ABSTRACT

Dr. Bruce Collet, Advisor

Much of the research on Islam and democracy has focused on the macro-level, and fails to detail a qualitative account of the experience of Muslim citizens of democracies (Cesari, 2004; Said, 1978; Said, 1981; Al-Azmeh, 1993; Esposito, 1995; Khan, 2006; Huntington, 1996; Adib-Moghaddem, 2008; Barber, 1996; Fukuyama, 1992). The neglect of the Muslim individual experience in the dominant discourse on Islam and democracy has stifled the voices of members of this marginalized population, thereby limiting their self-representation. This is especially true for Muslim Americans, who, in the aftermath of 9/11 and current surge of revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, are either demonized or forgotten altogether, despite the significance of their everyday navigation of both Islamic and democratic values and unique efforts toward identity construction. The purpose of this study was to address these gaps in the literature and, through the use of a phenomenological framework and Shi-xu’s (2005) cultural approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, complicate the dominant discourse on Islam and democracy by providing insight into the lived experience of seven Muslim American university students as well as supplemental perspectives from their university professors and local Imams. The findings of this study encapsulate the lived experience of the seven Muslim American student participants. These participants, along with professors and local Imams, constructed an alternative discourse that positioned the Islamic and democratic values of equality, respect, freedom, and education as compatible, with the exception of some complications such as Eurocentrism and a heavy reliance on unbridled capitalism. The study concludes with suggestions for all participants to better their understanding and/or enactment of Islamic and democratic values, including attaining education, engaging in civic participation, and developing empathy.
Either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation

-Egyptian Caliph ‘Ali, d. 660
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This phenomenological study employs qualitative methods to capture the lived experiences of seven Muslim American university students as democratic citizens of the United States. A cultural variant of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is also utilized, in efforts to both deconstruct the dominant US discourse on Islam and democracy, and to present an alternative discourse that is inclusive of the lived experience of the seven Muslim American university students and supplemental perspectives from their university professors and local Imams (Islamic spiritual leaders). This study represents an exploration of the legitimacy of the supposed Islam v. democracy dichotomy at the level of the individual, specifically the Muslim American university student. The academic complication of this basic polarity is even more pertinent in light of recent unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, where Islamic societies have used democratic means—the power of the people—to demand democracy. Much analysis has focused on the relationship of Islam and democracy at the societal level, but effects on the individual are rarely discussed.

Four of the student participants are 1.5-generation immigrants from Muslim dominant nations. They are childhood immigrants who share characteristics of both the first and second generation, experiencing early education in their country of origin but continuing the majority of their formal education and cultural socialization in the United States (Forrest, 2006). The remaining three student participants were born and raised in the United States, but experienced extensive interaction and socialization with their 1.5-generation immigrant parents. Diversity can be found not only between both sets of participants, US-born and 1.5 generation, but also within each sub-sample. However, each participant shares the experience of living as a young Muslim
American in the US democracy, navigating micro-level socio-political battlegrounds in the everyday enactment of his or her identity.

In efforts to capture the essence of the lived experience of the seven Muslim American university students, a phenomenological research methodology was used in this study. The purpose of situating this study within the phenomenological framework was to emphasize the voice of the participants, granting each individual a platform to explore and re-present his or her identity as a Muslim American. To accompany this empowerment of the individual, a cultural approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was also utilized, allowing both the deconstruction of the dominant discourse and the presentation of an alternative discourse inclusive of the individual and shared lived experiences of the participants. In accordance with both of the above research methods and in an effort to understand the experience of the proposed Islam v. democracy dichotomy at the individual level, this study addresses the following major research question and sub-questions:

1) To what extent do Muslim American university students view their religious values conflicting and/or aligning with democratic values?

   (a) How do local Imams’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?

   (b) How do Muslim American students’ non-Muslim university professors’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?

   (c) How do Muslim American students’ Muslim university professors’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?
Background of the Study

The perception of Islam as a global threat has dominated the Western ‘regime of truth’ since long before the 9/11 attacks. As stated by Cesari (2004), over the past three decades, images of militant Islam have flooded the global consciousness—the Iranian Revolution and taking of hostages at the American embassy, the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat, the Lebanese hostages, the Rushdie affair, the crisis in Algeria, the conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq—all of these events have culminated in the labeling of Islam as the ‘new Communism’ in terms of international risk. Myriad scholars view this demonization as a method of constructing and maintaining the dominant Western identity. Much like Communism, this derogatory, myopic perception of Islam has been utilized in the Western discourse to produce and reproduce the idea of a modern, advanced and rational western civilization, constructing Islam as the inferior “other” (Said, 1978; Said, 1981; Al-Azmeh, 1993; Esposito, 1995; Khan, 2006).

Recent ostensibly pro-democracy revolutions in the Muslim dominant countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria, however, have introduced a unique dynamic into the ‘clash of the civilizations,’ complicating the dichotomy of Islam v. Western democracy. Although often analyzed as an external, macro-level issue, this dichotomous relationship has the potential to be internalized at the micro-level by those individuals who live within both systems—the US democracy and Islamic ummah (community). Emerging adults within this population face a unique identity crisis (Erikson, 1968), walking the hypothetical tightrope between the enactment of Islamic values and US democratic citizenship. With Islam as the fastest growing religion in North America (Khan, 2006, p. 154), and an estimated six to eight million Muslims (Pew Forum, 2008) living in the United States, serious consideration of the experiences of Muslim Americans as democratic citizens is a timely and vital venture.
Justification for the Study

The main scholarly intention behind this project is to fill a gap in the literature. Although previous authors have thoroughly discussed the case of the Muslim student in the classroom (Abu El-Haj 2010; Sarroub 2005), the discussion of 1.5-generation immigrant Muslim American university students’ perceptions of Islam and democracy is rare. Furthermore, despite the efforts of many researchers to conduct quantitative studies of the perceptions of Islam and democracy in Arab and North African nations such as Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt (Al-Jarrah & Cullingford 2007; Jamal 2006; Tessler 2002), in-depth qualitative analysis of the views of Muslim citizens of democratic nations is needed to comprehensively understand the phenomenon. Finally, the 1.5 generation may expose further information regarding the latter stages of the assimilation process, and also reveal unique views of both Islam and democracy.

As mentioned, the phenomenological framework for this study provides participants with a platform to voice their experiences and take stake in their representation as Muslim Americans. This process grants the members of this marginalized population an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, and by valuing and respecting the participants’ opinions and voices, may prospectively empower the Muslim American university students in their every day participation in the US democracy.

This study has the potential to reveal important findings with regard to the association between Imams’ and university professors’ perceptions of Islam and democracy and those of Muslim American university students, and therein add to understanding of both secular and Islamic education and the association of each with democratic citizenship. Exploring this issue from the perspective of Muslim American university students will therefore expand the existing literature pool, give a unique population a voice, and assist in developing a deeper
understanding of how Muslim American university students navigate adherence to Islamic and/or democratic values in their daily lives; providing distinct insight for professors and Imams.

Organization of the Chapters

This manuscript is structured to introduce the purposes and framework of the thesis, situate the study within the literature, outline the details of the research methodology and practice, and explain and examine the findings of the study. CHAPTER II presents an in-depth review of relevant literature in relation to Islam and US democracy, democratic education and religion, the religious identity formation of emerging adults, and religious identity and democratic citizenship; providing a solid foundation for discussion of the lived experiences of the Muslim American university students. CHAPTER III describes the fusion of phenomenological methodology and CDA utilized for this study, and details the practical processes of participant selection and data collection and analysis. CHAPTER IV outlines the findings of the study via the voices of the participants, and thus contains extensive quotes from interviews, pieced together to provide both profiles of the individual participants’ lived experiences, and to describe three major themes prominent in the shared experiences of the participants. These common themes are used to construct an alternative discourse that is inclusive of the experiences and perspectives of the Muslim American students, their professors, and local Imams. CHAPTER V discusses this alternative discourse in relation to the dominant discourse outlined in CHAPTER II. By comparing these discourses, the phenomenon of living as a Muslim citizen of the US democracy from the point of view of Muslim Americans themselves may be included in the Islam and democracy discourse, and dominant views of this experience may be deconstructed. The thesis concludes with CHAPTER VI, which reviews the
implications of the study and offers speculative suggestions for practical application of the findings.

Key Terms Defined

- **1.5 Generation Immigrants**: The four 1.5 generation student participants in this study were either relocated by their 1st generation parents from a Muslim dominant nation to the US at a young age; or are adult immigrants from Muslim dominant nations who spent some time in the US school system (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

- **Imams**: Generically described as Islamic spiritual leaders, both Imam participants in this study head local mosques, providing Friday lectures and guiding prayers throughout each day. The mosque led by participant Imam Khaliq is also an Islamic center, and therefore offers a K-8 education system and opportunities and resources for informative outreach to the wider surrounding community.

- **Phenomenology**: Husserl’s (1964) philosophical encouragement of understanding the nature and meaning of individuals’ lived experiences from their own perspective is used as the underpinning approach to the qualitative phenomenological methodology of this study.

- **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**: A cultural approach to CDA is employed in this study—namely Shi-xu’s (2005) deconstructive and transformative methods of examining the dominant discourse and introducing an alternative discourse that is inclusive of the voices of a marginalized population, in this case the Muslim American university student.

- **Hijab**: This term is used to describe the headscarf traditionally worn by Muslim women. Although the garment is prescribed by the Quran to protect the wearer’s modesty,
Muslim women may choose to wear it or refrain from wearing it for a variety of reasons, including as a resistance to the hyper-sexualization of the female form, and a visual representation of identification with and loyalty to the Muslim ummah (defined below) (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006).

- **Ummah**: This is an Arabic term that means community or nation. In Islam, this term is typically used to reference all Muslims throughout the world as a unified kin.
- **‘Peace be upon him’**: Throughout this report, any mention of Prophet Mohammed’s name is followed by the phrase ‘Peace be upon him.’ The writing or speaking of this phrase after the mention of any prophet’s name is an Islamic tradition, aimed to ensure a provision of respect and love for all messengers of God.
- **Allah subhana wa ta’ala**: This phrase is used in interview responses, and is an Arabic expression that means ‘God, the most glorious and exalted.’ Much like the tradition described above, this phrase is written or spoken by Muslims whenever Allah is mentioned.
- **Shoora**: Practiced in medieval Islamic society and institutionalized in the government of Saudi Arabia, shoora is an Arabic term that translates as ‘consultation with the people.’
- **Participation**: Although politically used in reference to engagement in the democratic system, for the purposes and context of this study, the definition of participation is broadened to include day-to-day academically civic activities, such as class discussions and campus involvement.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

As a so-called ‘hot topic’ on the world stage, the relationship between Islam and democracy has been analyzed from a variety of academic perspectives. Studies range from macro- to micro-level, consider a myriad of factors, and frame the discourse in a spectrum of perspectives, from outright dichotomy to harmonious compatibility, and everything in between. Much of the literature is based in the realm of theory, with a serious lack of practical, person-to-person, present-day research. In the spirit of Foucault (Gaonkar, 1999), however, I believe that understanding the philosophical academic discourse on a topic provides progress towards dissecting a society’s ‘regime of truth’ (Gaonkar, 1999, p. 10), and in this case, deconstructing the dichotomy of Islam and democracy. Due to the nature of this study—an exploration of how Muslim American university students, their professors, and local Imams perceive Islam and democracy—no absolute definitions of these terms will be outlined. Instead, various academic views, many which are reflected in the findings of this study, will be presented. Thus, to assemble an informed foundation for discussion and analysis of this study, the literature review below is organized into the following sections: Islam v. Western democracy: the effects of public education; religion and identity; democratic citizenship and religious identity; Muslim civic involvement and the campus community; and identity crises and Muslim American emerging adults.

Islam v. Western Democracy: The Effects of Public Education

The perception of Islam as a global threat has dominated the Western ‘regime of truth’ since long before the 9/11 attacks. As stated by Cesari (2004), over the past three decades, images of militant Islam have flooded the global consciousness—the Iranian Revolution and
taking of hostages at the American embassy, the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat, the Lebanese hostages, the Rushdie affair, the crisis in Algeria, the conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq—all of these events have culminated in the labeling of Islam as the ‘new Communism’ in terms of international risk. Myriad scholars view this demonization as a method of constructing and maintaining the dominant Western identity—much like Communism, this derogatory, myopic perception of Islam has been utilized in the Western discourse to produce and reproduce the idea of a modern, advanced and rational western civilization, constructing Islam as the inferior “other” (Said, 1978; Said, 1981; Al-Azmeh, 1993; Esposito, 1995; Khan, 2006). Perhaps the most prominent work in the cementation of this dichotomy is that of Huntington (1996), who theorized that cultural and religious identities would be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. Adib-Moghaddam (2008) analyzes this historical ‘clash of civilizations’ even further, noting a distinct discord between Christianity and Islam that dates back to the emergence of Mohammed, whose messages both complicated and dethroned Christianity as a great united community (p. 222). The logic thus follows that, as the US democracy is highly based in Euro-Christian values, and Islam and Christianity are historically incompatible civilizations, Islam and Western democracy are irreconcilable (Huntington, 1993).

Barber (1996) capitalizes on Huntington’s (1993) logic, expanding the ‘clash of civilizations’ beyond US democracy to the ‘McWorld’—a globalized consumerist culture spread by the hegemonic rise of multi-national corporations. Barber (1996) pits this worldwide capitalistic civilization against not only religious fundamentalism (specifically Islam), but also declares a dichotomous relationship between ‘McWorld’ and democracy, and Islam and democracy. Barber (1996) concludes that the “global democracy dream” (p. 277) cannot come true until Islam modernizes and the ‘McWorld’ flexes to allow room for public spaces and
actions in the name of the public good. Fukuyama (1992), however, redefines this globalized homogenous culture as evidence that the ‘end of history’ is approaching, liberal democracy is triumphing over all traditional societies (including Muslim nations), and in turn, liberal democratic values are replacing Islamic values in a socio-political survival of the fittest. Thus, by presuming that liberal democratic values must replace Islamic values, Fukuyama (1992) also concludes that Islam and democracy are incompatible.

However, recent seemingly pro-democracy revolutions in the Muslim dominant countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria have introduced a unique dynamic into the ‘clash of the civilizations’ discourse, causing many scholars to find the dichotomy of Islam v. Western democracy to be flawed and irrelevant to modern society (e.g. Abu El-Haj, 2010; Cesari, 2004; Dallmayr, 2011; El Fadl, 2004; Hashemi, 2009; Kahn, 2006; Sachedina, 2006; Soroush, 2000; Swaine, 2009; Tibi, 2009). Hashemi (2009) and Swaine (2009) question the legitimacy of posing these two ideologies as conflicting forces, arguing that Western observers of the Muslim world should remember their own history of political development and recognize the similarities with Muslim societies. As stated by Swaine, “liberal societies are oddly glib and self-satisfied about their state of advancement, whereas they were considerably repressive in the recent past and continue to face various social issues” (2009, p. 104). This critique is timely and pertinent in light of the recent revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East—when the citizens of Muslim majority nations gather out of dissatisfaction and demand rights that are often comprehensively labeled as ‘democratic’ (the legitimacy of this label is to be analyzed more in depth in the discussion and analysis section), the schism placed between Islam and democracy must be questioned.
In his in-depth analysis of Islam and modernity, Tibi (2009) proposes a method for fusing these supposed polar opposites. Tibi (2009) outlines the need for religious reform and cultural change in Islamic civilization, calling upon the example of the thriving rationality of medieval Islamic society as proof that the development of an Islamic interpretation of the human-based worldview and secular values of modernity is possible and appropriate. Ciftci (2010) enacts the modernization framework utilized by Hashemi (2009) and Tibi (2009) more pragmatically—in a study of determinants of individual support for democracy in 10 Muslim-majority countries, he found that economic and cultural interpretations of modernization theory provide strong assistance in explaining democratic attitudes. Much like Ciftci (2010), Tessler (2002), who studied the effects of Islamic orientation on democratic attitudes in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria, found that Islamic religiosity is a poor predictor of democratic attitudes, especially when compared to economic and cultural factors. Several other scholars confirm these findings (eg. Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Hoffman, 2004; Jamal, 2006).

Tibi (2009), Hashemi (2009), and Ciftci’s (2010) great reliance on modernization theory gives many scholars pause, however. According to Gellner (1992), the essentialist nature of this discourse causes all ‘under-developed’ countries and cultures to face the following dilemma: “Should we emulate those whom we wish to equal in power (thereby spurning our own tradition), or should we, on the contrary, affirm the values of our own tradition, even at the price of material weakness?” (p. 270). In other words, is the push for modernization truly an altruistic cause, or is it a method for a handful of nations to maintain power of both economic and world resources via cultural hegemony? Gellner (1992) further frames Islam as a religion poised to overcome this obstacle, referencing the effects of industrialization and Islam’s subsequent self-affirmation as opposed to secularization. This strength of dedication is founded on the oil-wealth
of many Islamic nations, and according to Gellner (1992), may prove Islam to be an ideal fit for modern society, but a direct enemy of civil society.

There is an important population absent from the work of Ciftci (2010), Tessler (2002), and Gellner (1992), however. With Islam as the fastest growing religion in North America (Khan, 2006, p. 154), what of the six to eight million Muslims (Pew Forum, 2008) living in the United States? Gellner’s theory operates on the assumption that Islam is a stagnant, Arab dominated religion, ignoring an entire faction of the Muslim community, and while Ciftci and Tessler do not make such assumptions, their research is based in nations outside of the United States, and still reference Islam and democracy as quiescent objects, rather than malleable ideologies and processes. This reflects a gap in the literature, which, by focusing on the perceptions of democracy of Muslim Americans of varied ethnic background, this study attempts to partially satisfy.

Furthermore, although Western society is often perceived as a utopia on the scale of modernization, Gaonkar’s (1999) analysis of Baudelaire, Weber, and Foucault’s visions of modernity provides evidence that alternative perceptions may exist. According to Gaonkar (1999), while Baudelaire stresses the importance of the aesthetics of everyday life and self-realization, Weber questions the ‘freedom’ brought about by Western modernization’s reliance on the self and reason, stating the following:

Being value-neutral, purposive rationality is incapable of conferring meaning on the world it ushers into existence. At the same time, it works steadily to discredit and dissolve the traditional religious worldviews that, despite their errancy, give meaning and unity to life. (Gaonkar, 1999, p. 8)
In other words, what utility does freedom provide in a world bereft of meaning? Foucault takes this criticism of the Western ideal of modernization a step further, asserting the power relations that are inextricably tied to the formation of reason, knowledge, and truth, and thus tainting the romantic perception of Western society as a beacon of pure freedom (Gaonkar 1999). In conclusion, Gaonkar (1999) suggests interpreting modernity in a culturally and politically sensitive manner:

The proposition that societal modernization, once activated, moves inexorably toward establishing a certain type of mental outlook (scientific rationalism, pragmatic instrumentalism, secularism) and a certain type of institutional order (popular government, bureaucratic administration, market-driven industrial economy) irrespective of the culture and politics of a given place is simply not true. But at each national and cultural site, those elements are put together (reticulated) in a unique and contingent formation in response to local culture and politics. (p. 15)

When applied to the topic of Islam and democracy, Gaonkar’s (1999) interpretation of modernity carves a space for the Muslim American hybrid identity that is not addressed by Tessler (2002), Ciftci (2010), Gellner (1992), Tibi (2009), and Hashemi (2009)—an identity that many Muslim American youth may wish to enact.

One significant relationship has not yet been questioned in this review, however. Why, when discussing democracy, do the words ‘United States’ and ‘democracy’, or ‘American’ and ‘democratic citizen’ become interchangeable and almost inextricable? This connection has been speculated as a source of the oppositional positioning of Islam to democracy. According to several researchers, the dichotomy relies on a perception of the political democratic state and Western (predominantly US) culture as cut from the same antireligious cloth. Khan (2006) and
Cesari (2004), for example, explain an Islamic resistance to democracy as an extension of resistance to US global hegemony. As stated by Khan: “They see democracy in the same way as they see MTV, as a Western cultural artifact that will corrupt and de-Islamize Muslim societies” (p. 153). Al-Jarrah and Cullingford (2007) found a similar trend in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, where, when prompted with ‘democracy,’ 317 of over 1,000 students aged 18 to 22 responded with the word association of ‘colonization,’ and over 200 of the students responded with the word association of ‘killing’ (p. 18-19). While Cesari (2004) confirms this association of democracy with Western domination, both colonial and postcolonial, she further notes the dismantling of this misconception spearheaded by Muslim intellectuals living in the West, such as El Fadl (2004) and Soroush (2000).

‘Abdolkarim Soroush was born in Tehran in 1945, and engaged in several influential roles in the Iranian Cultural Revolution. He is often referred to as the Martin Luther of Islam, due to his work encouraging Islamic reformation (Soroush, 2000). Prominent among his ideas is the concept of socioeconomic development and stability as the key to fulfilling spiritual needs (Soroush, 2000). According to Soroush, “the primary condition for the realization of democracy is the liberation of human beings from the elementary needs and necessities of life” (p. 45). In other words, in order to meet the needs of the soul, or to fulfill spiritual development, one must have a stable society that allows the opportunity for citizens “to have the time, leisure, and security to think, learn, read, and inquire” (Soroush, 2000, p. 46). Soroush finds democracy particularly suitable for the provision of a stable society due to the respect and recognition of varied opinions spurred by freedom of speech, a value that is “meant not only for protesting injustices…it is meant to let us learn what others know and to let us teach them what we know” (p. 46). It is also this encouragement of cerebral decisive operations over manual, and the
cultivation of innovative minds, that makes tyrannical domination over citizens difficult—
“ruling over minds is not as easy as enslaving bodies” (Soroush, 2000, p. 46). Under these
conditions, it would appear that democracy and Islam follow hand in hand—democracy provides
the foundation for individuals and communities to meet their primal needs, thus further granting
citizens the ability to explore and strengthen their spiritual and religious beliefs and practices.

El Fadl (2004) pushes this concept forward, discussing the suitability of democracy not
just as a vehicle to spiritual fulfillment in general, but the Islamic faith specifically. According to
El Fadl (2004), three main social and political values take prominence in the Qur’an: “pursuing
justice through social cooperation and mutual assistance (49:13; 11:119); establishing a
nonautocratic, consultative method of governance; and institutionalizing mercy and compassion
democracy is the form of government that bests supports and promotes these values, specifically
through freedom of speech, association, and suffrage, and therefore the most appropriate form of
governance for Muslims.

Sachedina (2006), while also arguing outside of the modernization discourse, outlines the
inherent fusion between Islam and participation in a democratic, pluralistic civil society
displayed by previous generations of Muslims (similar to Tibi’s [2009] claims). Citing a
classical Islamic administrative document written by the Egyptian caliph ‘Ali (d. 660), Sachedina
(2006) emphasizes tolerant interfaith relations and a common moral responsibility to the human
community as obligations for all adherents to Islam. As stated by ‘Ali to the Muslim citizens of
a Christian dominant Egypt: “Infuse your heart with mercy, love and kindness… for they are of
two kinds: either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation” (p.188).
According to Sachedina (2006), it is this culture of inclusiveness that will allow for both the
individual conception of one’s relation to God, and the identification as a living, contributing member to the advancement of the wider civil society, to coexist; thereby converging both sides of the coin—revelation and reason, religious duty and democratic duty—toward the common good.

Along the same lines as the culture of inclusion discussed above, Khan (2006), Cesari (2004), Soroush (2000), El Fadl (2004), and Sachedina (2006) all delineate the democratization of Islamic interpretation as a crucial reformation. Khan (2006) highlights the democratic perception of all humans as equals as support for the argument that the vote, opinion, and interpretation of every individual must be considered valid. In other words, an institutionalized, essentialist definition of what or who may be considered ‘Islamic’ is undemocratic, as it inherently denies citizens the right to dissent, and limits their freedom of conscience (a concept that will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter). Cesari (2004) highlights examples of this democratization process in the United States, specifically in relation to religious authority. According to Cesari (2004), “in the United States, the hierarchies and clerical dynasties of the Muslim world simply cease to apply. Instead, the mobilization of ordinary Muslims is the deciding factor for the new forms of authority” (p. 127).

Although the participation outlined above is a major key to the democratization process, it appears the US ‘regime of truth’ often excludes the Muslim community from this form of engagement. Abu El-Haj’s (2010) study of the experience of Muslim students in a Pennsylvania public high school places this concept in a practical, modern-day context. Over the course of three years, Abu El-Haj (2010) observed the tendency of high school teachers and administrators to construct democratic discourses within the school in such a way that alienated Muslim students. Abu El-Haj (2010) found that administrators and teachers tended to describe Muslim
American students as inherently oppositional to three recurring democratic values—freedom, tolerance, and liberty—thereby positioning Muslim American students outside of the democratic discourse, and decreasing their acceptance and ability to self-identify as Americans. While Tibi (2009) and Sachedina (2006) refer to the responsibilities of Muslims and Islamic civilization, Abu El-Haj (2010) uses the above insight to support the need for American public school teachers, administrators, staff, and the media to alter their perspectives of Muslim students and citizens and their roles in the democratic process.

One method of transforming the image of Islam and its followers in democratic societies is the inclusion of the subject in public school curriculum. Merry (2007) discusses the successful recognition of world religions in the state schools of Belgium and the Netherlands as foundations for possible reform in the United States. Although Merry (2007) focuses on state oversight and funding of Islamic schools, his argument also extends to support religious education in public schools. This reform, Merry (2007) states, not only fosters tolerance through engagement with ideological differences, but also allows the state to control standards and quality of religious instruction—indirectly assisting in Tibi’s (2009) conception of the fusion of modernity and Islam through the regulation of content that promotes bigotry, sedition, intolerance, or the violation of free will.

Merry’s (2007) suggestions for education reform also provide an important opportunity to students—access and exposure to various ways of life. Gutmann (1999) and Kymlicka (1995) promote the importance of fostering knowledge of numerous conceptions of the ‘good life’ as a primary good in democratic societies, citing cultural membership as a platform for interpreting democratic choices and subsequently, a method of developing personal agency. Therefore, the presentation of Islam as a legitimate ‘good life’ is not only a helpful step in the dissolution of the
Islam v. West dichotomy; it is a democratic responsibility that public schools have an obligation to provide.

Although the aforementioned research provides evidence that Islam is indeed compatible with a democratic society, much effort from both Islamic and Western leaders and scholars is required to stifle the increasing divide between these worldviews. Merry (2007) and Abu El-Haj (2010) promote the particular importance of reform in the public school system, a potential arena for both the modernization of Islam and the enlightenment and development of autonomy for students in democratic societies.

Religion and Identity

The Islam v. Western democracy dichotomy discussed above extends to the micro-level—both sets of value systems (including those values shared by each, which, as will be discussed later, are many) contribute to the individual identity formation of Muslim American students. According to many researchers (Peek, 2005; Muedini, 2009; Nasir and Al-Amin, 2006), religion is often overlooked in social science reviews of identity formation, even though it “not only defines us in terms of our participation in practices and membership in certain communities within the context of our societies, but it also defines us in relation to God and the universe” (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006, p. 23). The National Survey of Youth and Religion, a 2005 study involving over 3,000 adolescents aged 13-17 from all major ethnic groups across the US, found religion as a particularly salient influence on adolescent identity in America (Smith & Denton, 2005). Over half of adolescents surveyed cited faith-based systems as important in shaping their daily lives and behaviors, and reported attending religious services at least twice a month (Smith & Denton, 2005).
Arnett (2009), however, claims that religiosity appears to decline in emerging adulthood, as youth may feel the need to break from their parents’ religious beliefs and practices in efforts to make their own decisions. Fowler (Arnett, 2009) describes this process as a set of distinctly separate stages—the stage of poetic-conventional faith (in which early adolescents become more aware of the symbolism used in their faith); and the stage of individuating-reflective faith (in which emerging adults rely less on what their parents believed and develop a more individualized faith).

Although Arnett (2009) references Muslim emerging adults as exceptions to Fowler’s second stage of individuating-reflective faith, recent studies show otherwise. Kaplan (2007) uses Erikson’s (1968) conception of identity crisis to discuss the efforts of Muslim emerging adults to form new identities that fuse the values of Islam and American democratic citizenship, claiming that “children of Muslim immigrant experience can bring about a unique American Muslim identity...a solution that has eluded their parents and traditional religious scholars” (p. 1). In studies of Muslim university students in the stage of emerging adulthood, Naber (2005), Peek (2005), and Muedini (2009) found a sweeping shift from the cultural, ethnic, and nationalistic perceptions of Islam of the previous generation to a universally accepting interpretation devoid of national borders, racial categories, and cultural influence.

Peek (2005) expands on Fowler’s (Arnett, 2009) stages, declaring three levels of religious identity development: religion as ascribed identity (when children/early adolescents are born into and raised in a religious identity, no reflection required); religion as chosen identity (when late adolescents/emerging adults reflect on and explore religious identity); and finally, religion as declared identity (when emerging adults/adults confirm their religious identity through public display, active participation, or pride). According to Peek (2005), this last stage is vital to the
Muslim American experience in the current socio-historical moment—findings that will be further explored in the discussion and analysis section.

Democratic Citizenship and Religious Identity

The political mobilization of groups of individuals who have claimed a specific religion as their declared identity is of particular interest to political scientists in democratic societies. Gutmann (2003) outlines the debate between critics and defenders of identity politics, stating that although critics cite identity groups as constraining to individuality and freedom of affiliation, defenders describe individuals without group identities as atomistic, insecure, and subsequently not autonomous—further stating that “a society that prevents identity groups from forming is a tyranny” (p. 4). According to Gutmann (2003), there are three basic principles of democracy—civic equality, liberty, and opportunity—and any group with principles compatible with these views (or identification with any group found compatible) can be called democratic.

In relation to participation in the democratic civic discourse, however, religious identity meets mixed reviews. Gutmann (2003) presents various perceptions, including the opinion that religious identities foster a social responsibility that counteracts the selfishness of pure individualism, and the opposing view that the political involvement of religious identities may lead to intolerance and aggressive collectivism. After deliberating between these conflicting opinions, Gutmann (2003) concludes that religious identities are compatible with democratic citizenship (or the democratic identity) in their development of conscience—an abstract authority that shares with democracy the fundamental belief in people as ethical subjects.

Cesari (2004), Khan (2006), Sachedina (2006), and Swaine (2009) cite the preservation of freedom of conscience as vital to democratic maintenance, as well as an essential component
of Islam. According to Khan (2006), the Quranic idea that all human beings, not just jurists or Muslims, are God’s vicegerents on earth (Quran 2:30) promotes respect for each individual’s conception and development of conscience. Sachedina (2006) confirms this in his analysis of the Quran:

The concern for human autonomy, especially freedom of worship (or not to worship), is as fundamental to the Koranic vision of human religiosity as it is to that of other civilizations. The Koran requires Muslims to sit in dialogue with their own tradition to uncover a just approach to religious diversity and interfaith coexistence. Moreover, a rigorous analysis of the Koran will demonstrate that, without recognition of freedom of religion, it is impossible to conceive of religious commitment as a freely negotiated human-divine relationship that fosters individual accountability for one’s acceptance or rejection of faith in God, commitment to pursue an ethical life, and willingness to be judged accordingly. (p. 181)

Thus, according to Khan (2006), Sachedina (2006) and Swaine (2009), the freedom of religion and conscience so heavily endorsed by US democracy is also a tenant of the Islamic faith.

This conception of the relationship between religious identity and democratic citizenship is not often displayed in practical contexts however, and specifically for the Muslim American population. Cesari (2004) speculates that although government defense of religious freedom is typically found less controversial in the US than in Europe, in the case of Islam, the mass scrutiny and discrimination of the religion since 9/11 exhibits a major shift in the status of the religion in public life, and in turn, the status of Muslim Americans as democratic citizens. In her study of a public high school in Pennsylvania, Abu El-Haj (2010) describes the systematic alienation of Muslim American students from the democratic discourse. Abu El-Haj (2010)
found that administrators and teachers tended to describe Muslim American students as inherently oppositional to three recurring democratic values—freedom, tolerance, and liberty (similar to Gutmann’s [2003] aforementioned basic principles). These perceptions positioned Muslim American students outside of the democratic discourse, decreasing their acceptance and ability to self-identify as Americans. Muedini (2009) found similar marginalizing trends in media, domestic policy, and foreign policy. Throughout interviews with twenty Muslim university students, the PATRIOT Act was consistently cited as an infringement upon basic civil rights for all Americans, but specifically Muslim Americans (Muedini, 2009). One respondent stated that the act has “also created an ‘us against them’ attitude inside and outside the US” (Muedini 2009, p. 46).

According to Connor (2009), this ‘us against them’ attitude is further sustained as propaganda to support the US War on Terror. Ehrenreich (2002) discusses these divisive politics from a masculinity perspective. According to Ehrenreich (2002): “the implicit whiteness of American nationalism enables masculine violence to become an expression of principle” (Connor 2009, p. 100), and further helps to explain why ‘our’ violence in response to 9/11 is seen as noble, while ‘their’ violence—the violence of the hijackers—is seen as irrational and cowardly. As stated by Connor (2009): “Whiteness enables the imagining of an American ‘us’ that provides clarity of purpose by directing anger toward ‘them’—while obscuring the divisions that plague ‘us’” (p. 100). This is particularly disconcerting when considering the Muslim American population, as it not only groups all Muslims together with the 9/11 hijackers, it also marks ‘them’ as un-American, inhumane enemies. According to Khan (2006), this oppositional discourse is not only found in the Western ‘regime of truth,’ but is also now employed in the reverse by Islamists. As Khan states: “The perpetuation of the Islam and the West discourse as a
dominant global narrative is essential to both chauvinistic Westerners and jingoistic Islamists to sustain their utopias through the creation and demonization of a civilizational other” (p. 150).

It appears, however, that Muslim American students are responding to this systematic alienation with amalgamating action, blocking out the temptation to enable the divisive discourse outlined above. A myriad of studies capture a growing trend among Muslim American adolescents and emerging adults to reclaim their political rights and American identities as well as re-present their Muslim identities. According to Naber (2005), although Arab American youth of San Francisco appeared to favor their Islamic ties through the “Muslim first” movement, participation in democratic methods such as the power of the people and freedom of assembly made development of the movement possible. Conwill and Jooma (2008) performed a case study of on-campus social activism, in which female Muslim university students constructed groups supporting the re-presentation of Muslim women on campus, reclaiming their presence in academic, social, and civic discourses. This is confirmed by Cesari (2004), as shown in the following quote from her interview with Asma Khan, founder of the “Muslims Against Terrorism” organization: “I am part of this generation that does not hesitate in asserting its American identity, and I am not afraid to be a Muslim and an American citizen” (p. 42). Finally, Kaplan (2007), Nasir and Al-Amin (2006), Tibi (2009), Hashemi (2009), and Peek (2005) all found evidence of Muslim American students molding their Islamic views with democratic tools, participating in the civic discourse to personally construct modern Muslim American identities.

Muslim Civic Involvement and the Campus Community

According to Swaine (2009), one can see by simple observation that Muslims can and do engage in normal political participation, such as voting, campaigning, letter-writing, pamphleteering, and so forth. In fact, a 2004 Georgetown University study found that 70% of
American Muslims report that the Muslim aspect of their identity weighs heavily in their political decisions, with 86% stating that it is important to participate in politics (Abdo, 2006, p. 83). If we extend this involvement to the public sphere most accessible to Muslim American university students—the campus climate—more of the same levels of engagement can be seen. Involvement in this arena has been found by many researchers to offer benefits beyond the range of civic participation. Scholars such as Seggie and Sanford (2010), Montelongo (2003), and Tinto (1997) note a significant positive correlation between campus involvement and academic achievement, student development, and degree completion. Others (e.g. Green, 1989; Tinto, 1997; Watson et al., 2002) state that supportive campus climates that offer all students the opportunity to participate enhance self-esteem, which in turn enriches the learning experience.

If the campus environment is a convenient platform for the civic engagement of Muslim American university students, and this involvement leads to democratic as well as academic and developmental benefits, it is vital to shape an atmosphere that reflects inclusion and promotes participation. Unfortunately, many studies show that US universities lack such campus climates, specifically in regards to the acceptance and motivation of Muslim American students. For example, several studies of the perceptions and experiences of Muslim university students (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003; Nasir and Al-Amin, 2006; Seggie and Sanford, 2010) expose instances of prejudice and discrimination and feelings of discomfort, all due to elements of the campus climate, including interactions with classmates and professors. Many students reported this stress to be the result of the constant negotiation of their identities with the campus ‘regime of truth’ regarding Islam and Muslims—as stated in Nasir and Al-Amin’s (2006) study, “most students we talked to felt taxed by the need to constantly manage others’ impressions of them” (p. 25). In all of these studies, a hostile environment caused the students to alter their behavior
and/or dress, and/or distance themselves emotionally from the campus community and, in some cases, school in general.

Many studies promote student organizations as supportive, identity-safe options for campus participation (e.g. Austin, 1999; Pace, 1990; Moore et al., 1998; Chowdury, 2006; Thomas, Jamerson, and Daniel, 2006). For students of the Islamic community, the most prominent student organization of relevance is the Muslim Students Association (MSA), a group with over 600 chapters existing on US college campuses (150 nationally recognized) and a Washington DC based national office that assists in the establishment of chapters and oversees fundraising, conferences, and the formation of committees (Hamilton, 2006, p. 28; Dowd-Gailey, 2004, p. 63). According to some studies (Chowdury, 2006; Kandil, 2004; Marquand, 1996), MSA chapters counteract the discrimination experienced on university campuses, and support and encourage Muslim students to become more involved in both campus and wider civic activities. Chowdury (2006), although discussing the MSAs of Australia, notes that her findings may be applied to all “advanced” nation states due to the similarities between these nations in both values and the status of Muslims as a minority population. Chowdury (2006) cites Australian MSAs as significant organizations in unique positions to bridge the gap between Islam and the West. Marquand (1996) further highlights the efforts of MSAs to encourage activism and the spread of knowledge via internet discussion boards and online dialogues, forming a unique virtual community that Cesari (2004) describes as a diverse platform for individual deliberation and debate. Finally, Kandil (2004) discusses the civil rights session titled “Get up, Stand up; Stand up for your Rights: The State of Contemporary Civil Liberties” held in September of 2004 at the annual conference for the Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada. A major tenant of the conference was to protest the PATRIOT Act,
encouraging Muslim students from campuses across the United States to start campaigns for civil rights.

There are, however, many critics that depict the MSA as an exclusive, mono-political organization that only serves a particular section of the Muslim community. According to Dowd-Gailey (2004), the MSA works to create a single Muslim voice that supports Wahhabism (a strict Islamic interpretation imported from Saudi Arabia), anti-Americanism, and anti-Semitism. In his study of MSAs across the United States, MacFarquhar (2008) further emphasizes this culture of exclusion as a major issue threatening accessibility to MSAs for Muslim American students of diverse Islamic interpretation and/or practice. MacFarquhar (2008) offers varied examples of issues encountered by MSAs, ranging from allowing women who wear mini-skirts and men who smoke marijuana to join the organization, to hosting mixed-gender social events and games.

Whether positive or negative, MSAs have a significant influence on their constituents. To reflect this importance, the MSA of one university in this study was used as a gatekeeper organization to recruit participants. Although the MSA experiences of many students in this study appear to align with the work of Chowdury (2006), Marquand (1996), and Kandil (2004), a select few participants perceive the organization in the negative manner portrayed by Dowd-Gailey (2004) and MacFarquhar (2008), citing the group as too political or conservative. More details regarding this phenomenon will be outlined in the discussion and analysis section.

For those campuses where there is no MSA chapter or the organization does not serve as a supportive, motivating force, many scholars and educators suggest the intervention and assistance of local Imams—the religious figureheads of Islam. Stewart (2008) outlines a plan in Great Britain to deter students from stereotyping Muslims by inviting Imams into the classroom
to teach about Islam and citizenship. A study in Finland highlights the proactive involvement of universities in educating Imams, in hopes of molding the Islamic leaders into positive influential role models for Finnish Muslim youth (“Academy’s call to prayer study”, 2011). Finally, in the United States, Hamilton (2006) discusses the importance of instituting Muslim campus chaplains, a trend that started in 1999 at Georgetown University with the appointment of Imam Yahya Hendi, a Palestinian immigrant. According to Hamilton (2006), Imam Hendi and Imam Rumee Ahmed (appointed as the first Muslim chaplain at Brown University in 2006) are part of a small but growing wave of Islamic religious leaders who are essential to assisting Muslim American university students in navigating their identities. As stated by Ahmed:

> The students are facing identity issues—questions of where does their loyalty lie? With the religion? With their parents? Their nationality? With America? I see my job as helping them to navigate those waters, discovering what is at their core. I help them to figure out questions like, how do they see themselves in acting their faith so there’s no cognitive dissonance? At the same time, I get to do my scholarship and focus on activism as well. (Hamilton, 2006, p.29)

Although no Muslim chaplains are based at the university settings involved in this study, the influence of Imams is considered as a factor in both student involvement in campus and civic activities, and their development of an identity that either reconciles or contends Islam with democracy. Jonker’s (2009) study of the genealogy of American multiculturalism confirms an increasing fondness of such hyphenated identities in the United States, institutionalized by the academic shift in historical framework from the melting pot to the salad bowl, mosaic, or kaleidoscope. These patterns of identity formation are discussed in greater detail below.

Bicultural Identity Patterns, Identity Crises, and Muslim American Youth
The theories of Erikson (1968) and Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) provide significant insight into the construction of the Muslim American identity. As confirmed by the previous review of religious identity formation, Erikson cited adolescence and young (or emerging) adulthood as vital stages in identity construction (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2010). Erikson’s (1968) concept of the identity crisis—“a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshalling resources of growth, recovery and further differentiation of self” (p. 50)—is particularly salient in regards to Muslim American youth, who face a variety of unique crises, including the maintenance of already formed and inherited religious identities, and the formation of a new identity between two seemingly conflicting cultures (Kaplan, 2007).

The product of these identity crises can be categorized using Phinney and Devich-Navarro’s (1997) bicultural identity patterns. By synthesizing the bicultural models of Berry (1990), Birman (1994), and LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993), Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) offer a comprehensive set of identity patterns ranging from assimilated or fused, through blended bicultural or alternating bicultural, to separated or marginal. Assimilation occurs when an individual gives up their ethnic culture and identifies with the larger culture, while a fused identity is developed when an individual blends both cultures to create an entirely new identity (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). A bicultural individual may also choose to embody those values that are overlapping between their ethnic identity and the wider society (an identity that is categorized as blended bicultural), or move between the two cultures as an alternating bicultural individual (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). In their study of African American and Mexican American adolescents, Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) found these middle identification patterns (blended and alternating bicultural) to be the most prevalent.
However, there are also two more extreme possibilities: separated (when an individual identifies only with the ethnic identity); and marginalized (when an individual identifies with neither the ethnic nor the dominant culture).

Deconstructing the Dichotomy at the Micro-Level

As seen above, many studies concerning Islam and democracy are heavily based in the realm of theory, focus on macro-level issues, and/or ignore or homogenize the significantly large, diverse Muslim American population. Religion is often overlooked in social science reviews of identity formation, and the reconciliation of religion and citizenship is rarely studied as a phenomenological lived experience. The growing population of Muslims in the United States, the glaring effects of 9/11 and the subsequent US ‘regime of truth’ on the Muslim American identity, and the benefits of both campus and civic involvement for university students are all salient components of a rationale for this study. By examining Muslim American university students’ perspectives of Islam and democracy, and their lived experiences as Muslim citizens of the United States, this study hopes to partially satisfy gaps in the literature; present unique data; understand the influence of and offer suggestions to student organizations, university professors, and local Imams; and finally, perhaps of highest democratic value—give a marginalized minority population a voice in their representation.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study was adopted in accordance with a number of the researchers’ primary goals: to examine assumptions surrounding the topic of Islam and democracy, and to deconstruct and understand the discourse formulated by Muslim American students, their professors, and local Imams in two neighboring campus communities. As stated by Creswell (2007, p. 40), qualitative research is appropriate when a “complex and detailed understanding of the issue” is needed—thus, qualitative methods such as interviews and researcher journaling were found to be the most appropriate forms of data collection. This chapter describes the study’s research questions and design, participants, researcher profile, data collection and analysis procedures, validity and credibility, and also outlines limitations.

Research Questions

As discussed in the literature review of Chapter I, it is rare that Islam and democracy are analyzed at the micro-level, and qualitative studies that include the perceptions of Muslim Americans are even more exceptionally scarce. In recognition of these gaps in the literature, the following research question and sub-questions were formulated:

1) To what extent do Muslim American university students view their religious values conflicting and/or aligning with democratic values?

   (a) How do local Imams’ perceptions relate to Muslim American students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?

   (b) How do Muslim American students’ non-Muslim university professors’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?
(c) How do Muslim American students’ Muslim university professors’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?

The above sub-questions were derived to address other significant contributors to the construction of the Islam and democracy discourse for student participants on each of the neighboring campuses.

Research Design

Much of the current discourse on Islam and democracy does not include Muslim American opinion. However, as citizens of the US democracy, Muslim Americans navigate Islamic and democratic values each day, their lives acting as the stage for an internal and external ontological negotiation. In order to provide a platform for this population to describe their lived experiences, and use these to construct their own discourse regarding the major forces that shape their identity, a phenomenological framework as well as a cultural approach to the qualitative critical discourse analysis method were utilized for this study.

As stated by Van Manen (1990), a phenomenological research design “asks, ‘What is this or that kind of experience like?’” (p. 9), and is therefore appropriate for ascertaining an understanding of the Muslim American lived experience. The phenomenological approach aims to provide those who experience a certain situation, activity, or general existence, with a voice in the description and understanding of this experience, and is thus participant-centered—making it a suitable framework to grant a marginalized population a platform for participation in their representation. In order to gain particular insight into how Muslim Americans navigate Islamic and democratic values and their subsequent perception of these values, specific attention is paid to the phenomenological concept of the ‘life world’ (Husserl, 1970). Described as “taken for
exploration of the “life world” assists in forming the discourse engaged by participants when both experiencing and discussing the concepts of Islam and democracy. To further deconstruct and understand this discourse, the qualitative method of critical discourse analysis is also employed.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is typically classified as a qualitative research method, due to the need for rich, detailed data to assist in the dissection of the relationships between discourse, power, and social inequality (Van Dijk, 1993). Although there are many ways of analyzing a topic ‘critically,’ discourse analysts focus on “the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 249). Van Dijk (1993) emphasizes the historic concentration of CDA on the dominant parties—a top-down approach—and the significance of intensive linguistic examination; however, Wodak and Meyer (2008) note a recent movement that has shifted CDA to “not be interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach” (p. 2). This multi-faceted approach was found particularly appropriate for the study, as concepts from political science, sociology, economics, religion, psychology, education, and cultural studies all converge in a detailed discussion of Islam and democracy from the perspective of Muslim Americans.

Wodak and Meyer (2008) further recognize the development of more balanced methods of CDA, constructing and promoting bottom-up counter-discourse and collaboration tactics alongside description and analysis of the previously prominent top-down discourses that perpetuate the dominant status quo. For example, a plethora of cultural approaches to CDA are gaining legitimacy in the academic arena, including methods such as Shi-xu’s (2005) research
program, which positions itself between discourses, examining power relations “from a global-and-local position” and viewing “discourse as a diversity of ‘language games’ in competition with each other” (Shi-xu, 2005, p. 5). Shi-xu’s (2005) method also emphasizes two broad research strategies, titled deconstructive and transformational (Scollo, 2011, p. 4). As stated by Shi-xu (2005), deconstructive strategy “strives to undermine culturally repressive discourses, that is, those discourses that dominate, exclude or discriminate against groups and communities on the ground of ‘cultural difference’” (p. 68), whereas transformational strategy “endeavors to create and advocate new or alternative discourses that are inclusive, non-hegemonic and collaborative with regard to cultural ‘others’” (p. 68).

In regards to this study, Shi-xu’s (2005) deconstructive strategy is applied to the academic discourse on Islam and democracy outlined in the initial section of the literature review of Chapter I. The perception of Islam as a global threat has dominated the Western ‘regime of truth’ since long before the 9/11 attacks—over the past three decades, US mass media and foreign policy has flooded the global consciousness with images of militant Islam (Cesari, 2004; Connor, 2009; Said, 1978; Said 1981; Al-Azmeh, 1993; Esposito, 1995; Khan, 2006) and as seen in many studies, this representation has influenced how Muslim Americans are perceived and treated by the general public, including peers, colleagues, and in several cases, public school educators (Abu El-Haj, 2010; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Muedini, 2009). As this discourse dominates, excludes, and discriminates against the voice of Muslim Americans, interview data was collected from Muslim American university students. This interview data was enriched by gathering opinions from influential forces in the communities of the students, including their Muslim and non-Muslim professors and local Imams. The culmination of these interviews is the application of Shi-xu’s transformational strategy—offering a new or alternative inclusive
discourse via the discussion and analysis of the opinions of Muslim American university
students, their professors, and local Imams.

Although CDA is typically applied to the linguistics of text and conversation, many
recent studies have used this methodology to analyze interview data. Vehkakoski, Sume, and
Poro (2011), for example, interviewed 10 Finnish special needs education professors, and used
CDA to examine the discourses the professors constructed when speaking about their field,
subsequently connecting these discourses to corresponding identities. Hall and Slembrouck
(2010) performed a similar study with the parents of children in care, combining the results of 60
interviews from previous studies to evaluate the “parental perspective” with CDA methods (p.
457). Finally, Ortlipp and Nuttall (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with non-native
English-speaking pre-service teachers and their supervising teachers. The researchers then
applied CDA to describe and deconstruct the discourse perpetuated by the latter when
negotiating the challenges posed by serving as mentors and managers to pre-service teachers
who speak English as a second language. All of the above studies offer evidence that the
application of CDA to interview data provides unique and pertinent insight into the reproduction
and transformation of dominant discourses.

Phenomenological Reduction

Due to the reflective nature of phenomenological research methods, the researcher must
be aware of his/her own biases, and temporarily suspend these assumptions in order to garner a
pure representation of the participants’ perspectives (Husserl, 1982). According to Husserl
(1982), this objective state of mind is prepared by engaging in the phenomenological reduction, a
process wherein the researcher reflects on the phenomenon being studied while “refraining from
judgment” (p. 59). It is through this process that the phenomenology gains a type of legitimacy,
as “the role of consciousness” (Giorgi, 1997, Key Aspects section, para. 2) is acknowledged and taken into account, thereby reducing the risk of researcher bias tainting the data.

_Epoche_

One method of participating in the phenomenological reduction is progression through the “epoche” (from the Greek word for “cessation,” McKenna, 1982), a period of intense meditation in which preconceptions are allowed to flow freely in and out of the consciousness. In order to increase the purity and verity of this phenomenology, I engaged in my own epoche, which is described below.

Before beginning the study, I discussed my perspective of Islam and democracy at great length with friends, relatives, and professors. Although much of my opinion was enhanced and transformed after reviewing the literature, conversing with others helped me to recognize the natural foundation of my perspective. I also kept a detailed journal of daily reflections, which, by heightening my awareness of personal preconceptions, allowed me to temporarily suspend these biases and prevent them from affecting present experiences (Giorgi, 1997). This further helped me to accept the lived experiences of the Muslim American students, their professors, and local Imams for what they were, without attempting to force them into any preconceived molds. While it is not possible or necessary to completely remove myself from this study, by acknowledging my perspective before beginning data collection, I was able to maintain awareness of myself in the research, and thereby understand how my perspective may influence my actions and thoughts toward participants. This personal insight was particularly helpful as a method of minimizing any imposition of my views on the participants’ testimonies of their lived experiences. In an effort to retain transparency and further expose the reader to the fruits of my epoch, a brief researcher profile follows.
Researcher Profile

I am entering this study as a Caucasian American woman from Ohio who converted to Sunni Islam in late 2007. Although I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church by Roman Catholic parents, during my undergraduate career I labeled myself an agnostic, and began to explore and study a variety of religious paths. In the spring of 2007, I studied at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England, and met an enthralling young man who held great pride in his faith, which was Sunni Islam. I was intrigued by his passion, and after studying the religion for some time, converted and began wearing hijab (the headscarf), cementing my identity as a Caucasian Muslim American. Although prescribed by the Quran simply as a method of maintaining modesty, wearing the hijab signifies much more to many female Muslims, including a visual representation of loyalty to Islam and solidarity with the Muslim Ummah (community), and a rebellion against the hyper-sexualization of the female form (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006). Similar to many converts (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006), these latter symbolic meanings attached to the hijab held the most influence over my decision to wear it. Upon returning to the United States, I not only confronted reverse culture shock, I also experienced an odd shift from being perceived as the dominant majority (a Caucasian American), to being perceived as a minority (convert) within a minority (Muslim).

My interest in understanding Islam and democracy from the perspective of Muslim Americans who were born and raised in the religion (1.5 generation immigrants, a population to be described in greater detail in the participants section) partially stems from the above. After converting, I found myself strung between two poles—American by upbringing, and Muslim by choice. This polarization of two halves of my identity brought forth a great tension, and caused me to question labels that I had always accepted as truth. What does it mean to be American?
Do I feel conflicted because of contradictory value systems? Is Islam reconcilable with an American lifestyle? What is an ‘American lifestyle’? Upon reflection and research, I unearthed a prominent discourse in mass media (Cesari, 2004; Muedini, 2009; Swaine, 2009; Khan, 2006; Peek, 2005) and sections of academia (Huntington, 1993; Huntington, 1996; Adib-Moghaddam, 2008; Barber, 1996; Fukuyama, 1992) that outlined the incompatibility of Islam and democracy. This confused and intrigued me—how, then, am I expected to perform my democratic duties and feel accepted as a citizen of a democracy if my religion is not compatible with this system of governance? Do other Muslim Americans, perhaps non-converts, face a similar dilemma? These questions led me to research this dichotomy further, and it was through this analysis of the literature that I found a serious lack of Muslim American opinion and voice.

I must note that although I began the study as a Sunni Muslim, immersing myself in the literature on the topic of Islam and democracy and the Muslim American identity shifted my view, and I no longer carry the label of Sunni. While I do still consider myself a Muslim, I stopped wearing hijab shortly before data collection began (although, out of respect for religious values, I wore it during the interviews with Imams). Both of these changes reflect my efforts to collapse the divide between my American identity and my religion. It must be noted, however, that these are my personal efforts, and I do not believe that these changes are required or necessary for all Muslim Americans to reconcile their identities. By recognizing these adaptations and personal struggles before beginning interviews, I prepared myself to maintain awareness of my perspective, and separate it from those of my participants.

Participants

Potential participants in this study were filtered into three sub-groups: 1) 1.5 generation immigrant Muslim American students in a public or state university; 2) the Imams of local
mosques that members of group (1) attend; and 3) non-Muslim and Muslim professors of group 
(1). For the purposes of this study, the definition of the 1.5-generation is ‘in-betweeners’—
children whose 1st generation parents relocated them from a Muslim dominant nation to the US 
at a young age; or adult immigrants from Muslim dominant nations who spent some time in the 
US school system (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Although this is not a homogenous group, as 
members may vary in levels of bilingualism, diasporic culture, socioeconomic status, etc. 
(Valdes, 1992; Portes & Hao, 1998), their experience with the culture and political socialization 
of both a Muslim dominant country and the United States provides a uniquely heightened 
perception of their navigation of Islamic values alongside US democratic values.

Participants for this study were identified through purposeful convenience sampling 
(Creswell 2007). Upon Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) approval (see Appendix A), I 
shared the substance of the HSRB application along with a proposed research plan with the 
Muslim Student Association (MSA) of one Midwestern university (referred to as Northern 
Midwestern State University, or NMSU). Although no functioning MSA was found active at the 
neighboring institution (referred to as Mid-Western State University, or MWSU), the same 
information was shared with a thriving Saudi Student Association in the hopes of finding 
qualified students within the membership or through gatekeepers to the Muslim student campus 
community. The leaders of the NMSU MSA were also provided with fliers (see Appendix B) to 
distribute to their members via email, during meetings, and at social events. All participants, 
including professors and Imams, were assigned pseudonyms to keep their identities confidential, 
and are referred to by these monikers throughout this report. A more detailed overview of the 
recruitment process is described below.
Two of the four NMSU student participants, Isir and Mika, attended an MSA iftar (the traditional meal held to break fast during the holy month of Ramadan), and were recruited for participation afterwards. Snowball sampling was then used to recruit the final two NMSU students, Rashid and Aisha. As with the other participants noted below (see Table 1), I will be featuring information provided by these students in subsequent chapters. Recruitment proved much more difficult at MWSU, where the absence of a functioning MSA and a smaller Muslim community combined to limit the range of participants. Nora, an MWSU student, was the first to respond to fliers posted throughout the campus, and Leila and Samarah, also MWSU students, were referred through a Muslim international student. Student participants referred the non-Muslim professors at both universities—Dr. Stephen by Aisha, and Dr. Sophia by Samarah. The Muslim professors, however, due to their limited number, were invited based on interaction with the campus Muslim community—Dr. Jalil is the Director of Islamic Studies at NMSU and frequently participates in lectures and events with the MSA; and Dr. Amina is a Women’s Studies and American Cultural Studies professor and attends the Remington mosque (a popular place of worship for both NMSU and MWSU students). Also, because she is new to the community, Dr. Amina often seeks out Muslim students on the MWSU campus with which to connect. The Imams of two mosques frequented by both NMSU and MWSU students—referred to as the Remington and the City Muslim Community Center (CMCC) for the purposes of this study—were recruited via email and phone correspondence.

Although the core sample of the study, the seven student participants, appears small, I used this opportunity to conduct extensive and in-depth research, leading to a more detailed and thorough understanding of each individual’s lived experience. Appropriate participant numbers for phenomenological studies generally depend on the phenomenon that is being studied, and
many scholars suggest that a phenomenological study sample may have as few as six members (Skuza, 2007; Lester, 1999). Two Imams and four professors are also included as a form of sub-sample, used to flesh out the discourse constructed within each campus community, which increases the total sample size to thirteen.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year/Profession</th>
<th>Major/Field</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Immigration</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Junior, MWSU</td>
<td>Interior Design</td>
<td>Palestine/Nicaragua</td>
<td>Born &amp; raised in US; Mother immigrated from Palestine to Jordan, then to US; Father born in Nicaragua to Palestinian parents, immigrated to Jordan then US.</td>
<td>US public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>Sophomore, MWSU</td>
<td>Interior Design</td>
<td>Iraq/US</td>
<td>Born &amp; raised in US; Father immigrated from Iraq; Mother is an American convert.</td>
<td>US public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samarrah</td>
<td>Graduate, NMSU</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Back &amp; forth between Egypt and US until age 12, then moved to US.</td>
<td>Primary-homeschooled; Middle- US Catholic school; High- 2 years in Islamic school; 2 years in US public high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>Senior, NMSU</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Born in US; age 3-11 in Egypt; age 12-19 in Saudi Arabia; immigrated to US at age 19.</td>
<td>Primary- Egypt; Middle/High-Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Title/Position</td>
<td>Major/Field</td>
<td>Background Details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mika</td>
<td>Freshman, NMSU</td>
<td>Chemistry/Pre-Med</td>
<td>Born &amp; raised in US; Parents immigrated from Palestine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashid</td>
<td>Junior, NMSU</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Immigrated from Saudi Arabia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Jalil</td>
<td>Director of Islamic Studies, NMSU</td>
<td>Islamic Studies</td>
<td>Born in Pakistan, immigrated to Saudi Arabia then the US</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Stephen</td>
<td>Associate Professor, NMSU</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Amina</td>
<td>Associate Professor, MWSU</td>
<td>American Cultural Studies, Women’s Studies</td>
<td>Born &amp; raised in Pakistan, immigrated to Canada then the US</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Sophia</td>
<td>Associate Professor, MWSU</td>
<td>Geology</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imam Khaliq</td>
<td>Imam, Remington Mosque</td>
<td>Arabic and Theology</td>
<td>Born &amp; raised in Egypt, immigrated to the US</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imam Naim Al Din</td>
<td>Imam, CMCC</td>
<td>Islamic Studies/Theology</td>
<td>Born &amp; raised in Egypt, immigrated to the US</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to establish a contextual starting point for the lived experiences of each student participant, Imam participant, and professor participant, Table 1 illustrates each participant’s pseudonym, year of study/profession, major/field, ethnic background, and, where applicable, immigration background and education background.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The data collection process began in the summer of 2011, and final reporting of data analysis was competed in the spring of 2012. Fieldwork was performed at two neighboring universities in the Midwestern United States, and consisted of semi-structured interviews, field
notes, and journaling. In keeping with the phenomenological resistance to a restrictive set of data collection procedures (Van Manen, 1990), the initial collection process was open-ended, allowing for the lived experiences of the participants to take shape unhindered.

After confirming informed consent to contribute to the study (see Appendix C), each participant was invited to engage in a semi-structured, audio-recorded interview. Although the option of a third-party was offered for interviews with male participants if preferred (there are various interpretations within Islam regarding the legitimacy of one man and one woman sharing company), no participants asked for this provision. Only one interview required a third party—Imam Naim Al Din requested the presence of his translator, due to a lack of fluency in English.

Interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes, and in order to ensure comfortable interaction (Moustakas, 1994), were held in informal settings of the participant’s choice. Open-ended questions concerning the participants’ experiences as Muslim citizens of a democratic nation, perceptions of Islam and democracy, and, as only applicable to Imams and professors—intended influence on Muslim American students or mosque community members—were utilized throughout interviews to grant participants flexibility and space for personal expression of their views and lived experiences (Giorgi, 1997). Although the interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix D), in keeping with the phenomenological premise of exploring the phenomenon from the participants’ view, questions were slightly altered as participants revealed their experiences.

The audio file of each interview was transcribed word for word into an electronic document. Each transcript was then sent to each corresponding participant via email, and in efforts to refrain from misrepresenting their lived experiences, participants were asked to review and confirm or change the data (Moustakas, 1994). Once participants verified the transcription documents, the documents were then examined, and a set of emerging themes was constructed
for further analysis. The data analysis process followed a pattern popularly used in qualitative methodologies (Creswell, 1998): (1) collect verbal data, (2) read data, (3) divide the data into parts, (4) organize and express the data in disciplinary language, and (5) summarize the data for reporting (Giorgi, 1997).

In order to gain a general sense of the data, all transcriptions and observation notes underwent a brief initial review before thorough analysis began (Giorgi, 1997). Each transcript was then individually analyzed with this review in mind, and common themes in the Islam and democracy discourse, as well as each student participant’s lived experience, were identified and categorized. The list of themes and relevant expressions was then further evaluated, and any discussion that did not directly relate to the research questions of this study or assist in the understanding of the lived experience of the participants was removed from the list. After this editing process, textual excerpts from the transcripts were clustered into these themes, and, in keeping with Shi-xu’s (2005) deconstructive strategy, compared to the discourse discussed in the literature review of this study. Finally, these textual excerpts were used to formulate a transformative discourse (Shi-xu, 2005) that included the voices of the Muslim American student participants, their professors, and local Imams.

Validity and Credibility

Due to the divergent orientation of qualitative studies in comparison to quantitative, when applied to qualitative research, the terms validity and credibility are perceived in a manner more appropriate to address qualitative concerns (Merrick, 1999). According to Stiles (1993), for example, there are two types of qualitative validity, one that depends on “the fit or agreement of new observations or interpretations with one’s understanding”, and another that depends on “the
change or growth in one’s understanding produced by new observations or interpretations” (Merrick, 1999, p. 29). The former type of validity can be divided into three subtypes:

(a) coherence—quality of interpretation determined by readers; (b) testimonial validity—accuracy of interpretation as determined by participants; and (c) consensus/stability/replication—interpretations as discussed with other investigators, often through peer debriefing. (Merrick, 1999, p. 29)

The latter type of validity can also be divided into three subtypes:

(c) uncovering and self-evidence—evaluations of fruitfulness and “fit” by readers; (b) catalytic validity—the degree to which the research process ‘reorients, focuses, and energizes participants’ (Stiles, 1993, p. 611); and (c) reflexive validity—evaluation of how theory or the investigator’s way of thinking is changed by the data. (Merrick, 1999, p. 29)

Both types of validity outlined above were addressed in this study. Testimonial validity was established through participant review—each individual transcript was sent to the corresponding participant for review and approval, and only used for analysis after the participant returned the approved transcript. To ensure consensus/stability/replication, general study themes and findings were discussed with peers, colleagues, and professors in the field via debriefing sessions. Both catalytic validity and reflexive validity are exhibited—participants were verbally grateful for the thoughts unearthed in discussions and many stated they were making connections they never had before; and I, as the researcher, shifted my understanding of the Muslim American identity (particularly my own interpretation and enactment) throughout the study. My personal transformation will be discussed in greater depth in the discussion and analysis chapter.
Credibility, often referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merrick, 1999), was established through the triangulation of data collection. By collecting interview data from Muslim American university students, local Imams, and Muslim professors, the lived experience of Muslim citizens of a democratic nation was pieced together from various sources, and this data was also supported by interview notes and researcher journaling.

Limitations of the Study

In order to protect the identities of the participants and the campuses and mosques with which they are associated, specific details pertaining to the setting and region of the study were purposefully omitted from transcripts and the final report. While these environmental details may reveal further insight into influences on the participants’ lives and viewpoints to the reader, this precaution is necessary to ensure confidentiality to the participants.

Also, due to the focus of this study on 1.5 generation immigrant Muslim Americans, an absence of voice from the convert Muslim American population is apparent. As a convert myself, I did not feel it appropriate to address this population, as it would be difficult to separate my experiences from the participants. Studies focusing on convert Muslim Americans are exceptionally scarce, however, and thus this research area is suggested for further investigation.

While interviews are a leading option for phenomenological data collection due to the granting of involvement in representation to participants, because participants are reporting their experiences themselves, they may each perceive their experiences in a more positive or negative light. Thus, there is no constant gauge of interpretation. This, however, cannot be reconciled, as it is intertwined with capturing the unique essence of each participant’s lived experience and perspective of this experience, which, as discussed earlier, is a primary goal of phenomenological research.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This chapter introduces the seven student participants in the study and establishes a context for their lived experiences. The information provided in Table 1 (p. 40-41) of the methodology chapter is discussed in greater detail, forming a thick description of each Muslim American student’s background, followed by a review of the emerging themes. Due to the phenomenological focus of this study and the aim of presenting an alternative discourse that is inclusive of Muslim American opinion, extensive quotes from student interviews are utilized. The themes outlined in this chapter reflect the research questions proposed by this study, and are therefore organized into three overarching groups: 1) The compatibility of Islamic and democratic values; 2) Challenges to integrating Islamic practice with US democratic engagement; and 3) Suggestions for Imams, professors, and students. The data categorized in each of these sets stems from the lived experience of the students, as well as supplemental perspectives from local Imams and university professors.

The Proposed Balancing Act: Living as a Muslim American University Student

To develop an understanding of the university student participants’ perceptions of Islamic and democratic values from a phenomenological view, each individual’s lived experience navigating these values must be established. While three of the seven students were born and raised in the United States, their relationships with their 1.5 generation parents provide significant influence over their socialization, and those students who are of the 1.5 generation themselves have encountered socialization in both Muslim-dominant nations and the United States.
Nora

Nora is a freshman at MWSU. She is originally from Mauritania, a former French colony in West Africa, but moved to the United States when she was eight years old.

Then I’d go back like, every 2 years, I’d go back. And I still have all my family there, I mean I have my mom and dad here, but we go back as often as we can. And it’s like mostly Arab, but there’s like, there’s the Fulan, there’s Fulani, which I am. And I’m Fulani and Arab.

Although Nora was raised Muslim and still considers herself a follower of Islam, she is the only female participant in the study who does not wear hijab. Nora found this lack of visual association to Islam to have a significant effect on her peers’ and professors’ perceptions of her, and also on her experience as a Muslim citizen of the United States: I don’t think I’ve had any conflict because I don’t think anybody would look at me and think, oh you’re a Muslim, because I don’t wear the hijab and you know, I look like I’m African American. She compared her situation to friends who did wear hijab, and commented on their struggles:

I’ve had friends that have been judged because they were Muslims and stuff. (And they had that visual?) Yeah, that visual in which you think, oh, since you’re a Muslim you’re supposed to look a separate, like a certain way, you’re supposed to wear hijab. Like, I don’t think anybody would look at me and say hey, you’re a Muslim.

At the time of the interview Nora was an undeclared major. As a freshman, she could not speak extensively to the influence of university professors, and due to her relocation from home to university, had not found a favored mosque to attend. She did, however, discuss a teacher

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1 Mauritania has suffered a long history of ethnic tension between black Africans, of which the Fulani are a tribe, and Arabs, who dominate the nation’s population and politics (Fleischman, 1994).
from her youth in Mauritania who, due to their closeness, held great influence over her perception of Islam: “My Sunday school teacher. We have Sunday school, actually. And I was close to her.”

Leila

Leila is a junior at MWSU studying Interior Design with a minor in Psychology. Although she was born and raised in the United States, Leila’s parents are Palestinian immigrants, who moved to the United States after seeking refuge in Jordan from conflicts in Palestine and Nicaragua.

My mom was born in Palestine. I don’t maybe three or four years old they all moved to Jordan because of the war and everything happening in Palestine. My dad, he was born in Nicaragua, but like he’s originally Palestinian too, and then maybe I don’t know when he was like fifteen or something, he moved to Jordan also because there was a war that broke in Nicaragua, so. But, originally Palestinian.

Although Leila expressed great admiration for the United States (I love America...I was born here, raised here. It was good.), she also mentioned discrimination, and shared a frustration unique to her status as a natural born citizen: being perceived as an immigrant and subsequently labeled “not American.”

I’ve just had people say horrible things. Again, and just like everything that happened after 9/11, and just like hate crimes, and people say really, really mean things. But you know, you can’t blame them, because they just see the media and they don’t educate themselves, so they don’t really know like about the true religion, or like you don’t group a whole group of people just because one group committed a certain act. And people automatically assume you’re not from here. And you know, how long have you been in
this country? I was born here. I have people tell me go back to where you came from, you know, you’re not American, you’re not this, you’re not that. I mean it bothers me in the moment, but later on I’m just like whatever, you have the right to educate yourself, just they’ve not taken advantage of that right.

Leila also referenced her high school government teacher as a negative influence on her experience as a Muslim citizen of the United States and her peers’ perceptions of Muslims, noting the impressionability of young minds (When you’re young you listen to anything and you’re like oh, okay, that makes sense, you know?).

The only class I remember was our government class my senior year. And he did not like Muslims. He did not like us at all. And he would outright just say you know, he would basically just call us terrorists right there. But he was very Republican too. Which I mean, I hold a lot of the values that Republicans hold, but again like... He had his facts backed up and everything. And it wasn’t just like he was just sitting up there preaching, you know he would be like, in this year, blah blah blah, this happened. Which I understand, but again you can’t group a whole religion based off of one action.

When asked about her opinion of the Imam at her local mosque, Leila noted a preference for hearing lectures from various ‘celebrity’ Imams (national figureheads in Islam, typically English-speaking), as opposed to the head of the local mosque she attended, Masjid Raeed. This was partially due to communication issues—“I mean personally the Imam that we have right now, I don’t really understand him... he’s not very good at English, so I’m not really influenced by him...”
Samarah

Samarah, a friend and classmate of Leila, is a sophomore at MWSU studying Interior Design. Samarah was born and raised in the United States, and although her mother is an American convert, her father was born in Iraq, but also lived in London, and eventually moved to the United States and studied at NMSU.

Although surrounded by friends of high political interest and activity, Samarah admitted a hesitance to engage in such participation and even to publicly express political opinion. These self-restraints were highly influenced by Samarah’s perceptions of politics.

*I try not to have a really strong political opinion, because I like to just sit back and see what’s happening... and because I know that before when I would see people you know, sway towards a certain politician or something, they end up being corrupt or there’s something wrong. So I kind of felt like I wasn’t sure enough to put my voice towards a certain person as of right now. Especially because, as a Muslim American, it’s really hard to have someone that represents me as a person. So I wasn’t sure exactly who I’d be able to support that would have the same ideals as I would.*

Samarah further stated a concern for surveillance from others, struggling with the personal responsibility to defend the already delicate popular representation of Muslim Americans.

*I’m always worried about that, that’s another reason why I just sit back a lot. And I just see what happens before I make any kind of major decision like that, because I’m always aware of the fact that I personally am representing Muslim Americans, so I wouldn’t want to have someone look at what I’m doing if I may be making a mistake, and say oh, that’s all Muslims, that’s all Muslim Americans, you know?*
Although limited in her political participation, Samarah noted the influence of her father’s activism on her practical understanding of democratic engagement and involvement (He was actually really close friends with the local congresswoman. And he was always being interviewed on local TV. He was the person they would go to when they had questions about Iraq or something). Similar to Leila, she found the lack of American-born Imams to be a great detraction from providing Muslim American youth with empathetic understanding, methods for integrating Islam and democracy, and encouragement of political participation.

Well it would be nice if some of the Imams were from here. A lot of them were either born in another country or English is their second language and they speak in Arabic. It would be nice for them to really connect these things [Islam and democracy], but they don’t always. I mean sometimes, if there’s something political going on about Egypt or the unrest or something, they’ll just comment, ‘let’s pray for them.’ But they won’t really make any specific comments about the actual government.

In general, Samarah found ignorance to be the main foundation for the construction of Islam and democracy as a dichotomy. She suggested that professors, Imams, and peers educate themselves before passing judgment or comments, especially if they are in social or official positions of power and/or influence (So, what I would say is, if they’re obviously knowledgeable in politics, to maybe brush up a little on the religion so that they can maybe incorporate them successfully without trying to call on stereotypes).

Aisha

Aisha is a recent graduate from NMSU with a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology. She was born in Egypt, and spent much of her childhood traveling back and forth between the United States and Egypt, eventually moving to the US permanently at the age of twelve. Although she
frequented the US as a child, with the exception of two years she was not within the US public education system. Aisha’s primary school years were split between homeschooling and an Egyptian education that required passing exams in Egypt. After moving to the United States, Aisha went to a Catholic middle school, then for two years attended an Islamic high school. Finally, her last two years of high school were spent in a US public high school, from which she graduated.

When asked about her experience as a Muslim citizen of the United States, Aisha discussed the contradictory nature of being considered anti-democratic, especially as she feels she engages in more civic participation than the average American.

*I think Americans view Islam as anti-democracy, which is odd because I think I’m more democratic than most Americans. I mean I know I’m more politically involved than most Americans. So I just think it’s funny. I was on the board of College Democrats the last two years of college. Right now I’m helping with the upcoming elections, and even before that I was involved with the Obama campaign, and I remained involved with them even after Obama was elected. So, pretty much ever since I was like, able, I’ve been up to date on news and I was involved in campaigns, and I kept myself politically updated.*

Aisha separated how other Americans view her as a Muslim citizen of the United States from how she views herself, noting that according to her experience and perception of democracy, the United States is not an ideal example. Although recognizing that democratic systems protect ‘unalienable rights to live freely,’ Aisha was unclear as to whether or not the US democracy follows this principle in practice.

*I think Islam is compatible with democracy, I don’t think the democratic system in America is democracy. Do you understand what I’m saying? So I don’t have a problem*
with my religion. My religion supports whatever political system the Muslim lives in. So if you go to a Socialist, Communist, dictatorship, whatever, as long as that government is not taking away peoples’ unalienable rights to live freely, you are required to support that political system because you chose to live in that country. And if I live in a democracy, which I’m supposed to, then I support democracy. Now, that’s my religious belief. My personal belief is yes, the world should be run in a democracy. But to run a democracy successfully, you have to educate people. And I don’t think we’re doing that. So it’s a great system theoretically, but we’re not taking the practical steps to get it done.

Although Aisha stated that she faces little discrimination concerning her religious beliefs and her views of democracy, she found that many have viewed her opposition to poverty to be unnerving. (Not democracy but people have opposed me saying that I don’t think people should die for lack of money. You know, that’s considered Socialist and Communist.) She noted the influence of professors on her ability to critique the US democracy (Influenced my understanding of democracy, no. Influenced my understanding of how democracy is not carried out properly in the US, yes), and the lack of encouragement of political participation found in the local mosques (Like, national Imams do, you know celebrity Imams, but not local ones. I think they need to speak about more relevant issues from the pulpit. One of which is political participation.).

Isir

Isir was a senior at NMSU with a major in Finance and a minor in Accounting when interviewed (she has since graduated). Isir’s upbringing involved socialization in many nations: she was born in Alabama but raised in Egypt from the age of three to eleven, and from twelve to nineteen lived in Saudi Arabia. This latter experience was described by Isir as the “most influential” on her development.
Isir discussed her experience as a Muslim citizen of the United States to be mostly positive, but does not plan to settle in the US.

*I mean for educational purposes, for jobs, I think it’s a very good place. To raise a family, I wouldn’t want to do that. But for a young person, unmarried and you know basically just wanting to build himself, I like the place.*

When asked why she would not raise a family here, Isir commented on culture shock and a lack of confidence in the K-12 education system (*Here I don’t think I could, I don’t like the schools, the high school, the elementary, or you know the schooling system here. I don’t like the environment I would say.*) She offered a more extensive critique of US strategies for homeland security, noting a compromise of human decency and lack of logic when accusing Muslims of terrorist activity.

*Sometimes in America they, that’s the problem with the Bush administration, they would go so far as to humiliate people just to find some link, some very flimsy link to some other flimsy link to some terrorist. I mean you have to use your logic. What’s more important, basic human decency, or like you know what’s happening in airports, for example. I think it’s ridiculous to strip search or, or just humiliate someone, someone who’s obviously not a terrorist. I mean don’t go out of your way, if you do your basic standard search and don’t go out of your way to humiliate people.*

Although Isir stated that she did not encounter issues concerning her views of Islam and democracy, she commented on the conflict felt within the Muslim community when Muslims of different religious schools or cultures intermingle, explaining her reasoning for limiting attendance at a local mosque.
Islam should be like breathing. You know, it’s simple; you don’t have to overdo it. And they have to go “Sister, sister”, I mean seriously like you know my name, I’m your friend, you don’t have to call me a title. It’s fine if you don’t know me, but they really overdo the whole now we should live in the freaking first century. And it’s contrived.

Isir’s above description of Islam is intriguing. She chose a natural process, breathing, to reflect her understanding of the ease with which the religion should be enacted. This further underscores a unique perception of why some members of the Muslim American community may encounter conflict between their Islamic values and identities as citizens of the US democracy—“overdoing it,” – or, in other words, exaggerating religious practice to compensate for the influence of US society, spurning American identity, and in turn, discouraging participation in civil society.

Similar to Aisha, Isir also questioned the authenticity of the US democracy, describing the imbalance between private and public sectors in the US economy as a breeding ground for corruption.

I mean you always have a balance between the two, you have public and private, so when you have the private sector and it becomes too powerful like in here in America, Exxon, all these corporations, they are way too powerful, they lobby, so in the end of the day, what’s ruling the country is corporations, it’s not really the people. So that’s why it’s not really a real democracy. But so that’s why you need to have a mixed economy. I think a mixed economy with public services, like which are the basic services, public schools, health... I think health is a pretty basic thing, I don’t know why people make a big issue about it.
Isir found much more influence from her family than from local Imams in regards to her development of understanding of Islamic values (I’m not too influenced by Sheikhs or Imams. In Egypt, or at least in my family, your father represents the biggest role), but offered a critique of Imams of the United States, analyzing the widespread practice of mosques setting aside a day of prayer on 9/11 as an apologetic stance.

*It did not feel good, it felt like a kiss-ass. And that’s the part where you don’t need to defend yourself, if you defend yourself that means you are involved with 9/11. When people ask how I feel about 9/11, it’s a tragedy, but it’s not my fault, I didn’t do it. It’s a tragedy just like what’s happening in the Gaza and everything.*

*Mika*

Mika is a freshman at NMSU studying Chemistry/Pre-Med. Although he was born and raised in the United States, both of his parents are from Palestine, and they are highly involved in the Arab American community.

*They’ve had involvement in things such as GCAAA, which is the Greater City Arab American Association. My dad was president of that for a couple of years I believe, like ten or eleven years ago. And my mom she’s always involved with a lot of cultural activities, such as her [interfaith] dialogues.*

When asked about his experience as a Muslim citizen of the United States’ democracy, Mika described his political alignment as what he considered similar to the “*general Muslim*”: morally conservative and politically liberal. Mika noted a strong bias against George W. Bush, however, and also stated that “*a lot of Muslims are*” biased against him. Despite this bias, Mika expressed a wish to remain moderate (*I try to just keep a level head about politics and listen to*
both sides of the story, and make my decisions based on what’s going to be best for me and my family.

Mika stated that his bias against George W. Bush was “because of the actions afterwards [after 9/11] like the war in Iraq,” and due to this, much like Aisha and Isir, found flaws in the legitimacy of the US democracy.

The ideal democracy, I think that would be without bias, and if there’s no bias then the Muslims aren’t going to hate the Republicans because you know with everything that happened after 9/11. Obviously like I said there’s the bias against them because of the actions afterwards like the war in Iraq. I think if we had an ideal democracy people are getting represented.

In terms of personal experience, Mika highlighted a moment from his high school AP Government course, outlining the need for teachers to lay down a foundation of knowledge before discussing controversial topics with students.

When we first started talking about Pastor Jones, we were discussing the whole concept about burning a holy book. And we had one person in our class who started going off, started saying that, you know, it’s fine to burn the Quran. And I mean that wasn’t the problem, of course I mean it was a little bit shocking for me to hear that, but that’s not the problem, that’s their opinion. But then they started talking about how Muslims are out to kill the infidels and I don’t think she knows what the correct definition of infidel is, in the culture [it] has nothing to do with people who follow Judaism or Christianity but that’s what she drew it out as. And again that was just a lack of knowledge on her part.
This situation helped Mika develop his advice and suggestions for both university professors and local Imams in regards to the understanding of Islamic and democratic values for non-Muslim students, and the navigation of these values for Muslim students.

Well first of all, you have to educate them about Islam, and then you can set up that environment that’s conducive to people being able to express their opinions about the two being informed... because that’s still a problem, you know stereotypes and that. I believe the main problem with stereotypes is people are uninformed.

Rashid

Rashid is a junior at NMSU studying Information Technology. He was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, and came to the United States shortly before beginning university. Rashid discussed his upbringing in Saudi Arabia as a great influence on his understanding of Islamic values. (Mainly I would say schools back home, like there’s religion classes and stuff, so they’re teaching Islam in school.) When asked about his experience as a Muslim citizen of a democracy, he discussed the importance of participation in Islam, and compared this to democratic engagement.

I believe that we’re supposed to have participation. As Muslims I believe that democracy is getting along with Islam. Because Islam, one of its main principles is choosing who leads you, and choosing who’s in charge. And voting is one of the values that Islam is encouraging for, so I would say that democracy is another face of Islamic principles. We’re supposed to have democratic participation and a lot of these rights are given by a country like the United States, so...
Although Rashid did not directly discuss situations of discrimination or conflict concerning his views of religion and democracy, he offered his interpretation of why people may consider Islam and democracy to be dichotomous.

*It depends on how people understand religion. Islam is practiced in a different way from one country to another. There are so many social values added to religion itself. For example, women’s rights are really granted in Islam, while Saudi Arabia is still in progress toward achieving these goals. People might think that women are not having their own rights in Islam because of how countries are practicing. I don’t think that there’s really something there conflicting with democracy, but there’s some behaviors and some strategies or policies that certain countries are following that might seem like they’re conflicting with democracy itself. So I would say that there’s usually so many other symptoms that might be considered in democracy, that are not part of Islam, while they’re social values, or tribal values, that these countries are used to.*

Rashid was unsure of suggestions to offer university professors in regards to assisting Muslim American students. Although he appeared pleased with the efforts of Imam Naim Al Din, who is a participant in this study and leads the CMCC community where Rashid attends, Rashid shared general advice for all Imams.

*I believe that they could be more involved into the society, like the democratic society. And by this, they’re encouraging me to be participating in a democracy. So a suggestion would be Imams could encourage their own societies and their own communities to be more involved by telling them about it and initiating to be a part of the democratic community.*
Inclusion of the Muslim American Voice: Shared Experience as Transformational Discourse

Although prolific in presence, the initial phenomenological focus of this study required the use of the above excerpts from individual interviews. By stringing together participant profiles with the students’ own words, a descriptive understanding of the lived experience of each Muslim American student may be garnered by the reader, and simultaneously, the members of this marginalized population are granted a platform to express their ontological and epistemological perspectives.

The second aim of this study—to construct a transformational discourse via the lived experiences of Muslim American students and the perspectives of their professors and local Imams—is explored through the analysis of several common themes that emerged from the participants’ discussions of Islam and democracy. The findings are presented here with support from participant quotes, and will be analyzed in comparison to the literature’s deconstructed discourse in the following discussion and analysis chapter.

After reviewing the data from each interview, a prominent discourse of shared themes emerged from the participants’ words. This discourse included three broad categories, each with sub-themes:

1. The compatibility of Islamic and democratic values
   a. Equality and respect for all
   b. Freedom as a basic human right: Product and process
   c. Education as foundation and purpose

2. Challenges to integrating Islamic practice with US democratic engagement
   a. Corruption and greed: The dangers of unbridled capitalism
   b. We don’t take kindly to Others: The Euro-Christian tradition
c. Human-centric vs. God-centric

3. Suggestions for Imams, professors, and students
   a. Fighting ignorance with knowledge
   b. Participation: Democracy’s life-blood
   c. Keeping it real: Staying connected to the next generation

The Compatibility of Islamic and Democratic Values

Equality and Respect for All

All student participants in this study discussed Islam and democracy as compatible to an extent, some citing the two as fully interchangeable in values, and others noting similarities but also highlighting areas of complication. The concepts of equality and respect were frequently mentioned as aligning values between Islam and democracy. When asked about her perception of Islamic values, for example, Aisha stated, “I think between me and society, first thing is to live and let live. In regards to living and let living, that’s stated specifically in the Quran and it’s also my own political belief.” Aisha further clarified her consideration of democratic values with the concept “that every person counts and that the majority should not oppress the minority.”

Leila echoed this evaluation with the following assessment of Islamic and democratic values:

   The level of respect [in Islam] you have to show for others and our parents specifically. I really think that helps me a lot. Like just knowing that you’re supposed to respect your family, your friends, everyone around you to the uppermost level of decency. And in a democracy, again, you show respect for your citizens. Everyone, you know, treats everyone equally.

Rashid noted a direct interchangeability between the equality valued in Islam and emphasized in democratic nations. When asked about his perception of Islamic values, Rashid stated: “I would
say equal rights and justice and freedom of speech,” and when separately asked about
democratic values, he insisted “[the Islamic values], they’re the same as I feel that democracy
has.” Interestingly, Imam Naim Al Din of the City Muslim Community Center, the mosque
where Rashid attends Friday prayer, shared this exact perception.

This combination of equality and respect culminates in peace, which Nora defined as a
guiding force of Islam: “I know we value peace. Because most people look at a Muslim and
think that it’s extremist, and that’s not what the religion is.” This focus on debunking the
stereotype of Muslims as violent extremists may relate to Nora’s experience in Mauritania,
where she was split between her identity as a Fulani, black African Muslim and a traditional
Arab Muslim. Growing up in an environment riddled with ethnic tension, it would be logical for
Nora to relate to and subsequently emphasize the peaceful core of her religious beliefs. Dr. Jalil,
the Muslim director of Islamic Studies at NMSU, referred to verses in the Quran and instructions
to Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) to support his claim of truth and peace as the two
essential concepts in Islam:

So what I’m saying is that this was a reflection of that dual commitment of Islam, truth
and peace. Truth, and on the one hand, which is certainly the primary value, but peace
and tolerance at the same time. And I guess peace, tolerance, and diversity, there’s this
complex of these three things that comes out because the Quran says, even if you wish,
not all people will ever convert to you oh Prophet. You know, so the Prophet is being
told, look you know, you want everybody to convert but that’s not going to happen.
Don’t fret about it; don’t force other people to do it.
Dr. Jalil then compared this to the values of democracy, stating “Well, democracy has only one value, if you will. Take truth out of it, and it has to do with peace and coexistence and diversity. Those are the values that democracy most seeks after.”

Dr. Stephen, the non-Muslim professor referred by NMSU student Aisha, also noted a respect for others as equals in his interpretation of Islamic values:

*One essential tenant of Islam would be obedience to God. And, as I interpret that, that means also a respect for and compassion towards everything that God has created. Everything that would be considered within God’s domain, and so that includes people, the environment, and anything that people hold as valuable. Their property for example. So that would entail adherence to specific rules and some basic understandings between people so that people treat each other with respect, and are not infringing upon each other’s freedoms, things like that. That would be my understanding.*

Finally, both Imams interviewed – Imam Khaliq of the Remington mosque and Islamic center and Imam Naim Al Din of the City Muslim Community Center—highlighted equality as granted by Islam and supported by democracy. As stated by Imam Khaliq:

*Because all of us come from God and God is our Supreme Being, you know? No one is superior to anyone. There is only one superior which is God. And that is the main cornerstone to strike the concept of equality. Equality of man before God.*

Imam Naim Al Din further stated, “*Allah subhana wa ta’ala (God, the most glorious and exalted) is absolutely fair. Allah subhana wa ta’ala does not oppress anyone. Allah subhana wa ta’ala says: ‘Oh people we make you or create you out of Adam and Eve, and we make you equal.’*”
Freedom As a Basic Human Right: Product and Process

A second concept prominent in the discourse constructed by the participants of this study was an emphasis on the shared value of freedom. For many participants, this principle was discussed as a basic human right. Rashid described Islamic history as a foundation for the granting of freedom of speech:

*And freedom of speech is something that is granted in Islam as well. Like if you go back into the history, in the Prophet’s time, there used to be, they were called hadiqas. It used to be a council where people used to gather and give their own political opinions, give their own criticisms about what’s going on in their community. And even in war, we can remember there’s something in Pharisees, a story where he had a suggestion to the Prophet, so the Prophet would listen to him as well, even though he’s the president, even though he’s the leader of Muslims, he could listen to one normal person because [that person], he has the right to say whatever he wants.*

Leila and Mika both cited this freedom as a right to choose their paths and actions, so long as the rights of others are not infringed upon. To them, this functioned as support for the compatibility of Islam and democracy. As stated by Leila:

*Conflicting? Not really. I feel like actually, when you look at it, after you asked this question I realized that they do have a lot in common. Just you know, basically democracy is supposed to be things you can do that are moral.*

Although Leila expressed a distinct lack of interest in politics in her everyday life, the above quote shows an example of how, after reflection, her perception of Islam and democracy developed. Mika echoed Leila’s view, referencing the US democracy’s stipulation for freedom of religion as a method of securing the ability for people to “live the life that they want without
difficulties”. Aisha extended the above to state that Islam is adaptable to any governmental system, so long as basic human rights, such as freedom, are granted. As noted earlier, she states:

*My religion supports whatever political system the Muslim lives in. So if you go to a Socialist, Communist, dictatorship, whatever, as long as that government is not taking away peoples’ unalienable rights to live freely, you are required to support that political system because you chose to live in that country.*

Dr. Amina, a Muslim professor at MWSU, highlighted the granting of these human rights by every religion, noting that the “same message has been shared will all Prophets... so within that context, our values as human beings should be the same”. Imam Khaliq and Imam Naim Al Din confirmed this, with Imam Khaliq stating:

*Islam, as other religions, came with the human values. To emphasize the human life, the human dignity, the human fulfillment of necessity, the right to live, the right to express feeling. Right to be free. The right to choose your religion, right to feel secure. To be honored, you know? All of those are human values, right to be able to choose, right to religion. That is rights given by God, not by the government or someone else. We all are equal in regards to those rights.*

Imam Naim Al Din related this to compatibility between Islam and democracy, and further highlighted the democratic nature of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).

*The Imam said because the same values in Islam are the same values in democracy and the same values in other religions, that declare for him all the natural rights to the people—he thinks they are the same. In addition, who reads the biography of the*

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2 As noted in the methodology chapter, a translator was present for interviews with Imam Naim Al Din, thus all quotes from the Imam were interpreted and spoken by his translator.
Prophet, peace be upon him, he will find that true democracy was applied by the Prophet, peace be upon him, regarding Muslims and non-Muslims in the old Islamic nation.

Freedom was not only discussed as a right—a static product provided by religion and protected by democracy—but also as a method to further the democratic process. Through freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, etc., democracies, and any social systems for that matter, are challenged, supported, motivated, and morphed. Isir outlined this as an essential tenant of Islam:

*Islam says you should question your faith, and question the Quran and so forth. And then that’s what democracy says, you should question the people who are representing you like in the government or whatever it is, so I think they go hand in hand. You should always question whatever it is that you’re doing. Why put a slogan if you don’t really believe in it? You should fully understand what you say you are. And I don’t say I’m many things, but I know I’m Muslim.*

Although the above quote appears to stem from Isir’s revolutionary nature—she admitted to being “rebellious against social norms”—Dr. Jalil also discussed historical incidents of revolution similar to the current state of affairs in North Africa and parts of the Middle East, and highlighted an Islamic concept that is not well-known in the popular discourse: shoora, or consultation with the people.

*Historically, Muslim governments have had a complicated history with freedom, but the idea of people deciding their fate, people having a say, the idea of shoora, was absolutely essential. It’s in the Quran, it’s in the Hadith, and the first century and a half of Islamic history is full of revolts against oppressive rulers. Precisely in the name of shoora, in the name of consultation with the people.*
Education as Foundation and Purpose

A third theme concerning the compatibility of Islam and democracy also emerged, related to the role of two components of education—teaching and learning—in the existence, practice, and maintenance of Islam and democracy. According to Aisha’s interpretation of the values of Islam, “to learn and to use that knowledge for the better of humanity” and “to educate, not just about religion but about everything” are essential tenants. She supported this with text from the Quran: “And in regards to seeking knowledge, that’s everywhere in the Quran. The first, Ayyah to come down was ‘Read.’ The first verse I guess to ever be written was ‘Read.’” Nora agreed, stating that learning was a main value of Islam.

Other students cited education systems and self-education as influential forces in their understanding of democracy. As stated by Mika:

That’s any kind of education I’ve had. Especially AP US government last year. That was probably where I took more, because I had been more really democrat. And I kind of reexamined things in that class. Like we got to talking about political views, and I thought about well, I do fall more along the lines of being a moderate because I share views of both parties.

Although Mika initially encountered difficulty when attempting to overcome his biases against George W. Bush and in turn the Republican Party, the above experience with education appeared to assist him in his understanding of political views and their corresponding values. Rashid echoed this stress on the role of education, adding a comparative element that was more relevant to his upbringing in Saudi Arabia:
I would say school as well, community, media... comparing countries to others, like to another one. I would say all these presidential elections and debates that take place, they usually contribute to clarify the idea of democracy more.

In correspondence with her independent nature, Isir discovered methods of critical thinking through self-education, making connections between film and literary themes and the reality of the US democracy.

Oh yeah, how did I forget that, my favorite book is 1984. And after that book I think I was, even with V for Vendetta, at that stage I was just seventeen or something, and then I think that really made me question authority as a whole, and question commercialism and things like that.

Dr. Amina, a Muslim MWSU professor of American Cultural Studies and Women’s Studies, stressed the importance of her position as an educator in passing on the ability to effectively understand and deconstruct US society, and in turn, the US interpretation of democracy.

If I am able convince only handfuls of my students that there is something fundamentally wrong in our society, and we need to shift those power relations if we care about social justice, then I think I am successful in a way that at least a few people are starting to think that what the mainstream media is telling me, or mainstream society tells me actually is a lie. And it is a big lie. And I need to see that lie very nakedly and then say okay I’m not going to participate in that system in the same way that I was participating.

So I do think that even if a couple of people start thinking differently, there’s hope.

Dr. Jalil agreed with this, but also presented the position of professor as an opportunity to assist Muslim American students with navigating Islamic and democratic values in their daily lives.
Well, if democracy is about education, and if the greatest threat to democracy anywhere is false propaganda—then I think professors teaching, Muslim professors in particular, have an absolutely crucial role in enabling American democracy. So in that sense, I see my work as directly related to the thickening of civic bonds, if you will. In America, where Americans, Muslim and non-Muslim, can understand each other and respect each other, without reducing the other to something that they want. In other words, Americans should be able to respect Muslims despite acknowledging the differences in their viewpoints. And that is not possible without a good education in history of Islam, history of America... and the same thing on the Muslim side, understanding American democracy in a dynamic way, not in a simplistic kind of way, either good or bad.

Looking at both the threats and opportunities—I think that is necessary for American Muslims and American society to continue in a democratic direction.

According to Imam Naim Al Din, the role Dr. Jalil described above also applies to Muslim spiritual leaders, who, by fostering religious growth, motivate students to act as ‘good citizens.’

Starting with self-reform, how to become a better Muslim. And by becoming a better Muslim that person will understand the true democracy and the true Islam. And so educating the youth who are in the mosque to become better youth, better Muslims, will enable them to understand the main values of Islam and the main values of democracy.

Both Leila and Samarah discussed education as a resource for dispelling stereotypes of Muslim students. Although Leila encountered situations of discrimination, she shrugged these incidents off, marking the ignorance displayed by commentators as a failure to take advantage of their democratic right to education (You have the right to educate yourself, just they’ve not taken advantage of that right). Samarah displayed an eagerness to answer others’ questions about
Islam, hoping that by educating them, she might sever the spread of false information. This eagerness may be inspired by Samarah’s mother, an American convert, who Samarah stated was a great influence on her understanding of Islam. As a convert, Samarah’s mother was exposed to Islamic education as an adult, and therefore more willing and prepared to answer Samarah’s questions regarding their shared faith.

I’m always open to people asking me about religion. I mean it happens all the time, even if I’m in the grocery store, people will come up to me and ask me. I actually would prefer it. Because I would rather them get information from me. I mean on the Internet and stuff sometimes there’s really backwards things.

Dr. Sophia and Dr. Stephen, the non-Muslim professor participants in this study, confirmed the power of Muslim American students to challenge popular perceptions of Islam and re-present themselves. By questioning students, Dr. Sophia gained a better understanding of not only Islam, but also the unique experience and enactment of the religion by each individual.

So it’s been nice to talk to Muslim students about what their personal experiences have been, what they’ve been taught by their family or where they grew up or, you know, oh my family is from Lebanon, and so this is what we talk about in Lebanon, or oh my family is Pakistani, and in Pakistan it’s much more conservative. So it’s sort of been a good learning experience for me to know more about what they’re actually experiencing.

This also resonated with Dr. Stephen, who called Muslim American students “the best spokespersons for Islam at NMSU,” citing their interactions with other students and professors as doing “more to dispel myths about Islam and stereotypes than [he] ever could standing in front of the class lecturing.”
Challenges to Integrating Islamic Practice With US Democratic Engagement

Although all student participants found Islam and democracy fundamentally compatible, this compatibility relies on certain assumptions. By deconstructing both ideologies to expose the common values of equality, respect, freedom, human rights, and a valuation of education, each dogmatic system is perceived in an idealistic manner. In practice, however, these values may not be strictly supported. Also, both Islam and democracy take shape in various forms throughout the world—as stated by Dr. Stephen: “there are different flavors of democracy just like there are different flavors of Islam”—but by denoting common themes, the description of Islamic and democratic values provided by participants becomes monochromatic. Although the formation of an alternative discourse via participant perceptions requires the highlighting of shared values, this is not intended to oversimplify the academic understanding of either Islam or democracy, or mark the alternative discourse constructed as comprehensive. Respect for and acknowledgement of the perceptions of this particular sample of participants is vital to the goals of this study and the phenomenological methodology employed, however. Furthermore, although participants overwhelmingly described Islam and democracy as complimentary, in the practical context of the US specifically, several challenges to combining Islamic practice with democratic engagement were outlined.

Corruption and Greed: The Dangers of Unbridled Capitalism

Firstly, consideration of the distinctive characteristics of the US relationship between democracy and capitalism brought forth complications. One prominent theme discussed by students and professors alike related to difficulties stemming from the US brand of capitalism, such as corruption, materialism, and debt. Isir’s background as a major in Finance emerged throughout this discussion:
America, the problem is, is individualism first and foremost. And then hand in hand, of course economically, capitalism. Because you have people that want to have that car, that lawn, that yard, that American dream at whatever costs. So usually we say like if you get a dollar, you spend .50 and you save .50 or whatever, but in America you get a dollar and you spend five dollars. So I mean that conflicts with logic, and conflicts with Islam of course. Because Islam is very much against debt.

Dr. Amina expanded this materialistic desire to the global level, commenting on US domination of socio-economic resources across the world.

It is not only political power but it is also socio-economic power. The United States of America declares itself a democratic country along with other Western and European countries, and in the end this is the result, that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, and the world resources are even more restricted in a sense that only a few big corporations are making profits and the wealth is coming into the hands of few people, few elite, mostly white male.

Dr. Jalil labeled the above negative consequences as the result of “unbridled capitalism,” which he described as not only a threat to the compatibility of the US economic system and Islam, but also to the legitimacy of the US democracy.

The greatest challenge to American democracy are those who manipulate democratic institutions, and public opinions, not just public opinion but public desires, based on their access to media and ultimately, money. Unbridled capitalism is I think one of the biggest, if not the biggest threat to American democracy. But, I think theoretically we can see that look, liberalist capitalist democracy which is based on people serving their
own desires and an economy that creates desires, makes people buy more, trash more
and seek more and more and more pleasure—that’s not going to work.

The risks of this corruption led Samarah to resist the idea of unconditional compatibility
between Islam and US democracy. Samarah described herself as reserved in terms of democratic
participation, and although this was prominently due to a fear of misrepresenting the Muslim
American population, her civic engagement was also deflated by the potential for this corruption.

Well I mean I know that government in general isn’t exactly honest all the time. So I
mean with democracy in general I’m thinking if the people have good values, then
generally what they would be asking for, like in a nutshell, would be normal things, like
they’re not going to be asking for terrible things. It’s just with corruption nowadays, it’s
really hard.

Rather than highlighting this criticism, Rashid offered an example of an alternative interpretation
of capitalism enacted in his country of origin, Saudi Arabia. According to Rashid, Saudi Arabia’s
interpretation of capitalism incorporates Islamic financial principles such as transparency in
banking institutions and a repugnance toward the charging of interest (Gaunaurd, Abdelhady, &
Issa, 2011):

If I compare some countries that are Islamic, such as Saudi Arabia, I know their situation
over there. They’re following capitalism as well. But they’re differentiating themselves
with very little differences. For example, the banking system is kind of different back
home than it is in the United States. I mean even taxation or things like that, or interest
in banks—these things are really different. [They’re] like the Islamic banking or these
other financial Islamic laws.
Finally, Dr. Stephen discussed an important assumption in the discussion of US democracy and capitalism:

*Democracy and capitalism often get confused, and oftentimes they’re discussed in the US as if they’re inseparable. You can’t do a democracy without capitalism. Capitalism is democracy. A lot of that traces back to Friedman’s work... his book is on my shelf somewhere... yeah! Here it is. ‘Capitalism and Freedom.’ And the basic argument he’s making is well, how can you really have freedom without capitalism? Yes I mean if you’re rich, then yeah, it gives you a lot of freedom... if you’re poor, capitalism doesn’t really give you much freedom. If anything it takes away. So, I don’t necessarily agree with that but again I’ve spent a lot of time living overseas, so I’ve been opened up to different perspectives a lot of people living in the US haven’t.*

The above comment by Dr. Stephen exposes a distinct criticism of the US democracy’s heavy reliance on capitalism, interestingly from the perspective of a *non-Muslim* professor. The implications of this will be analyzed further in the following discussion and analysis chapter.

*We Don’t Take Kindly to Others: The Euro-Christian Tradition*

Further complications beyond the consequences of unbridled capitalism were also found, such as the Euro-Christian foundation of the US democracy. This history, according to many participants, clouds the acceptance of ‘Others’—anyone who does not fit the Euro-Christian mold faces marginalization, discrimination, and a forced incompatibility. Although aware of the categorization of Muslim Americans as ‘Other,’ Aisha’s background in sociology assisted her in noting this as consistent with the pattern of US treatment toward all minority groups, whether classified by gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.
I think throughout American history there’s always been a group that’s not allowed to live. And that group changes and they think that’s progress, but it’s not progress because the oppression and discrimination are still there, they’re just redirected at someone else.

Leila, Samarah, and Mika all mentioned incidents of discrimination and/or misunderstanding from educators and peers, isolating them as ‘un-American’ due to their appearance and religious values, which differ from the monocultural Euro-Christian tradition. As discussed by Leila, who (along with Samarah, Aisha, and Isir) wears hijab:

They automatically assume you’re not from here. And you know, how long have you been in this country? I was born here. And I have people tell me go back to where you came from, you know, you’re not American, you’re not this, you’re not that. So yeah I’ve had that a lot.

Dr. Stephen, as a sociology professor, discussed how he addresses many of these issues in his courses. When asked about the influence he hoped to have on his Muslim American students, he laughed, stating:

You know, honestly though, I think I’m less concerned about them and more concerned about all the other students in the class. From what I can tell from the Muslim students who speak up in class, they get it. They know; they’ve lived it.

The latter statement in this quote exposes an intriguing understanding of Muslim American students: “They know; they’ve lived it”. In other words, according to Dr. Stephen’s perception, Muslim American students live the challenges of existing as a minority within the US democracy with every day, a striking thought when considered in relation to this study’s phenomenological framework. In regards to other students in the class, he continued:
I suspect they’re the ones who need to hear about that more than others. And of course in sociology there’s been a lot of research done about the transparency of whiteness or invisible whiteness, and when you’re white, especially like me, white and male, a lot of your privileges just come as a granted thing, it’s given and you never think about it. You don’t even imagine it, and you don’t think about what it would be like to be someone else, to always have someone suspicious of you as you’re walking down the street. To have people wonder about your true intentions and things like this, to hear jokes being made about you behind your back and things like that. And so I hope that they’re the ones who get the message.

Dr. Amina, as a professor of American Cultural Studies, also commented on the authenticity of the US valuation of diversity:

The thing is that I have a big problem with this democratic face that we value diversity. And I teach a course on American culture. And this is one big issue. Anyone who has studied, who has researched, knows very well that in the end of the day what we are actually valuing is white, middle-class, Eurocentric values.

The institutionalization of this Eurocentricity, according to Dr. Amina, served to complicate her practice of Islam.

So, for instance the holiday pattern is not according to my faith. If I want to take a day off on Eid I have to make an effort to say that this is what I want. The daily routine is not according to ours. If a class is scheduled at or during Friday prayer, I cannot just say that I am not going to teach it. When I have a decision-making power I do make sure that I don’t teach in that slot. Nonetheless sometimes I don’t have that choice, so I think when
we say democratic we need to be very clear that in the end of the day it is a very Euro-Christian country.

Dr. Jalil elaborated upon this discord, rationalizing it as a common issue for countries with histories of immigration, but also offering hope in the definition of democracy as a malleable process.

And if you’re saying is it possible or not to live within liberal democracy? Well I would say: yes, but. It has been possible of course in many ways, but you see, liberal democracy is not a thing; it is not one system that has worked out all of its problems. It’s a process. It keeps changing. In Europe, you had some kind of you know, secular democracy in France until there were a lot of Muslims who are challenging the way the French saw themselves; and same thing in Scandinavia, they were some of the most secular, tolerant countries, and they are turning into quite intolerant countries because they’re realizing that their democracy cannot handle these differences. That means their democracy presumed certain homogeneity. They expected everybody to be the same, everybody to be some sort of Protestant Christian or Catholic Christian background, which they have left, you know they’re okay with certain social norms, mores, and when that begins to be challenged, the ideals of democracy, that it’s human beings that matter and you know, it doesn’t matter where you come from—they begin to be challenged, fundamentally.

Human-centric vs. God-centric

Although only raised by one professor participant—Dr. Amina—the contradiction between the human-centered structure of democracy and God-centered structure of Islam was found to be a strong criticism of the compatibility between Islam and democracy, and in efforts to present a comprehensive review of the discourse constructed by participants, it is thus
Dr. Amina was the only participant to declare Islam and democracy as wholly incompatible. Her argument is as follows:

According to Islam, we as human beings, we are not the center of the world. It is God who is the center of the world and it is our responsibility to figure out what God wants us to do. The way He wants us to live, and the way He wants us to conduct our social relations. In democracy, on the other hand, we believe that we as human beings, we are capable of deriving our values, our social system, our laws, as human beings and then implementing them accordingly. So, in that sense then we as human beings become the center as opposed to God. So these are totally two different worlds. Two different perspectives, two different realities. And because I am very clear on them, I never even try bringing them together.

The implications and weight of this argument will be analyzed alongside the dominant discourse in the following chapter.

Suggestions for Imams, Professors, and Students

Fighting Ignorance with Knowledge

Beyond providing an in-depth qualitative assessment of the topic of Islam and democracy, this study also produced practical suggestions for Imams, professors, and Muslim American students in regards to their understanding and/or enactment of Islamic and democratic values. As mentioned, all participants placed great emphasis on the benefits of education, particularly toward the dispelling of stereotypes and dissipation of discrimination. Student and Imam participants advised that professors learn more about Islam, whether through exposure to Muslims and/or Islamic culture, or textual resources. As stated by Samarah:
I mean sometimes you’ll run across professors in general that don’t really know much about Islam. And they play on stereotypes. So, what I would say is, if they’re obviously knowledgeable in politics, to maybe brush up a little on the religion so that they can maybe incorporate them successfully without trying to call on stereotypes.

After describing a negative experience in his AP US Government class, Mika echoed this need for education in regards to both professors and his non-Muslim peers:

Well first of all, you have to educate them about Islam, and then you can set up that environment that’s conducive to people being able to express their opinions about the two being informed... because that’s still a problem, you know stereotypes and that. I believe the main problem with stereotypes is because people are uninformed.

Nora promoted a student-centered solution for the lack of understanding displayed by professors and non-Muslim students, suggesting, “students share with students [and] Islamic students talk about their experiences.” This method was described as preferred and even most effective by both non-Muslim professors interviewed. Dr. Stephen cited personal experience:

But, speaking from myself personally, as you can tell, a lot of my appreciation and understanding of Islam comes from other people. And I did mention that yeah, I’ve read books, and books are useful, but there is no substitute for getting to know people.

Personal contact, the sense of connection with people, that you realize that these are other human beings, and hearing their perspective on things, there is no substitute for that. So maybe the best thing they could do is if they don’t have that kind of experience, diversify. Get to know some people. Go out to lunch with them, or have dinner with them, something like that.
Imam Khaliq and Imam Naim Al Din encouraged establishing proactive relationships between mosques and universities, suggesting that professors take advantage of the resources available to them in the surrounding community. Imam Khaliq described previous experiences with this type of interaction as successful:

*I think to touch base with Islamic centers. Inviting speakers from Islamic community. I mean get assistance from the Islamic center. Asking Imams to come to a class. To be present, you know, from time to time to answer some questions. I found this to be very helpful here.*

Imam Naim Al Din reiterated this: “*I would suggest that university professors meet with Imams and discuss together the core Islamic values and how to educate the Muslim students at university.*”

Education was not only prescribed for professors—several participants advised that Imams develop a critical understanding of the US democracy in order to better understand their congregation and the system within which they reside. Dr. Sophia suggested that Imams encourage their community members to “*think critically.*” In order to validate this encouragement, however, Dr. Jalil stated that Imams must act as role models by first becoming efficient critics themselves:

*The Imams, it’s not that they oppose democracy; many of them of course will praise democracy. The problem is that they don’t have any critical or realistic attitude towards it, they don’t know what it is, they don’t know what to criticize, they don’t know what rights democracy gives them. They don’t know where to stand up for justice and you know, be a role model for what it means to be a dissenter in a democracy. I guess to*
some degree, this is particularly the case with immigrant Imams, they think that submission is the only way to be good citizens.

Participation: Democracy’s Life-Blood

All students, Imams, and professors involved in this study prominently discussed the importance of participation, whether in education or civic life, which, as argued by Dr. Stephen, are one in the same. Democracy was described as a process that relies on active engagement from citizens to function. For Muslim American students, Muslim professors, and Imams, this participation serves a dual purpose: by taking part in the process, the members of this marginalized population not only enable the democratic system, they also increase their representation and voice in the wider society, reclaiming their identities as American citizens. Many students stated a desire for Imams to encourage civic participation, including Aisha, who is highly involved in local and national campaigns and political events (I think they need to speak about more relevant issues from the pulpit. One of which is political participation), and Rashid:

I believe that they could be more involved into the society, like the democratic society. And by this they’re encouraging me to be participating in a democracy. So a suggestion would be Imams could encourage their own societies and their own communities to be more involved by telling them about it and initiating to be a part of the democratic community.

Imam Khaliq agreed, suggesting that other Imams follow this advice:

Getting involved, really. Getting involved with the social arena, the political arena.

Interfaith dialogue. To be in the front. The front in every human function. Be that Islamic or non-Islamic.
Imam Khaliq’s encouragement of involvement may stem from his experience as head of the Remington Islamic Center, which offers educational Islamic resources to non-Muslim and Muslim members of the wider community, and regularly hosts informative lectures and discussions.

Professors also encouraged the participation of students in civic life via campus involvement. As stated by Dr. Stephen:

But I think the best spokespersons for Islam here at NMSU are the students themselves. The Muslim students. So I can get up there and you know, speak for an hour about what I saw in Bangladesh or what theories say about religion, and that’s just another professor speaking. But when they hear these students speaking, and speaking quite clearly, and very sensibly, and very persuasively about various issues, it defies what they may have heard on Fox news. But also remember that I was arguing that participation is a daily occurrence. So just going to class and talking in class about some of the issues that we talk about in sociology, which are public issues, you know we’re not talking about physics or biology, we’re talking about policies and how people live their lives, that’s civic participation too. And they’re already doing that and they’re doing a great job of it.

Dr. Sophia, the faculty advisor for Amnesty International, discussed the benefits of involvement beyond the classroom, marking membership in student organizations, particularly the Muslim Student Association (MSA), as an educational form of civic participation:

Including Muslim Student Association, you know, educate the rest of the community about what does it mean to be a Muslim student. What is it like to be a Muslim student?
What is Islam about? What are the values of Islam? So we can answer these questions better. And to become more visible is a good thing; it’s an empowering thing.

Dr. Jalil expanded upon this concept of empowerment, eagerly encouraging the duty of all democratic citizens, but particularly Muslim Americans, to dissent.

The greatest form of jihad⁴ is raising the word of truth before an oppressive authority. That is a value that democracies understand in the best of their values. Now dissent is not an easy process. People don’t like it. But what we need to understand is that democracy requires that dissent. It thrives on that dissent. To make your fellow citizens angry because you’re demanding your right or you’re criticizing, you’re demanding somebody else’s right—even better—that is what makes a democracy work. And that is what makes an Islamic moral order work.

Keeping It Real: Staying Connected to the Next Generation

Student participants in this study described Imams as immigrants with little connection to the Muslim American youth of their congregations. Again, as stated by Samarah: “Well it would be nice if some of the Imams were from here. A lot of them were either born in another country, or you know, English is their second language and they speak in Arabic.” The language barrier was also cited by Leila as a deterrent from retaining information or messages from her local Imam (He’s not very good at English, so I’m not really influenced by him).

Beyond this communication issue, students also stressed a wish for Imams to speak about “relevant issues from the pulpit,” as articulated by Aisha. This involves the development of an

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⁴ As discussed by Quinlan (2002), although often sensationalized as a provocative and violent term in mass media, the Quranic meaning of the word ‘jihad’ is to struggle in God’s way. Muslim scholars further categorize jihad into two forms: internal and external. Prophet Mohammed described internal struggle, or the resistance of one’s own human desires in efforts to draw nearer to God, as “the greater jihad” (p. 55) and thus, “by the heart” and “by the tongue” are cited by many Muslim scholars as the greatest methods of performing jihad.
empathetic stance toward Muslim American youth. Imam Khaliq echoed this need, offering suggestions from personal experience:

*I think the main advice is simplicity. Simplicity. Being true to what you believe in.*

*Being realistic in dealing with issues. And the main thing is really considering the time and the place where you live. In everything we preach. So you have to relate religion to the life you are living.*

Dr. Stephen emphasized the importance of keeping an open mind and maintaining connections as a method of better representing the congregation:

*Hopefully they’re being open-minded and letting the new generation express their views and come to understand themselves in their own way. Because every generation has to. You know they got to rebel a little bit, and they got to be different, and that’s a good thing. So hopefully they’re being open-minded enough to allow that. And, at the same time hopefully they’re staying integrated with the larger community and making sure that their interests and their community is being protected within this city or the greater city area.*

**Summary of Findings**

As a phenomenological research study, the findings presented above are intended to encapsulate the lived experience of the seven Muslim American student participants. After reflecting on their lives as Muslim citizens of the US democracy, the students constructed an alternative discourse that positioned the Islamic and democratic values of equality, respect, freedom, and education as compatible, with the exception of some complications such as Eurocentrism and a heavy reliance on unbridled capitalism. In efforts to flesh out this discourse, the perspectives of professors and local Imams were also considered, and suggestions were
produced for all participants to better their understanding and/or enactment of Islamic and
democratic values, including attaining education, engaging in civic participation, and developing
empathy.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In the following discussion, the study findings are examined and analyzed in relation to the dominant discourse presented in the literature review within the parameters of the initial research question and sub-questions:

1) To what extent do Muslim American university students view their religious values conflicting and/or aligning with democratic values?

   (a) How do local Imams’ perceptions relate to Muslim American students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?

   (b) How do Muslim American students’ non-Muslim university professors’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?

   (c) How do Muslim American students’ Muslim university professors’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?

The phenomenological focus of this study, combined with Shi-xu’s (2005) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), necessitates the use of the alternative discourse constructed via the lived experiences of the seven Muslim American university students and supplemental perspectives from their professors and local Imams to form the foundation for discussing the research questions. It must be noted that the term ‘alternative’ in this case is used in reference to the inclusion of the voice of Muslim Americans students and associated forces in their immediate community, such as professors and local Imams. Thus, although dubbed ‘alternative,’ it is not to say that the discourse constructed from these findings is completely different from dominant views, as there is some overlap. The presence of unique themes within
the data, however, serves to partially satisfy gaps in the literature and thus validate the rationale of the study.

The Compatibility of Islamic and Democratic Values

All student participants in this study found Islamic and democratic values to be compatible to an extent. The principles most prevalently attributed to both Islam and democracy were equality, respect for others, freedom, human rights, and an emphasis on education. This is in contrast with the writings of Huntington (1993; 1996) Adib-Moghaddam (2008), Barber (1996), and Fukuyama (1992), who, viewing Islam as rigid and neglectful of human rights, found no link between Islam and democracy, specifically the democracy enacted in the US. Although students critiqued the US democracy, this was reflective of an enactment of democratic duty—much like the ‘duty to dissent’ that Abu El-Haj (2010) found was denied of Muslim American high school students in her study of a public high school in Pennsylvania—a right secured to all citizens to question the government, its institutions, and representatives. As stated by Isir: *You should always question whatever it is that you’re doing. Why put a slogan if you don’t really believe in it? You should fully understand what you say you are.*

An interesting aspect highlighted by students, Imams, and professors alike was an understanding of democracy and Islam as malleable processes instead of static products. This complicates the essentialism of the modernization theory employed by Hashemi (2009), Tibi (2009), Ciftci (2010), Tessler (2002), and Gellner (1992), who position Islam as a traditional ideology on the opposite end of the spectrum from the final destination of the wholly refined US democracy. For example, when asked whether or not he believed a Muslim American identity respective of both Islamic values and US democratic values could be enacted, Dr. Jalil discussed the pliability of the democratic system:
I think from a legal and philosophical perspective, Muslims have no religious obligation to leave America. No religious obligation to topple a popular government. No religious obligation to not be good citizens. And good citizenship does not always mean submission, it means sometimes dissent. But good citizenship means participating through communication, through sharing basic ideals, through challenging some of the ideals as well, while remaining within the system. So if we understand that we are in a state of flow, that America is up for grabs, America is not a finished product, no more than any other country in the world—and in that new formation of America do Muslims have a place? Yes. Is it religiously legitimate? Yes.

This view of democracy as an adaptable system in constant motion is shared in Isir’s description of Islam:

Like if you’re American, you have a different atmosphere and temperament, so Islam, it still suits you. It will suit my understanding, my background as well. So it doesn’t ask anybody to change their identity or change their culture. It asks you just to be decent in your every day life, I mean you don’t have to go out of your way and like feed the birds in the street or whatever. So it adapts to every person. You know a lot of people, I think when they convert they become suddenly Arab. You don’t have to; I mean you don’t have to change your name or anything. I mean there’s nothing wrong with your Western name or Western behavior, you know what I mean? It’s your own thing.

As described by Dr. Jalil and Isir above, Islam and democracy cannot be placed in monolithic pigeonholes of modernity or anti-modernity. Instead, Gaonkar’s (1999) interpretation of multiple modernities, which carves space for hybrid identities such as the Muslim American, is a more appropriate assessment. This finding prominently influenced the transformation of my
personal enactment of my Muslim American identity—after speaking with the participants, specifically Isir and Dr. Jalil, I understood that I did not need to spurn my American upbringing in order to live as a Muslim. I then made two significant changes: I stopped wearing hijab, as I felt it was not relevant in US society and the present historical context, and also dropped the label of Sunni from my identity as a Muslim. This latter alteration was inspired by the view of all Muslims as within one community, and a subsequent disenchantment with strict schools of thought that did not allow for malleability of the faith under various circumstances. I must stress, however, that these changes were my personal attempts toward the hybridization of my identity, and I by no means recommend them as necessary for all Muslim Americans.

Although Dr. Amina criticized the US democracy as endorsing only “white, middle-class, Eurocentric values,” her argument appears to be founded upon a confusion of the political democratic state with US culture, a popular perception discussed by Khan (2006), Cesari (2004), and Al-Jarrah and Cullingford (2007). This view outlines a resistance to democracy as an extension of resistance to US global hegemony, “seeing democracy… as a Western cultural artifact that will corrupt and de-Islamize Muslim societies” (Khan, 2006, p. 115). Dr. Amina was the only participant to declare Islam and democracy completely incompatible, citing the God-centered structure of Islam and the human-centered framework of democracy as contradictory. Sachedina (2006), however, complicates this argument, emphasizing an individual responsibility to God, but also a collective responsibility to an inclusive wider civil society. As outlined by Khan (2006), Cesari (2004), Soroush (2000), El Fadl (2004), and Sachedina (2006), a society that institutionalizes a God-centered structure limits the freedom of conscience of citizens, which is not only undemocratic, but also anti-Islamic in its compulsion
of religion (as stated by Dr. Jalil: *But the Quran did not go in that direction to begin with. It said la ikraha fid-deen: there is no compulsion in religion*).

The student participants were able to separate US cultural values from democratic values, and although, as stated earlier, they found Islamic and democratic values compatible, issues arose throughout their discussions of capitalism and Islam. Isir, Aisha, and Samarah particularly found problems with the nature of the current US economy, describing it as encouraging of materialism, greed, corruption, and debt, and therefore in conflict with the Islamic principles of simplicity, modesty, and charity. Rashid, Mika, and Dr. Jalil, however, did not see grounds in this conflict to declare Islam and the US partnership of democracy and capitalism as wholly incompatible. Dr. Jalil corrected this perception as a description of “unbridled capitalism,” and stated that this unrestricted system was “one of the biggest, if not the biggest threat to American democracy.” Rashid further noted the use of capitalism in Saudi Arabia, explaining the nation’s adaptation of the economic system as having “very little differences” to make it more reflective of Islamic financial laws. Finally, Mika questioned the separation of Muslim citizens’ problems with capitalism from non-Muslim citizens’ issues:

*I mean there’s more than people who follow Islam who have financial troubles, so I mean what about them, do they have a problem with democracy? And I mean they’re suffering too under capitalism, so I mean I don’t see how those two [a conflict with capitalism and a conflict with democracy] would be related.*

A comparison of the above grievances against the US brand of capitalism with the slogans of the recently rampant ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement validates the rationality of Mika’s query. Similar to the flaws of “unbridled capitalism” discussed by the Muslim American students, ‘Occupy Wall Street’ unified under the banner that “All humans are affected negatively by
corporate greed. We are the 99 Percent. That is the non-millionaires and billionaires” (Adler, 2011, p. 1). If this non-Islamic grounded movement is accepted as an example of democratic engagement, why should these same complaints, when leveraged by Muslim American students, be considered reason to find Islam and US democracy incompatible?

In summary, the main research question of this study—to what extent do Muslim American university students view their religious values conflicting and/or aligning with democratic values—brought forth an alternative discourse describing Islam and democracy as compatible in their shared values of equality, respect for others, freedom, human rights, and an emphasis on education. Although incompatibility was discussed in regards to the US Euro-Christian tradition, God-centric v. human-centric structure, and the flaws of unbridled capitalism, both democracy and Islam were recognized as malleable processes that can and should be questioned and modified to best represent citizens and adherents, allowing Muslim American youth the opportunity to construct their identities as they wish.

Associated Forces in the Discourse: A Movement Toward Peer Importance

A review of the relationship between students’ perceptions of Islamic and democratic values and the perceptions of their Muslim and non-Muslim professors and local Imams yielded several strong and weak relationships. Although the opinions of Muslim professor Dr. Jalil, non-Muslim professors Dr. Stephen and Dr. Sophia, and Imam Khaliq and Imam Naim Al Din typically followed a similar channel as those of the students, the interview data garnered from Muslim professor Dr. Amina marked her as an outlier in the study. In reflection of the phenomenological focus of this study, however, her perspective is not discredited, and although many of her responses were not included in the shared themes of the alternative discourse, her
critiques of the compatibility of Islam and democracy were reported as a reflection of her lived experience.

When asked about the influence professors (both Muslim and non-Muslim) and Imams have on their perceptions of Islamic and democratic values, the students shared a variety of responses. Common among these replies was the conception of professors’ roles in fostering critical thinking skills in students, particularly in regards to developing informed evaluations of the US democracy. Aisha, for example, cited professors as responsible for influencing her “understanding of how democracy is not carried out properly in the US.” This may stem from the students’ shared development stage—as discussed by Peek (2005) and Fowler (Arnett, 2009), emerging adults are less likely than adolescents to simply accept the information presented to them. Leila confirmed the impressionability of adolescents when speaking of her peers from high school government: “When you’re young you listen to anything and you’re like oh, okay, that makes sense, you know?” The student participants formed foundations for their understandings of democratic values before university, however—whether through “school...community, media... presidential elections and debates” as stated by Rashid, self-education as cited by Isir, or witnessing democracy in action through the engagement of parents and peers as described by Aisha, Leila, Samarah, and Mika—and because of this, were less susceptible to professors’ influence on the development of these values, but equipped with these fundamental understandings, were prepared to be guided by professors in the deconstruction of these understandings. Although Mika and Leila both described incidents of discrimination from non-Muslim high school government teachers, and Samarah mentioned the tendency of some professors to “call on stereotypes” when discussing Islam, no student participants detailed
specific situations of discriminatory influence from non-Muslim or Muslim university professors.

Very little distinction was found between the relationship of Muslim professors’ perceptions with those of the students and non-Muslim professors’ perceptions with those of the students. There was, however, a significant difference between the views of each Muslim professor and the students’ perceptions. Dr. Jalil, the Muslim Director of Islamic Studies at NMSU, shared a strong association with the students in regards to his perceptions, while Dr. Amina, the Muslim professor of American Cultural Studies and Women’s Studies at MWSU, rarely held the same views of Islam and democracy as the students. A possible explanation for this variation relates to the integration of each professor in the campus community—Dr. Jalil is heavily involved in the MSA at NMSU, while Dr. Amina is a new professor on the MWSU campus, and has few connections to the Muslim community. Rashid, for example, referenced Dr. Jalil when discussing the benefits of attending MSA lectures: “the Muslim Students’ Association, they have sometimes events over here in the student union, and I have attended these …and there’s a professor over there who’s teaching I think Islamic culture or something.”

According to the students, although local Imams were helpful in their delineation of Islamic values, the Imams’ lack of connection to the wider society was unappealing, and often led to students either disconnecting from lectures or interrupting their mosque attendance altogether. As stated by Leila, “I mean personally the Imam that we have right now, I don’t really understand him… he’s not very good at English, so I’m not really influenced by him” and echoed by Samarah, “It would be nice if some of the Imams were from here. Like a lot of them were either born in another country, or you know, English is their second language and they speak in Arabic.” It must be noted that these complaints were recorded more prominently from
the US born students, and not as much from the 1.5-generation students. This gap in communication, however, led to a distinct disengagement between local Imams and at least five of the seven student participants. Although both Imams’ perceptions of Islam and democracy were similar to the views of the students, their capacity to act as role models for engaging in civic participation was questioned, as students noted the Imams’ lack of personal presence and encouragement of participation in the democratic system.

Interestingly, many of the student participants instead cited their peers and student-led organizations such as the MSA as major influences on their perceptions of the relationship between Islamic and democratic values. Mika, Aisha, and Rashid all emphasized the benefits of attending lectures and discussions offered by the NMSU MSA, and although this strong relationship may be partially founded in the use of this organization as a gatekeeper for participant selection, even Leila, who attends MWSU, stated, “I go to the MSA stuff at NMSU a lot. They have a bigger Muslim community there. And I know they have stuff to see the relation [between Islam and democracy] and how it works and everything.” Although this supports the research of Chowdury (2006), Kandil (2004), and Marquand (1996) describing the MSA as a beneficial student organization, Isir’s perception of the NMSU MSA (their politics I am very much against) appeared to match the national critiques of the organization’s exclusive nature and association with strict interpretations of Islam discussed by Dowd-Gailey (2004) and MacFarquhar (2008). It would be interesting to speculate how the discourses constructed on these campuses would change if either MWSU formed its own MSA, or both campuses attained Muslim campus chaplains as promoted by Hamilton (2006)—would these Imams, due to their involvement in the campus community and consequential relatable experience, have higher influence over Muslim American university students?
In summary, the sub-questions of this study—a) How do local Imams’ perceptions relate to Muslim American students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values? (b) How do Muslim American students’ non-Muslim university professors’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values? and (c) How do Muslim American students’ Muslim university professors’ perceptions relate to students’ perceptions of the relationship between Islamic values and democratic values?—brought forth an alternative discourse that, although exposing high correlation between the perceptions of Imams, university professors, and students, regulated professors’ roles to the fostering of critical thinking skills and described Imams as lacking the appropriate levels of personal civic participation and assimilation to act as role models for Muslim American emerging adults. Students appeared more likely to find association with their peers and student-led organizations such as the MSA when seeking understanding of the navigation of Islamic and democratic values.

Education and Participation as Empowerment

The constant thread running throughout all themes in the alternative discourse constructed by the Muslim American students, local Imams, and Muslim and non-Muslim university professors was a valuation of education and participation. Not only described as a common value between Islam and democracy, education was also suggested as a method for fighting ignorance and breaking up stereotypes, encouraging informed critiques of both Islam and democracy, and engaging in civic participation. Education was the only hope cited by Dr. Amina for the deconstruction of hegemonic structures within the US democracy, and, according to Dr. Stephen, Dr. Jalil, Dr. Sophia, Imam Khaliq, Aisha, Samarah, Mika, and Nora, the perfect
platform for Muslim American students’ civic engagement and re-presentation of the Muslim American identity. As stated by Dr. Stephen:

*Participation is a daily occurrence. So just going to class and talking in class about some of the issues that we talk about in sociology, which are public issues, you know we’re not talking about physics or biology, we’re talking about policies and how people live their lives, that’s civic participation too.*

Imam Khaliq encouraged this emphasis on the free exchange of ideas and information as a method to assist Muslim American students in their navigation of identity, and asked the following of professors:

*To be open-minded in dealing with those issues. And to appreciate the diversity you know, of Muslims and non-Muslims in the class. So, that is really a good setting for learning and exchanging ideas. And that is the democratic values.*

Beyond participation in the classroom, involvement in campus activities was also marked as an empowering venture. Dr. Sophia is the faculty advisor to the MWSU chapter of Amnesty International, and when discussing the benefits of campus involvement, stated that “*to become more visible is a good thing, it’s an empowering thing.*” Dr. Jalil further encouraged participation, whether within or without the classroom, as “*what makes a democracy work... and an Islamic moral order work.*” This investment in the wider community, the ability to share opinions and gain acceptance and respect for their legitimacy, is empowering in the sense that the Muslim American students become stakeholders in their own voice and representation, and by making themselves visible in the US democracy, redefine what it means to be American.

The discussion of this type of participation-centered society does not find its end in the alternative discourse presented here—according to Kulish (2011), the development of social
technology such as video and networking sites has eased the ability for like-minded individuals to assemble and dissent. As stated by Yochai Benkler, director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University:

You’re looking at a generation of 20- and 30-year-olds who are used to self-organizing. They believe life can be more participatory, more decentralized, less dependent on the traditional models of organization, either in the state or the big company. Those were the dominant ways of doing things in the industrial economy, and they aren’t anymore.

(Kulish, 2011, p. 1)

This reliance on peer organization may provide insight into the aforementioned findings regarding the importance of the MSA, but also highlights a broader theme of this study, prominently pointed out by Mika in his critique of Islam and capitalism—if Muslim American students make efforts to gather and participate in the campus community, to educate and exchange ideas in democratic tradition, or even engage in more comprehensive civic duties—how is this different than other youth, who, in keeping with a generational hymn of participation-driven technology and ease of assembly, come together to demand rights and representation?

For how long will the cloud of Islam as the ‘new Communism’ (Cesari, 2004) cast a shadow over the Muslim American identity? The public education system is cited as a prominent arena to dispel these misinterpretations and misunderstandings by preparing non-Muslim students for informed discussion of Islam and democracy, and also enhancing Muslim students’ abilities to enact identities that incorporate their Islamic upbringing with US democratic citizenship. Thus, in accordance with the findings of this study, and the research of Merry (2007), Tibi (2009), Gutmann (1999), and Kymlicka (1995), this cloud will only dissipate through the educational presentation of Islam as a legitimate ‘good life,’ a democratic responsibility that public schools
have an obligation to provide, and Muslim Americans, particularly youth, fight to preserve in their every day interactions and engagement in US society.
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Much of the research on Islam and democracy has focused on the macro-level, and fails to detail a qualitative account of the experience of Muslim citizens of democracies (Cesari, 2004; Said, 1978; Said, 1981; Al-Azmeh, 1993; Esposito, 1995; Khan, 2006; Huntington, 1996; Adib-Moghaddem, 2008; Barber, 1996; Fukuyama, 1992). The neglect of the Muslim individual experience in the dominant discourse on Islam and democracy has stifled the voices of members of this marginalized population, thereby limiting their self-representation. This is especially true for Muslim Americans, who, in the aftermath of 9/11 and the current surge of revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, are either demonized or forgotten altogether, despite the significance of their every day navigation of both Islamic and democratic values and unique efforts toward identity construction. The purpose of this study was to address these gaps in the literature and, through the use of a phenomenological framework and Shi-xu’s (2005) approach to CDA, complicate the dominant discourse on Islam and democracy by providing insight into the lived experience of seven Muslim American university students and supplemental perspectives from their university professors and local Imams.

Prominent in this study’s findings was the negation of the dominant discourse construction of Islam and democracy as a dichotomy (Huntington, 1993; 1996; Adib-Moghaddam, 2008; Barber, 1996; Fukuyama, 1992). All participants in this study, with the exclusion of one Muslim university professor, found Islamic and democratic values compatible to a vast extent. The principles most prevalently cited as both Islamic and democratic were equality, respect for others, freedom, human rights, and an emphasis on education. Although issues were described concerning conflicts with the Euro-Christian culture of the US, relationship between US democracy and unbridled capitalism, and human-centric vs. God-centric
structure, the question of whether or not criticism and dissent from Muslim Americans should mark Islam and democracy as incompatible or simply function as a form of civic engagement arose. An examination of the relationship of university professors’ and local Imams’ perceptions of Islam and democracy with those of the Muslim American students brought forth strong relationships—with the exception of one Muslim professor, most perceptions were shared. However, the findings of this study suggested that the seven Muslim American student participants were more likely to find peer groups influential in their understanding and navigation of Islamic and democratic values than their Muslim and non-Muslim professors and/or local Imams.

When describing their perceptions of Islamic and democratic values, participants prevalently discussed the Islamic equality of humans before God and also within the democratic system, and the subsequent Islamic respect for all God’s creatures/other democratic citizens. Freedom was also marked as a basic human right granted by Islam and by most liberal democracies, and was further credited as a means to support progress both within Islam and the democratic system, allowing citizens and congregants to exchange ideas and thereby foster community and propel both systems forward. Finally, both Islamic and democratic societies were described as advocates of education, emphasizing the personal, spiritual, and communal benefits of fostering informed citizens and congregants.

Although the overwhelming impression derived from the data was one of compatibility between Islamic and democratic values, the institutionalization of Euro-Christian aspects of US culture was discussed as a hindrance to certain Islamic practices. Also, the democratic system was found fundamentally incompatible with Islam by one Muslim university professor, Dr. Amina, who contrasted the God-centric nature of Islam with the human-centric structure of
democracy. According to Sachedina (2006), Khan (2006), Cesari (2004), Soroush (2000), and El-Fadl (2004), however, a society that institutionalizes a God-centered structure limits the freedom of conscience of citizens, which is not only undemocratic, but also anti-Islamic in its compulsion of religion.

Although several students and professors described a conflict between Islam and the greed, corruption, and materialism spurred by unbridled capitalism, and therefore an incompatibility between Islam and the capitalistic US democracy, a question arose concerning dissent. If the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement protested similar grievances against the current US economic system, and was considered a form of civic engagement—why, when Muslim Americans leverage the same complaints, are they considered anti-democratic?

An examination of the relationship between university professors’ and local Imams’ perceptions of Islam and democracy with those of the Muslim American students exposed strong relationships. Most perceptions were shared, with the exception of one Muslim professor. There was little difference noted between the relationship of Muslim professors and students, and non-Muslim professors and students. There was, however, a significant difference between the perceptions of each Muslim professor and the students, which was proposed as a reflection of each professor’s integration into the campus community. Dr. Jalil, who shared views with the students, was heavily involved in the NMSU MSA, while Dr. Amina, who did not share much of the same perspective as the students, was a new professor at MWSU, and did not know many Muslim students.

The relationship between the Imams’ perceptions of Islam and democracy and those of the Muslim American youth was strong. When the students were asked about their association with Imams, however, although they considered them influential in the maintenance of Islamic
values, they suggested that the Imams engage more in the surrounding community and civic society. These suggestions matched the findings of Stewart (2008) and Hamilton (2006).

The overarching theme of the alternative discourse outlined by the Muslim American university students, their professors, and local Imams was the advocacy of education and participation. Not only described as a common value between Islam and democracy, education was also suggested as a method for fighting ignorance and breaking up stereotypes, encouraging informed critiques of both Islam and democracy, and engaging in civic participation. Education was the only hope cited by Dr. Amina for the deconstruction of hegemonic structures within the US democracy, and, according to several students and professors, the perfect platform for Muslim American students’ civic engagement and re-presentation of the Muslim American identity. This investment in the classroom and wider community, the ability to share opinions and gain acceptance and respect for their legitimacy, is empowering in the sense that the Muslim American students become stakeholders in their own voice and representation, and by making themselves visible in the US democracy, redefine what it means to be American.

Implications of the Research

The alternative discourse presented in this study—alternative in its inclusion of the lived experience of Muslim American students, their professors, and local Imams—negated the dominant discourse construction (Huntington, 1993; 1996; Adib-Moghaddam, 2008; Barber, 1996; Fukuyama, 1992) of Islam and democracy as a dichotomy. This complication of the relationship between Islam and democracy at the micro-level contributes significantly to the fields of political science, religious studies, cross-cultural education, and democratic education, particularly for educators, policymakers, Imams, and Muslim American students.
The findings of this study imply that when professors and Imams encourage participation, critical thinking skills, and the free exchange of ideas by both constructing environments conducive to these actions and acting as role models themselves, students feel more inclined to engage in the classroom, campus community, and wider society. For Muslim American students in particular, this involvement has the potential for empowerment, as it offers the members of an often misunderstood and marginalized population the opportunity to re-present themselves.

Suggestions for Future Research

The discussion of one question is often the inspiration for the formation of many more. Although this study provided insight into the lived experience of 1.5 generation and US-born Muslim American university students, due to the researcher’s direct affiliation, members of the convert population were not addressed. These individuals could provide a unique perception of Islam and democracy that was not examined in this study. Further research into the influence of campus organizations such as the MSA, the provision of Muslim university chaplains, and/or the inclusion of Islam in school curriculum may be helpful to institutions of higher education, public schools, mosques, professors, Imams, and policymakers when assisting Muslim American youth with the navigation of their identities and success and involvement in the classroom and wider civil society. Comparative studies such as the evaluation of the experiences of Muslim American students in relation to those of Muslim students of other nations where religious education is mandatory may further highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of religious education in curriculum. Finally, a detailed understanding of how Muslim Americans view human rights within an Islamic framework may assist in the deconstruction of stereotypes regarding Islam, and provide government officials and policymakers in Muslim dominant nations guidelines for directed social change.
REFERENCES


(Original work published 1913, 1976)


Montelongo, R. (2003). Latina/o undergraduate involvement with college student organizations and its effects on specific student outcomes at two, large, predominately white,


APPENDIX A: HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

July 18, 2011

TO: Sarah Lamont
MACIE

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H11T279DE7

TITLE: Deconstructing the Dichotomy: Muslim American University Students' Perceptions of Islam and Democracy

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of July 14, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on June 9, 2012. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 10 participants. If you want to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications: Stamped original consent form is coming to you via campus mail.

c. Dr. Bruce Collet

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER

Informative Flier

You are invited to be part of a research project that is studying Muslim American university students’ views of Islam and democracy. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will have no influence on future relations with the researcher, Bowling Green State University, the University of Toledo, cooperating mosques, or your grades or academic standing at university in any way.

This study will benefit Muslim Americans, university professors (both Muslim and non-Muslim), and imams, as it aims to understand how Muslim American university students perceive Islamic and democratic values, and how professors and local imams affect this perception. With this information, mosques and universities may work together to better understand and educate Muslim American students.

Participants will be asked to be involved in an interview about themselves and their views of the relationship between Islamic and democratic values. This interview will be a one on one interview and take about an hour to an hour and a half. The location and time for the interview will be arranged according to the participant's preferences.

You will be given a pseudonym (fake name) and information collected from your interview will be connected to that pseudonym, not your real name. All of the information provided by you and about you will remain confidential. The researcher plans to conduct this study during the Fall of 2011. You may drop out of the study at any time you wish.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact Sarah Lamont, at (330) 701-7493 (slamont@bgsu.edu) or her thesis committee chair, Dr. Bruce Collet, at (419) 372-7354 (colleba@bgsu.edu). Also, if you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716, or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Thank you for your interest!

Sarah Lamont
Graduate Student in Cross-Cultural and International Education
Bowling Green State University
APPENDIX C: CONSENT LETTER

Letter of Informed Consent

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Below is a brief outline of information you need to know about the study and the interview process.

Purpose of the study
You are invited to be part of a study being carried out by Sarah Lamont, a graduate student at Bowling Green State University. The purpose of this study is to learn about Muslim American university students’ views of Islam and democracy.

Description of the study
This study is being carried out by Sarah Lamont. Sarah Lamont is a graduate student at Bowling Green State University, studying Cross-Cultural and International Education. This study will assist her in completing her Masters degree. She would like to speak with Muslim American university students, their university professors, and local imams about themselves and their views of Islam and democracy. Individuals must be at least 18 years of age to participate. The interview will last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Sarah Lamont would like to audio record the interview with your permission.

If preferred, a third-party may be present during interviews with male Muslim students, professors, or imams out of respect for religious expectations.

Confidentiality
The information you provide in this interview will not be linked to your name. All transcripts of audio tapes made during the interview will:

- Use a pseudonym (a false name) to protect your identity
- Alter any additional information that might reveal your identity.

The audio tapes and transcripts from this interview will be kept safe under lock and key in a secure location, and will be available to no one except Sarah Lamont. Once the study is completed, the audio recordings of the interview will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the interview at any time, and you may choose not to answer any questions. Whether or not you choose to participate will not influence your future relations with Sarah Lamont, Bowling Green State University, the University of Toledo, cooperating mosques, or your grades or academic standing at university in any way.

Risks or Discomforts
Physical or mental health risks to participating in this study are minimal or no greater than the risks you would ordinarily encounter in everyday life. Some participants, however, may feel uneasy about sharing their information with an unknown researcher. The following are steps taken to minimize any discomfort:
• The interview is held at a location and environment that you feel is safe and that you are comfortable in.
• If at any time during the interview you want to stop, just let Sarah Lamont know and she will stop the interview.
• If you start to feel uncomfortable, just ask Sarah Lamont to stop the interview.
• If you wish, helpful information about where you can get support services can be provided.

You must complete and return the participant consent form before the interview can take place.

Benefits
This study will benefit Muslim Americans, university professors (both Muslim and non-Muslim), and imams, as it aims to understand how Muslim American university students perceive Islamic and democratic values, and how professors and local imams affects this perception. With this information, mosques and universities may work together to better understand and educate Muslim American students.

Questions
If you have any questions or concerns you can contact Sarah Lamont at (330)701-7493 (slamont@bgsu.edu) or the chair of her thesis committee, Dr. Bruce Collet, at (419) 372-7354 (colleba@bgsu.edu). Also, if you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716, or hrsb@bgsu.edu.

Agreement
• Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study.
• Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your assent to participate at any time.
• You have been told that by signing this agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.
• You have been given a copy of this agreement.

Signature of the interviewee: ____________________________ Date: __________

Printed name of the interviewee: ____________________________________________

Researcher: ____________________________ Date: __________
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Hello! You are here today because you have agreed to participate in this study. This interview will last an hour to an hour and a half, and with your permission, will be recorded. The digital recorder will be in plain sight at all times. If you would like to stop the interview or stop recording at any time, please let me know and I will do so. You may withdraw from the interview at any time, and you may choose not to answer any questions. The information you provide in this interview will not be linked to your name. All transcripts of audio tapes made during the interview will:

- Use a pseudonym (a false name) to protect your identity
- Alter any additional information that might reveal your identity.

The audio tapes and transcripts from this interview will be kept safe under lock and key in a secure location, and will be available to no one except myself. Once the study is completed, the audio recordings of the interview will be destroyed.
Student Interview:

Introductory question:
1. How do you feel about the current unrest in the Middle East and North Africa? What do you think are the causes of this unrest?
   a. Probe: Religious/democratic conflict?
2. Tell me about your experience as a Muslim citizen of a democratic nation.
   a. Probe: Experience in regard to Islamic beliefs and participation in democratic duties

Core questions:
3. What do you believe are the main values of Islam?
4. What do you believe are the main values of a democracy?
5. Have you encountered any interesting issues or situations concerning your religion and/or your views of democracy? Explain.
   a. Probe: Do you know anyone who has encountered… Explain.
6. Do you see these values conflicting in any way? Explain.
7. Do you see these values aligning in any way? Explain.

Areas for further questioning:
8. What/who has influenced your perception of the main values of Islam?
   a. Probe: Influence of professors (Muslim and non-), influence of local imams
9. What/who has influenced perception of the main values of democracy?
   a. Probe: Influence of professors (Muslim and non-), influence of local imams

Final Questions:
10. What suggestions do you have for imams or university professors to better your understanding and/or navigation of Islamic and/or democratic values?
11. Do you have any further comments on this topic?
• **Imam Interview:**

*Introductory question:*
1. How do you feel about the current unrest in the Middle East and North Africa? What do you think are the causes of this unrest?
   a. *Probe:* Religious/democratic conflict?

2. Tell me about your experience as an imam in a democratic nation.
   a. *Probe:* Experience in regard to position as imam and participation in democratic duties

*Core questions:*
3. What do you believe are the main values of Islam?

4. What do you believe are the main values of a democracy?

5. Have you encountered any interesting issues or situations concerning your religion and/or your views of democracy? Explain.
   a. *Probe:* Do you know anyone who has encountered… Explain.

6. Do you see these values conflicting in any way? Explain.

7. Do you see these values aligning in any way? Explain.

*Areas for further questioning:*
8. What/who has influenced your perception of the main values of Islam?

9. What/who has influenced your perception of the main values of democracy?

10. What influence do you believe you have on Muslim American youth who attend the mosque?

*Final Questions:*
11. What suggestions do you have for other imams to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of Islamic values?

12. What suggestions do you have for other imams to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of democratic values?

13. What suggestions do you have for university professors to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of Islamic values?

14. What suggestions do you have for university professors to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of democratic values?
15. Do you have any further comments on this topic?
**Muslim professor Interview:**

*Introductory question:*
1. How do you feel about the current unrest in the Middle East and North Africa? What do you think are the causes of this unrest?
   a. *Probe:* Religious/democratic conflict?
2. Tell me about your experience as a Muslim professor in a democratic nation.
   a. *Probe:* Experience in regards to position as Muslim professor and participation in democratic duties

*Core questions:*
3. What do you believe are the main values of Islam?
4. What do you believe are the main values of a democracy?
5. Have you encountered any interesting issues or situations concerning your religion and/or your views of democracy? Explain.
   a. *Probe:* Do you know anyone who has encountered… Explain.
6. Do you see these values conflicting in any way? Explain.
7. Do you see these values aligning in any way? Explain.

*Areas for further questioning:*
8. What/who has influenced your perception of the main values of Islam?
9. What/who has influenced your perception of the main values of democracy?
10. What influence do you believe you have on your Muslim American students?

*Final Questions:*
11. What suggestions do you have for other professors to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of Islamic values?
12. What suggestions do you have for other professors to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of democratic values?
13. What suggestions do you have for local imams to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of Islamic values?
14. What suggestions do you have for local imams to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of democratic values?
15. Do you have any further comments on this topic?
Non-Muslim professor Interview:

Introductory question:
1. How do you feel about the current unrest in the Middle East and North Africa? What do you think are the causes of this unrest?
   a. Probe: Religious/democratic conflict?

2. Tell me about your experience as a non-Muslim professor of Muslim students.
   a. Probe: Experience in regards to position as non-Muslim professor educating Muslim American students.

Core questions:
3. What, from your own knowledge or from what you can discern, do you believe are the main values of Islam?

4. What do you believe are the main values of a democracy?

5. Have you encountered any interesting issues or situations concerning Islamic religious values and/or views of democracy? Explain.
   a. Probe: Do you know anyone who has encountered… Explain.

6. Do you see these values conflicting in any way? Explain.

7. Do you see these values aligning in any way? Explain.

Areas for further questioning:
8. What/who has influenced your perception of the main values of Islam?

9. What/who has influenced your perception of the main values of democracy?

10. What influence do you believe you have on your Muslim American students?

Final Questions:
11. What suggestions do you have for other professors to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of Islamic values?

12. What suggestions do you have for other professors to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of democratic values?

13. What suggestions do you have for local imams to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of Islamic values?

14. What suggestions do you have for local imams to assist Muslim American students in their understanding and/or navigation of democratic values?

15. Do you have any further comments on this topic?