you have any special memories associated with the masjid?
- 4. What kind of role does the masjid play in the Muslim community?
 - a. Can you describe how the Muslim community uses the masjid?
 - b. Have you ever personally used any of the services provided at the masjid?
For any reason other than prayer and work?
 - c. Do you feel if a non-Muslim or non-member visited the masjid he or she would learn anything about the community here? How so?
 - d. Did you personally learn anything about the Muslim community by coming to the masjid that you wouldn't otherwise know?
- 5. Have you ever faced any problems in your activities in the mosque?
 - a. While saying prayers
 - b. While using the common 'mix' areas and other non-segregated parts of the masjid like the Old Masjid and the cafeteria
- 6. If there was anything you could change about the masjid and its environment, what would it be?

Additional Questions

- 1. Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- 2. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that we have not talked about?
- 3. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix D: Reflections on Research

As I see the building of the *masjid* come into view, I suddenly remember I have forgotten to wear my scarf over my head. Purely out of respect for the religious space, I don't like to enter the *masjid* – even the parking lot – without proper attire. As I turn into the parking lot, I hurriedly toss the scarf over my head and shoulders, which I had remembered to keep on the passenger seat before leaving home.

So began my first ethnographic foray into a mosque, complete with intense physical self-awareness and a heightened sense of surveillance that would come to characterize my observational excursions. It was not, in fact, my first ever visit to this mosque. I had been to this mosque to pray on numerous occasions before, and was certain that I would go many times in the future as well. However, the mental and physical preparation this visit had unexpectedly involved made it somewhat momentous.

The American Muslim experience has continued to hold my sociological interest since I joined this population in 2008. My desire to study the mosque as the place of the creation of the American Muslim community, combined with membership-granted ease of access to a population that is usually studied from the outside, made for an uncomplicated decision to focus on the Muslim community for my thesis. Thus, I assumed at the mosque what Lofland *et al.* (2006) call the “insider” participant researcher role. I commenced with my sociological investigation based on ‘where I stood in life’ as Lofland *et al.* encourage, in unique relation to ethnic and dominant groups, institutions, and academia. As an occasional visitor, I knew my way around the main areas and functions of the mosque and yet was not thoroughly accustomed. Therefore, as an ethnographer, the mosque seemed to afford a good balance of the familiar and the unknown.

Before I began my ethnographic work in earnest, I imagined conducting research in the mosque to be relatively straightforward – I would go to the mosque to pray as I did on many Fridays, and

would observe the happenings more closely than I was accustomed to, before returning home as usual. So I was somewhat surprised that my visits to the mosque were altered even before I left on my first visit, beginning with the question: 'what am I going to wear?' I might have worn the same or similar items of clothing for my visits to the mosque in the past as a worshiper, but with the role of the researcher came self-consciousness. In the decision to dress a certain way for my ethnographic visit to the mosque, it became evident that I myself was going to be the 'tool of research' in its most literal sense.

As I reflect on my dual member-observer role in the field, Amanda Coffey's (1999) work resonates with me on many levels. A major part of my research in the mosque revolved around body work - I was a 'visible as well as a watching body' (Coffey 1999:73). On a very basic physical level, my body had to be clothed in a certain Islamic way before I could enter the mosque. My hair needed to be hidden, and my arms and legs completely covered. The ideal Islamic look that I strived for when I visited the mosque conceals all feminine curves. Never in all my visits to the mosque have I seen a sign telling women to dress a certain way, nor a woman being chastised for dressing inappropriately. However, I do recall a distant memory of my own shock and disapproval at the sight of a woman with bare arms and no head covering in the mosque parking lot, and I have always let that feeling guide my personal choice of attire. I find that a persona of modesty, not just in appearance but also in movements and interactions, descends upon me when I don Islamic garb. For my fieldwork in particular, I often went beyond meeting the basic requirements of modesty that I follow ordinarily, in order to portray myself as a reliable Muslim of strong conviction to the people I would approach, and to gain the confidence and approval of members, mosque officials, and research participants.

In a spatial sense, my fieldwork necessitated venturing into male-dominated areas of the mosque. Although I had never regarded the administrative offices or the bookstall as masculine spaces, I now realize that as an ordinary mosque-going female these areas were not relevant to me and therefore, were invisible. Through my ethnographic lens I became aware of their existence, and my research forced me to enter these bubbles of male space. As I went to visit the office of the *Imam* to receive permission to conduct observations, entering the office required adjustment, as the excerpt below shows:

As I reach the entrance of the office, I hesitate at the door. I feel vaguely uncomfortable because this is a part of the *masjid* run by men and I am a little out of my depth here. I pause to adjust my scarf self-consciously in front of the door.

While I was aware of my physical self in other parts of the mosque as well, the feeling of inadequacy I felt before entering the office was new. Similarly, I used the excuse of talking about the Muslim Capitol Day to approach men in the male-dominated book stall and felt a distinct sense of discomfort. The men, too, were hasty in concluding the interactions with me.

According to Coffey, ‘the vocabulary of the field is performative as well as semantic’ (1999:64). This statement could not hold truer for my verbal work in the mosque. Not only did I observe a high frequency of Arabic words and prayers used by Arab and non-Arab Muslims, but I also found myself repeating common terms of supplication in my interactions with others, inside the mosque offices in particular. The use of religious language in itself was not problematic. Indeed, Muslims are encouraged to use language that helps in the remembrance of God. What left me uncomfortable were the strong feelings of ‘show’ and the fakeness that was apparent in these encounters. I found my own, almost sub-conscious use of overly Islamized vocabulary – use of words such as ‘brother’, ‘sister’, ‘*inshallah*’, and ‘*mashallah*’ that far exceeded my ordinary usage – to be disconcerting. Coffey, meanwhile, finds it acceptable (1999:65):

The impression management of the ethnographer's body goes beyond dress and adornment. Demeanor, speech and the use of props are aspects of the construction of identity and role during fieldwork. All are concerned with the production of a fieldwork body which is both acceptable and plausible.

My reliance on impression management in the mosque indicated a lack of authenticity within me. I felt that I relied on props to prove myself as a legitimate member of the mosque and the Muslim community, and to compensate for the 'true' investigative purpose of my visits. Perhaps I would not have been struck by others' assumed religiosity had I not become aware of my own overly religious behavior inside the mosque. These realizations introduced a dissonant feeling heretofore unknown to me. If I had to create a 'good Muslim' image in my fieldwork, what kind of Muslim did that make me in my real life? Why was the mosque a place for performance, presumably not just for me but also for many others present? The combination of impression management and my 'use' of the mosque as an easily accessible site for research also induced in me feelings of guilt that I saw myself try to overcome by becoming overly participatory in the events at the mosque. I attended the Muslim Capitol Day Town Hall community meeting even if research was the ulterior motive, and subsequently helped with some of the efforts to volunteer around the mosque.

My dual member-researcher role challenged my objectivity as well. Like Samuel Heilman (2009) points out in his book *Ethnography Behind Defenders of the Faith*, I too, believed that beginning fieldwork as an at least a partial native and insider would benefit my research as opposed to entering a field as a complete stranger. My cultural competence promised to be harnessed by academic training and technique and my cultural knowledge would direct me towards important processes to study and research. Instead, I felt that I relied on my 'insider' and member self much more than I had anticipated or wanted to, which overpowered the researcher at times. Coffey describes it as "the tension between strangeness and over-identification"

(1999:23). My internal judgments and inner voice as Muslim certainly served to inform my research and direct my interpretation of every day exchanges as ordinary or extraordinary, as a matter of course or a notable occurrence. However, when I visited the mosque on Fridays, I could not shake off or abandon my personality, educational background, or my own religious beliefs, and I struggled to remain objective. I had to be aware of my bias and actively remind myself not to look for patterns of behavior that would reaffirm my ideas, particularly those pertaining to gender-segregation and the status of women in an American Muslim community, where I felt critical of the mosque as a feminist. I also had to be mindful of my role as researcher and to view events through a sociological lens and not overlook them just because I had witnessed them before as a common mosque-goer. Finally, I had to ensure that as a member-researcher, I didn't portray the Muslim community in an overly positive light.

Due to personal reasons, there is a gap of six years between the data collection and writing phases of this research project. In the intervening years, I have 'gone native', for lack of a better term. Unrelated to my research, I have undergone an identity transformation of my own, and my practice of Islam has become more overt than when I first arrived to the United States. While I conducted research for my graduate studies, I continued to engage with mosques as a practicing Muslim member. As part of my effort to assert my identity as an American Muslim, I began to wear a headscarf and follow Islamic guidelines for women's attire more closely. Since Muslims do not strictly "belong" to one particular mosque, I have visited several mosques in the U.S. over time and being part of the multicultural American Muslim population comes more naturally to me now. The duration of my lived experience as an American Muslim has also almost doubled since the inception of my research project. Over the last five years, I have become a vocal and involved member of my local American Muslim community and have been

able to observe many more aspects of a mosque both as community organizer and member. While I feel that my relationship with my research sites that are the subject of this study has not changed since I moved away from South Florida, my interest in the broader subject of this research has become stronger. I continue to regard the American mosque experience with a great degree of sociological curiosity and hope to explore it further as a researcher.