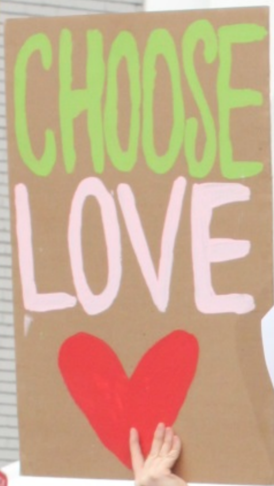

Claiming the Narrative

The Muslim Community's Response to Discrimination and Stigmatization in Pursuit of Empowerment in Los Angeles

Universiteit Utrecht
Cultural Anthropology And Development Sociology

Bachelor Thesis
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Frontpage: Picture of the Islamic Center of Southern California, taken by Marlot Huizinga on 19-02-2017. All the pictures in this thesis – except for the maps - were taken by Marlot Huizinga and Eliza Bol.

Universiteit Utrecht

Claiming the Narrative

By: Eliza Bol and Marlot Huizinga

Utrecht University

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Social Sciences

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Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology

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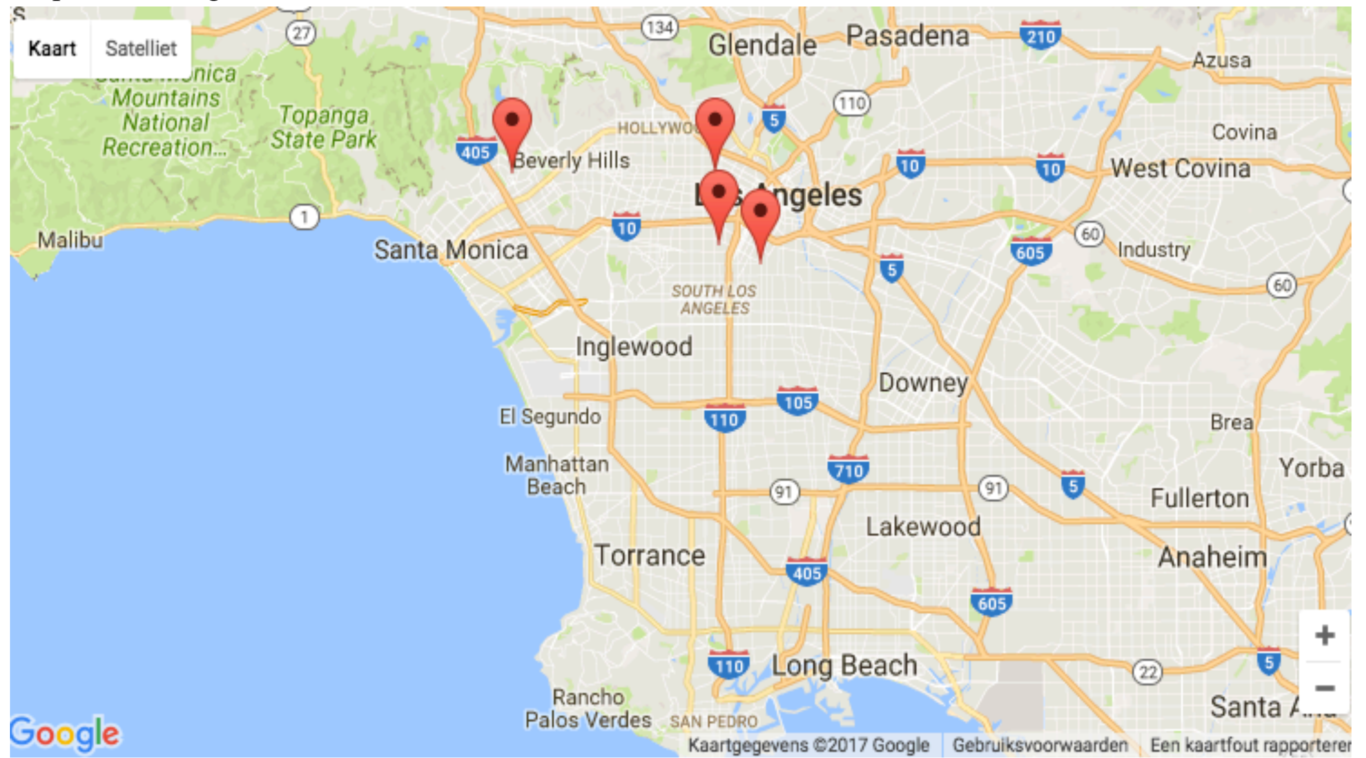
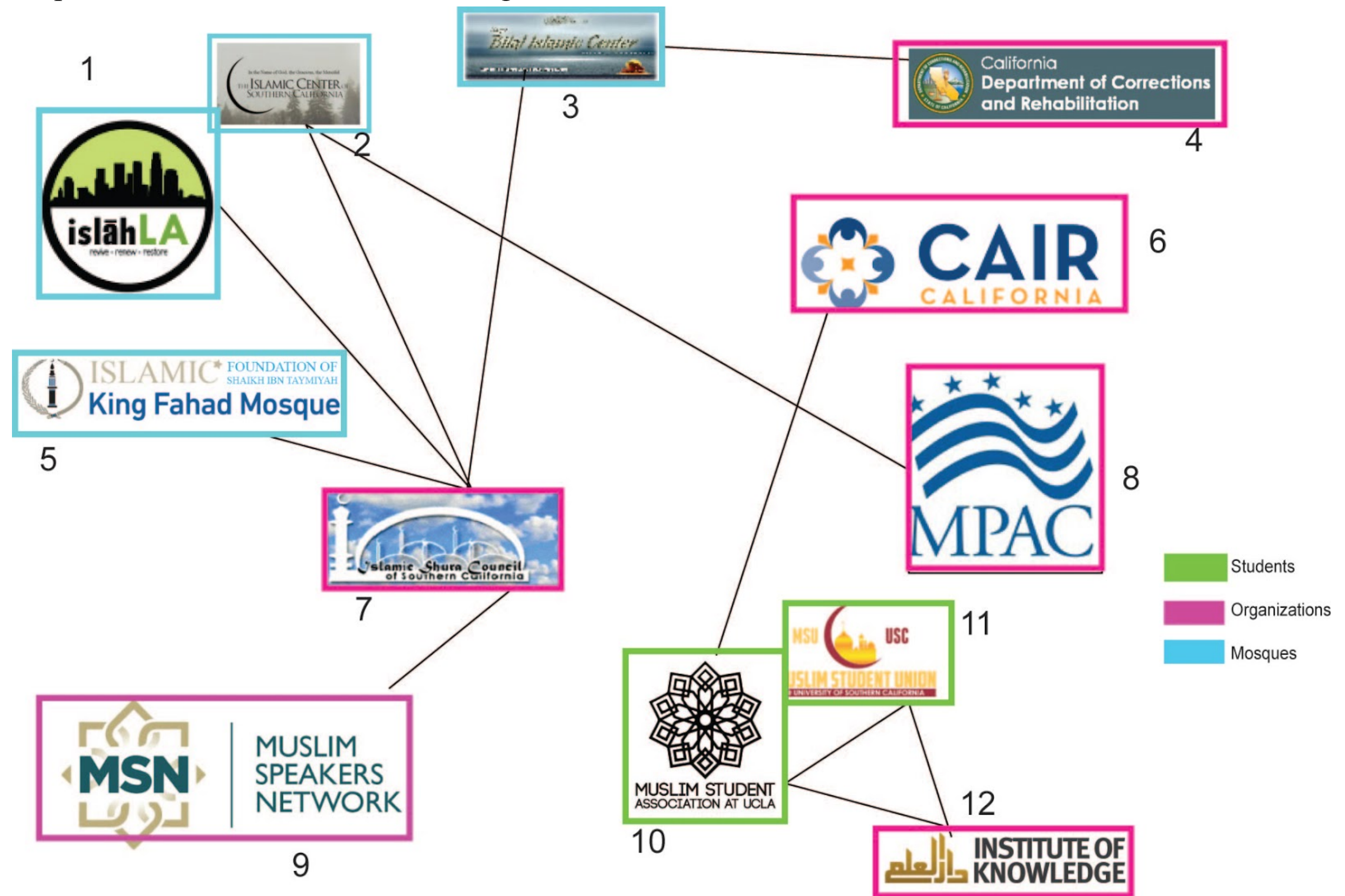
Source: www.wordatlas.com

Map of Los Angeles



Source: maps.google.com

Map of Islamic institutions used during fieldwork



1. Islah Mosque
2. Islamic Center of Southern California
3. Masjid Bilal Islamic Center
4. State Prison California
5. King Fahad Mosque
6. Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
7. Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
8. Muslims Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
9. Muslim Speakers Network (MSN)
10. Muslim Student Association at UCLA
11. Muslim Student Union at USC
12. Institute of Knowledge

List of Terms and Acronyms

WORDLIST

Allahu Akbar	God is great
Desi	Asian region; Pakistan, Bangladesh and India
Halaqa	Religious gathering for the study of Islam and the Qur'an
Hijab	Headscarf
Hijabis	Women who wear hijab
Imam	Leader of the prayer in a mosque. Often also religious director of that mosque
Jihad	'Struggle'. Different interpretations, but most often perceived as inner struggle to be a pious and righteous person
Jummah	Friday prayer. Most important prayer in the week according to Islam. It is mandatory to perform this afternoon prayer together
Khutba	Lecture before Jummah
Masjid	Mosque. Term often used by Muslims to refer to a mosque
Minbar	A pulpit in the mosque where the imam stands to deliver the khutba
Sheikh	Formally educated leader in a Muslim community or organization
Sura	Chapter of the Qur'an

ACRONYMS

CAIR	Council on American-Islamic Relations. One of the biggest Muslim-organizations of the country
ICSC	Islamic Center of Southern California
MPAC	Muslim Public Affairs Council. One of the biggest Muslim-organizations of the country
MSA	Muslim Student Association
MSU	Muslim Student Union
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
USC	University of Southern California

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Introduction

Introduction

Since the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, Muslims have become the center of attention in the public debate on terrorism and religious fundamentalism. Muslims are often portrayed as a homogenous and static group, while they are - just like American society in general - a dynamic and heterogeneous collection of people. This simplistic point of view combined with fear have on many occasions led to discrimination and stigmatization of Muslims in American society. A response from the Muslim community to all this negativity was of course inevitable. The way Muslims experience discrimination and stigmatization, and subsequent their response to it will be the focus of our research.

The election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States has sent a shockwave through the Muslim community in the entire country. This was no different in Los Angeles. One of the first actions Trump took, after his inauguration in January 2017, was issuing an executive order to "protect the nation from foreign terrorist entry in the United States"[1]. The executive order prohibited citizens of seven Muslim majority countries to entry the United States for 90 days and refugees from Syria indefinitely and it was met with enormous protests. Not only Muslims and citizens from the countries concerned protested, but people from a broad variety of backgrounds raised their voices against the so called 'travel ban' or 'Muslim ban'. All these tensions and activities made the spring of 2017 an appropriate moment to examine the responses of the Muslim community to Trump's presidency and their experiences with discrimination and stigmatization. An important question here is what the Muslims themselves perceive as effective activism and how they should organize this. An additional consequence of the travel ban has been that Muslims in the United States were pushed into the spotlight of the national debate on religious freedom and exclusion. What the Muslim community does with this spotlight and how they represent themselves is also an important focus in this research. On social media statements and videos pop up on a daily basis of Muslims and Islamic organizations condemning terrorists attacks or speaking out against Trump and his Muslim-unfriendly policy. The way (social) media and

[1]http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/28/politics/text-of-trump-executive-order-nation-ban-refugees/index.html, accessed on 21-05-2017

internet should be deployed and used in this process in the perception of Muslims is a key factor in this representation.

We argue that it is necessary to take into account how the exclusion mechanisms in contemporary American society influence the debate about Islam. By combining the concepts of citizenship, racism, stigmatization, and discrimination, we aim to show the dark sides of that society. We will use the theories of Anderson (1984), Holston and Appadurai (1996), and Huntington (1983) to explain the concepts of the nation-state and citizenship. From the formal notion of citizenship, we move on to exclusion and discrimination within the nation-state. Here we will discuss how Saïd's (1978) notion of Orientalism still influences race and discrimination discourses in the United States. Moreover, the concept of racism is still ingrained in contemporary American society (Omi and Winant 2015). Subsequently, by examining how people deal with these discourses and experiences, and show resilience by claiming their own narrative, we also want to shed light on the positive powers at work. To be able to claim their own narrative, Muslims have to deal with different forms of representation. Representation can help to (re-)create a cultural identity that previously has been imposed by others (Hall 1996). Next, we will look into the way Sewell (1992) discusses how people can control resources in exercising their agency. Through Craig and Mayo's (1995) argument about community activism we arrive at empowerment. Subsequently, Putnam (2000) and Hopkins (2011) show us how expanding social capital through bonding and bridging activities can increase a group's empowerment.

In this research, that took place from February until April 2017, we have examined how activism of the Los Angeles Muslim community addresses discrimination and stigmatization in the pursuit of empowerment. To operationalize this question, we have composed four key points to focus on during the research. First of all we have looked into the ways Muslims in Los Angeles experience discrimination and stigmatization. Our second focus point was the way Muslims take action against this discrimination. Thirdly, we explored the way Muslims represent themselves in this activism. Finally we examined how the effectiveness of the activism for empowerment was perceived by the Muslim community in Los Angeles.

With this research we want to contribute to a deeper understanding of the current problems the Muslim community in Los Angeles is experiencing and of the perceptions of the community itself on how these should be addressed. We also believe it is important to understand and show

the internal conflicts of the community, which can possibly prevent Muslims from effective activism. Hopefully this thesis will contribute to a better representation of Muslims and Islam.

During the eleven weeks we were in the field - from February the sixth until April the twentieth -, participant observation was our main research method. This meant that we were involved in activities almost everyday, ranging from *Qur'an* classes at the local mosque, to kayaking with the girls from the Muslim Student Association from UCLA and participating in protest rallies. We mainly focused on three communities within the larger Muslim community in Los Angeles. The first one and also the community where we spent most time is the Islamic Center of Southern California located in Koreatown. The second ones are the Muslim Student Association from UCLA and the Muslim Student Union from USC. The third one is the Masjid Bilal Islamic Center located in South Central Los Angeles. Besides our involvement in these organizations, we have spoken to many people who are active within other Islamic networks in the city.

Next to participant observation we have used several other methods in our research. Unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, focus group discussion, and some analysis of visual data proved to be the most important ones. We used the snowball method to get acquainted with new people and to find out who the relevant and influential people within the communities were. In total we have had 21 semi-structured interviews, all of which have been recorded. In contrast with our planning, we only did one focus group discussion. The planning of these group conversations turned out to be quite difficult, since all of our informants were busy with their jobs or study. We had also planned to use photo elicitation during interviews and focus groups, but in the end this method did not seem to add value to our data. The events, we took pictures of, were mostly attended by the people we wanted to discuss them with, so showing pictures would not add any new information to the conversation. Moreover, a lot of the time we could not take photographs, because activities often took place in 'sacred' religious spaces. Social media like Facebook and Instagram were useful tools for us to keep updated on events and to keep in touch with our informants. Furthermore, we used Facebook pages and email newsletters of different Islamic organizations to observe what they shared with their followers and to be able to refer to this in interviews.

The fact that we are white non-Muslim women fortunately did not complicate our research in a significant way. It did have some consequences, however. During prayers we were confined

to sit in the women's area and during the classes in the mosque all the women would sit on one side and the men on the other. As a result of these practical rules we had more informal contact with women in both the mosques we attended and the MSA's. However, we have interviewed more men than women. Overall, we don't have the feeling our gender skewed our results. In all the communities where we did participant observation, we felt very welcome. The fact that we were not Muslims never was a problem, on the contrary; people were glad we took an interest in them and were eager to educate us on their religion and experiences. The fact that our skin and hair color often stood out during activities, was more an advantage than a disadvantage. Because people quickly approached us when they saw we were new, it was easy to make new contacts. There was only one time when we did not feel comfortable being white. This was at a lecture about Trump's America and the influence of white supremacy on the world.

There have not been many complicated ethical dilemmas in our research. There have occurred a few situations, however, that have called for more consideration and discussion between ourselves. The first thing is that taking photographs is forbidden inside most mosques, also in the Islamic Center of Southern California. We have taken photos inside the building only twice, during a rally and a march, and we had asked special permission for this. If we took pictures, we made sure that everyone who was in a photo had agreed to this. A situation in which we felt slightly uncomfortable occurred during the food pantry close to the end of our research. While we were preparing the food that we were going to hand out to the clients, a man who I had seen once before, was taking a lot of pictures and was filming the volunteers. This was fine by us, because these images could be used for promotional goals and for capturing the activities, since he was the coordinator of the event. However, he also filmed the clients who were waiting outside for their food. We both strongly disagreed with this, because many of the (elderly) people who come to the food pantry are very poor and often ashamed they have to rely on the food pantry. We felt it was not right to film them without their consent and even put it on Facebook, for everybody to see. Although we were uncomfortable with this situation, we did not say anything to him, because we felt it was not our place to interfere. Another point of discussion arose when someone we know from outside the research offered to help us in a potential photo project that we were contemplating about. This photo project was supposed to be a personal project, outside of the research. First we thought it was very nice that he offered to help, but later we realized we didn't want to bring outsiders into the research and endanger the anonymity of our

informants. In the end, we kindly declined his offer to help. The problem of anonymity was also the reason we decided not to go through with the photo project in the end. Something that has also happened a few times is that people try to 'take over' our research and tell us what to do or where to go. When this happens, we thank them for their advice and eventually do whatever *we* think is best.

Obtaining informed consent has almost never been a problem during the research. Before each interview we explained what our research entailed, what would happen to the recording and we ensured the informant we would keep his/her identity anonymous. Everybody we have spoken to has agreed to this, only two people who were connected to big Islamic organizations were a bit hesitant and wanted to know more about the research before they agreed to the recording. One of them also asked us if he could read the transcription of the interview and we agreed to this. At events where we were doing participant observation, we introduced ourselves as researchers to the group and to the speaker, whenever possible.

Thesis design

First of all, we will elaborate on the theoretical discourses that compose an imperative framework to our research. The concepts of cultural exclusion and ethnicity have become important factors in current debates on citizenship. Although citizenship supposedly offers every citizen equal rights and inclusiveness, the American society has shown that, under the influence of racialized exclusion mechanisms, citizens have been and *are* indeed being stigmatized and classified. In the last two decades Muslims have become a dangerous 'Other', an image that is being reiterated in the media and public discourse. After 9/11 this narrative had reached a peak and it has lately been reinvigorated and politicized by President trump.

Hereafter, we will continue this thesis with an analysis of our empirical data in connection to the theoretical framework. Starting with the concept of citizenship, we will explain how our research informants understand the current political climate, how they experience discrimination and stigmatization, what kind of action they take to address this, and how effective these actions are in their perceptions.

Finally, we will draw several conclusions based on the theoretical framework and our empirical data. We will also discuss parallels and differences between the theory and empirical data we have found.

Chapter 1

Addressing Discrimination and Stigmatization through Activism

Addressing discrimination and stigmatization through activism

1.1 | Citizenship in The United States

Citizenship is a political term, and indicates the people that belong to a politically defined community. Holston and Appadurai (1996, 187) explain that through history citizenship came to be known as being a "right-bearing citizen of a territorial nation-state". To this extent modern citizenship is associated with the nation state and it takes a dominant position. Nation state is according to Anderson (1984) 'an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.' One of the developments in citizenship is that "nation-states have sought to establish citizenship as identity which subordinates and coordinates all other identities" (Holston and Appadurai 1996, 187). Citizenship in this context creates equality in rights and entitlements to all citizens who are member to a particular nation-state. However in reality one can see injustice in rights and entitlements within a nation state. For this problem we need to redefine equality, not as homogenizing citizenship, but rather as equality in opportunity: "thus, it would define citizenship on the basis of rights to different treatment with equal opportunity" (ibid, 195). Citizenship is the public face of a nation and generally based on civic idealistic ideas of citizenship. In the case of the United States identification and citizenship are 'not primarily defined in terms of specific cultural practices and symbols, but in more abstract, idealist terms' (Stratton and Ang 1994, 8). These abstract and idealist terms are explained by Stratton and Ang within a political and national category, expressed through loyalty and patriotism. The United States is a classic prototype of idealistic citizenship; after the Civil War they had the possibility to build modern citizenship from the ground up. This ideal could be described as the national creed shared by most of the people living in the United States; American identity or character is defined by the belief in 'liberty, equality, individualism, democracy and the rule of law under a constitution' (Huntington 1983, 14). According to Parekh (1995, 262) The American political identity is defined in political, not ethnic terms: "to be patriotic is to be loyal not to the American Volk but to the American way of life, which is only partially articulated in its Constitution." Citizens are members of the political community within their nation-state and develop a political identity together. In this context 'the American way of life' can be interpreted as an important part of the American identity, which is not fixed.

The United States is a country where the word patriotism is celebrated. People are striving to be a patriot and are proud of it. When is someone a patriot? Who are allowed to be patriots? Before we saw that it means to be patriotic is to be loyal to the American way of life. Huntington (2004) describes two types of nationalism: patriotism and nationalism. The two types are different in a way that the first, according to Huntington (2004, 29), is associated with the good: civic nationalism, which assumes an open society based on a social contract and is open for any person to subscribe and become citizens. The second type, the bad association is based on ethnic nationalism and seen as exclusive for 'those who share certain primordial, ethnic, or cultural characteristics' (ibid). Huntington (ibid, 119) writes that the Civil War in the United States unified the country and after the war the nationalistic sentiment was increasing. When the nationalistic sentiment surges, the creation of symbols also arises. Likewise pointed out by Huntington (ibid, 126), especially with the use of the national flag, to this day: "The United States is an exception, however, in the extent to which its flag predominates over all other symbols and has been pervasively present in the American landscape" .

Considering loyalty towards 'the way of life,' or what Americans call patriotism and is the symbol of the nation, ideally causes civic inclusion. However in reality one can see cultural exclusion. After the Civil War the majority was immigrant; this was an important part of the identification with the nation state. The nationalistic feeling is important; the distinguishing mark of nationalism regarding identification is by definition its relation to the state (Eriksen 2010, 7). Nationalism in this sense functions as a way of making people feel connected with the nation state, in the case of the United States it is expressed through patriotism.

Within a nation people are creating a social identity in interaction with others and one 'must also be able to draw on some kind of internal solidarity or cultural commonality – be it of a political, economic, religious or symbolic nature' (Eriksen 1995, 435). However this is a process and not static, every individual and group has various dimensions of identification, which shift circumstantially (Eriksen 2010, 31-37), so it is an ongoing process.

Although one supposedly is looking for recognition with one's nationals, 'the members of nations need neither be 'the same people' in every respect and every situation, nor do they necessarily live in the same place' (Eriksen 1995, 435). The nation state forms a problem for the imagined community through migration mechanisms, the notion of in - and - exclusion begins to play a role.

This way people living in a diaspora can be member of a nation, despite being far away from the group.

Within a multicultural society as the United States the national identity is something complex. That a multicultural society doesn't leave the unity in citizenship untouched is showed by Stratton and Ang, they argue that multiculturalism has become a controversial issue, because of its real and perceived incompatibility with national unity (Stratton and Ang 1994, 124):

> […] the US is a pluralist society, but America is America: it has a unified national identity. That is, while everyday US social reality is so clearly multicultural, multiculturalism is alien to the way American national identity is imagined" (ibid).

When being patriotic is very important for America, how is it for citizens of America who hold a hybrid or hyphenated identity? These people are likewise able to claim to be patriotic but at the same time associate themselves with other identities besides being solely American. Does this duality question true patriotism with people who hold a dual citizenship? It became more and more accepted to hold two national citizenships. Huntington (2004, 212) writes that the shift, towards more citizens with dual nationalities, changes the meaning and significance of citizenship. In addition Huntington argues; "the lack of the need to make a choice (between the two citizenships) means the lack of a comparable need for loyalty and commitment" (ibid.), hence dual citizenship would end the exclusiveness of the American citizenship. What Huntington describes as a decreasing form of loyalty to one's citizenship, we would like to approach this process as hybrid citizenship. Hybridity does privileges border crossing, whereas it subverts nationalism (Nederveen-Pieterse 1995, 1392). However this phenomenon doesn't need to affect the notion of patriotism. Differently than Huntington, Nederveen-Pieterse (1999, 230) writes that the crossing of boundaries is something that had been happening throughout history 'it is not mixing that is new but the scope and speed of mixing.' Furthermore the American national identity doesn't have to oppose the hyphenated identity, they are able to coexist when it is understood as 'two separate identities, one culturally particular, the other presumably ideologically universal'(Stratton and Ang 1994, 138).

One of the groups in the United States that is largely concerned with hybrid identity is the Muslim community. Muslims in the United States is a group who had a difficult position because of their migration history. The slaves who were shipped by Europeans in the eighteenth and

nineteenth century originally brought Islam to the United States. However it is the more recent flow of migration of Muslims that raised a question of loyalty towards the nation by the American people. Various authors note that migrants used to identify based on ethnicity, but now shifted toward identification with religion (Akbarzadeh and Roose 2011; Moorey and Yaqin 2011). This is the case in particular with Muslims in the US; before they would be identified with their ethnic hyphenated identities; Indian-American, or Arab-American. The difficulty of politics of naming is shown and the term ‘Arab’ becomes contested (Naber 2008, 5) as well as other naming terms. However after negative events to which the Islam is associated people came to be identified as Muslim-Americans. This identification, within the politics of naming, brings another problem of being seen as homogenous. The next section will elaborate more on discrimination and the consequences for the Muslims in the United States.

1.2 | Discrimination in the context of a divided society

Although citizenship plays a central role in the United States, it does not operate along official lines of inclusiveness. The basic principle is claimed to be equal citizenship for all Americans, regardless of physical appearance or religion. The United States, however, have not adhered to this notion. The imagined community of the American nation-state has become conditioned in a setting of hybrid citizenship. We can see this in the racialized exclusion mechanisms that have been active throughout the country’s entire history. Racial structures and politics are strongly interwoven in the social structure of the United States. Although the concepts of race and racism are socially constructed and have changed over time under the influence of socio-historical factors, they are still of undeniable significance in the contemporary American society. Omi and Winant (2015, 128) define something as racism if “it creates or reproduces structures of domination based on racial significations and identities”. The nation-state of the United States has been racially ordered from it’s foundation, with the category ‘white’ as superior to other races. This racial domination has defined and shaped processes of ‘othering’ and marginalization (Omi and Winant, 263). This subversion of the formal meaning of citizenship has not remained confined to race, but has expanded along ethnic and, more recently, along religious lines.

Before we continue to explain 9/11 as a significant turning point in this process, let us first take a closer look at the concept of discrimination. Differences among people have resulted in conflicts and violence in the past, and nowadays discrimination and hate crimes still take place throughout the entire United States.

Discrimination generally means to draw a distinction, but can be used in a neutral or in a negative way. "According to generally accepted standards, or by drawing an unfair or injurious distinction" and when particular values or a particular group is specified, a certain act can be labelled discriminatory (Simpson and Yinger 1985, 23). When distinctions are made in a way that accepted procedures and values are violated, we are talking about discrimination in the sense it is mostly used in the public debate and with which we are concerned here. According to Yinger (1968, cited in Simpson and Yinger 1985, 23) discrimination is characterized by the fact that it is not simply the subject of interindividual conflict, but it deals with relations between (cultural) groups. Furthermore, it emanates from a system of social relations (ibid.), which often makes it even harder to change.

This issue also has serious implications for the debate on multiculturalism in the West. In the last decades, the increasing complexity of cultures and identities has caused multiculturalism in Western societies to deepen and has produced new modes of social agency and identity. However, as Ibrahim Kalin (in Esposito and Kalin 2011, 5) argues, multiculturalism has also reached its limits in the debate on Islam and Muslims. The narrow scope of the liberal political system "which defines secularization as the only emancipatory power in the modern world" (ibid.), turns Islam into a marginal member of multiculturalism in Western modernity. The sole basis of creating meaning and legitimacy for one's actions has become the individual choice. The secular liberal framework of Western modernity has shaped and principally determined this debate, which has no room for a non-Western religion such as Islam (ibid.).

Unlike the situation in Europe, Muslims in the United States tend to have a better education and a higher income than the average American citizen (ibid, 27). The causes of these statistics are not entirely known, but the fact that the nature of the immigration of many Muslims is quite different than in Europe - i.e. no large flows of economic migrants - plays an important role in this. Even though Muslims do not experience economic inequality more than other Americans, they are - and have been for a long time - characterized as the 'Other' in many media

reports and political discourses. This problem was brought to the surface and changed in character due to the events that took place on September 11, 2001 (Esposito and Kalin 2011, 4-5).

Since 9/11 Muslims have had to deal with an enormous increase in discriminatory expressions. For instance, several legal changes have resulted in mosque searches, telephone taps and unjustified bureaucratic hassle nationwide (Esposito and Kalin 2011, 30-31). On an overarching level, 9/11 intensified the discourse on Islam and Islamophobia (Esposito and Kalin 2011, xxx). After these extreme events Muslims were labeled with a cultural politically stigma and were no longer just an Other, but the *dangerous Other.* This narrative is now being deployed and politicized by president Donald Trump and his administration with a narrative about Muslims as dangerous and an emphasis on radical Islamic terrorism.

The media in the United States played an important part in portraying Muslims a particular way as well. Although the media cannot be labeled as Islamophobic, a significant increase in the amount of sensationalist stories can be observed, often focused on the threat of terrorism (Esposito and Kalin 2011, 33; see also Werbner 2005). A concerning trend of media nationwide is the tendency to "mix foreign and domestic Islam together, thus extending the entire trope of politically radical Islam to immigrant Muslim populations" (ibid.). The attention paid to sensational stories leaves less room to discuss the positive stories and successes of Muslim integration (Esposito and Kalin 2011, 34). Another problem is the lack of proper contextualization in news stories, which leads to essentialist and reductionist stories about Muslim culture and religion (Esposito and Kalin 2011, 15).

The image painted in television broadcasts and in newspaper articles often is a static, monolithic, and simplified one. For instance, Muslims are often depicted as a homogenous group of Arabs, while in reality most American Muslims are from South-Asian descent (Love 2009, 403). Furthermore, the general Western audience lacks the proper knowledge on Islam and Muslims to contextualize the news concerning these groups themselves (Ernst 2013, 2). Subsequently, the identity category of 'Muslim' takes on a predetermined meaning, which can lead to a justification of insults, threats, and intimidation of Muslims as a reaction to 'the existential threat' that Islamic extremism and terrorism is posing. Erik Love has observed widespread "efforts to distort the teachings of Islam, to discredit and defame Islamic organizations and to marginalize and impugn the religion itself" (2009, 402) in contemporary American society. These efforts originate partially from the discursive construction of the 'Orient' and the way Islam

is being constructed as foreign or alien by the West (Saïd 1978). One of the major implications of this construction of the Orient and it's inhabitants the 'Orientals', as stated by Saïd in his follow-up article 'Orientalism Reconsidered' (1985), is that Islam is deemed incapable of self-representation, self-understanding, and self-consciousness. Consequently the Orientals must "be represented by others who know more about Islam than Islam knows about itself" (Saïd 1985, 97).

Reifying Muslims as the Other, can result in a denial of their formal citizenship. An example of this is the argument used by right wing activists that Islam is not a religion, but a political movement, and that Muslims subsequently have no First Amendment rights (Ernst 2013, 4). This marginalisation and exclusion of a particular group from American citizenship is not a new phenomenon . The United States has done this to certain groups in at particular moments in it's history. The current subordinated and excluded group are Muslims and Middle Easterners (Maira, in Esposito and Kalin 2011, 111-112). The state of emergency for Muslims that arose after 9/11 is not a break from previous structures, but it builds on existing and ingrained modes of power. Many American Muslims have the feeling that since 9/11 they are no longer regarded as equal American citizens and that their civil rights are less protected or not protected at all anymore (Jamal 2008; Ali 2011, 369-70). In addition, many Muslims have identified a change in whether or not they 'feel American' since 9/11 (Ali 2011, 371). This illustrates the exclusion from citizenship that is experienced.

Although the term 'Islamophobia' is a problematic and contested one, it is also the most common term "to refer to bigotry, discrimination, policies and practices directed towards Islam and a racialized group of people that includes Muslims" (Love 2009, 402). So Muslims are only one of the groups affected in a direct way by Islamophobia; many people with a 'Muslim-like' appearance, but who are not necessarily Muslim, have been affected as well. The fear that is implied by this concept expresses itself in various domains, amongst others the workplace, in travelling, and in politics. Next to the targeting of people with a 'Muslim-like' appearance, Islamophobia is being expressed against institutions as well. There are plenty examples available of intense and sometimes even violent protests against the building of Islamic Centers and mosques (see Love 2009; Ernst 2013; Esposito and Kalin 2011). However, as a response to these various negative expressions towards Islam, many American Muslims have raised their voices and contested these blunt assumptions. In the next section we will discuss why it is important for a minority group to have fair representation within the nation-state.

1.3 | Representation and Participation

So far we have discussed that in Western multicultural societies questions are raised about equality and particularly in the case of Muslims. When a culture deviates from the majority - like Muslim immigrants in Western countries - segregation and discrimination is a threat. People tend to focus on the differences and on this base exclude others. We will examine the response of minorities, especially the Muslims in America, to the discrimination and stigmatization within a modern nation-state.

One of the causes of discrimination is unfair representation of a minority within the society, and therefore people are limited in their use for a platform to perform representation. The nation-state functions as a system of representation. According to Hall (1996, 229) representation depends on relations of difference. So within a pluralist society 'the other' is required to represent oneself, in order to obtain a fair representation. The concept of representation is helping to re-create a cultural identity that has been imposed upon people by others. The inequality of rightful citizenship within a nation-state causes underrepresentation of several minority groups. Ideally minority groups are fairly represented within a nation-state, however political entities are also tied to an agenda:

> [...] politicians and in mainstream media and cultural forms are almost always tied to an agenda that simultaneously announces its desire to "engage" with them while at the same time forcing debate into such contorted and tenuous channels as to make a meaningful flow of cross-cultural discussion almost impossible (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 2).

Here there are two dimensions of representation. The first is the representation one tries to realize for oneself. This form of representation expresses the particular narrative of the group, and political forms of empowerment the group wants to achieve (Morey and Yaqin 2011). The second dimension of representation is being represented by an outsider, with the possibility of being misrepresented. Here from derives and arises stereotyping and discrimination.

In the case of the Islamic community the stereotyping derives from a historical moment in which the set of representations operates from the micro-local to the international level (Cesari

2004, 22). This is what Edward Saïd (1978) argues; it is the cause for inaccurate and cultural misrepresentations that are the foundations of Western thought and perception of the Eastern world, specifically about the region of the Middle East. Additional, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Saïd (1985, 97) argues that the Other is subject to the representation that the majority ascribes to them. Although Muslims oppose the stereotyping, Muslims in the West also contribute to the misrepresentation of contemporary Islam (Cesari 2004, 6), through radicalization and violent acts in the name of Islam. Through negative events related with Islam and partly because of Islamophobia, a reactive identity formation takes place among Muslims. The hostility towards Islam results in intensification of the adherence to Islam and a way to "establish personal identity in relation to the outside environment and the discrimination it presents" (Cesari 2004, 42). Cesari questions the possibility of a stable Muslim American identity formation, in consequence of the combination of identities. Moreover, the reaction of many Muslims to negative events cause high rates of participation in political activities, especially since 9/11 (Jalalzai 2009, 160). Political participation is important for minority groups to make their voices heard. The next paragraph will look into the change of American political participation during the last century and how this changed the way people participate in society.

To examine the shift in the way people participate we look into the work of Skocpol (2003). She explains that before the 60s there were broad-based networks, for example the American Legion (WW II veterans organization) and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, with local departments who works cross-class. These association and networks trained the average citizen for civic skills and to learn how to participate in politics. But after the 60s these tasks professionalized; specialists went out to lobby for people who they thought they represented. They speak a (political) language that the low class people don't understand anymore, and therefore exclude them from politics. Thus, fewer people volunteer in civic organizations and a proliferation of non-profit groups led by elites arose, who interact not with the people but with the government (Skocpol 2003). In current American political developments one could see a similar trend happening. The low class American don't understand the language the political elite speaks. They don't want the elite governing over them and choose a president who is more like themselves, in this case president Trump. The idea is that president Trump worked for his money and came from a low class family and made a career by hard working.

Additionally, this happens with the Muslim community as well: there is much said for Muslims, but not spoken with them. Therefore Muslim strategy in the American public sphere has taken two routes according to Cesari (2004, 86), lobbying and moral persuasion. After the events of 9/11 it became particularly important for Muslim organizations to speak up. The American public asks from the Muslim community to condemn violent events related to Islam and therefore "Islamic community groups have sought to mobilize and assert their collective, this time religious, identity while reiterating their loyalty to the state"(Akbarzadeh and Roose 2011, 310).

Besides being represented in politics, media is an important element in representation of a group. Social media connects people over time and place and therefore "facilitates global connectedness even as it strengthens local ties (Juris 2008, 12). Through internet people can keep group members informed about developments of the group, this is especially an advantage for diaspora's like the Muslim community, to keep close ties. In addition to this Manuel Castells (2010, 388) writes that the internet allows the forging of weak ties between strangers, in an egalitarian pattern of interaction. He explains it by seeing the internet as a contributor to expanding social bonds in a society that seems to be in the process of rapid individualization and civic disengagement (Castells 2010 388). Various authors emphasize the internet as a platform for political representation (Gerbaudo 2012; Juris 2008). Additionally, when media is used in a creative way to display identities "such images offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas"(Hall 1990:224).

Thus Muslims within the United States can use media as a tool to represent themselves in the public sphere and disprove the existing stereotypes of Muslims, as well as to keep close ties with the *Ummah,* in order to inspire and empower themselves in tough times. The next section will take a closer look into empowerment and activism.

1.4 | Community Empowerment

To be able to fully grasp the meaning of empowerment, it is essential to discuss the concept of agency first. Although the structure-agency debate has been dealt with many times in academic

literature (see for instance Bourdieu 1972; 1994 and Giddens 1986), it is important to express the specific meaning and significance the concept of agency has within our research.

When one is an agent, one has a certain amount of control over a situation or social relation and subsequently can transform this situation to a certain degree if one would wish to (Sewell 1992, 20). Sewell argues that “agency arises from the actor's control of resources, which means the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted the array. Agency is implied by the existence of structures [...]” (1992, 20). So people are able to exercise agency, *because* they have to deal with structures. Structures can be utilized and/or altered by people for their own goals and benefits - not without effort however.

When looking into the way religious groups exercise their agency, it is of course essential to investigate “social actors’ understandings of their religious identifications and how these shape their engagement with others” (Hopkins 2011, 529). Another notion to keep in mind is that identities do not exist outside the conditions of their creation or independently from their social representation (Macdonald 1993). Nick Hopkins argues that identities are “actively constructed in and through argument” (2011, 529). This construction takes place, among other things, in group-making activities that support self-categories and give them particular meanings and contents.

The effort to alter structures and the potential reaching of this goal can lead to empowerment. Empowerment is described in the Oxford dictionary as: “the authority or power given to someone to do something” and “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights” (2016). The latter part of the definition is applicable in the context of this study. Empowerment and community participation fit within “the framework of wider strategies to promote economic, political, social, and cultural transformation” (Craig and Mayo 1995, 1). Angela Cheater discusses in her work on the anthropology of power one way empowerment can be achieved – depending on the cultural habitus of course: “through appropriation of the control of resources previously belonging to others, or intended to benefit others” (1999, 9). The most important thing when pursuing empowerment is to make the most of every individual’s potential. In addition, the author observes paradoxes of empowerment:

> simultaneous empowerment and disempowerment (from different perspectives) ‘in the same moment’ […]. Thus there may be simultaneous as well as

> alternating paradoxes of empowerment, both related to discursive constructions of essentialised otherness as well as to unvoiced assumptions about the reach of discursive power. (Cheater 1999, 10)

Efforts to acquire empowerment often arise at a grassroots level and have a voluntary character (Craig and Mayo 1995, 2). Subsequently, community participation is of great importance. Effective citizen's participation is one of the key elements to people's struggle for rights, equality, and democracy, according to the World Commission on Environment and Development (in Craig and Mayo 1995, 2). Participating and empowering efforts can lead to access to economic resources, decision making, and power. The (re)gaining of agency seems to be one of the main goals of empowerment. Kalin argues that countering the current systematic disenfranchisement of Muslims and non-Westerners will lead to an increase in a sense of agency and empowerment (Esposito and Kalin 2011, 12).

One way of empowering a specific group is for its members to expand their social capital. In the words of Robert Putnam: "social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (2000, 19). These durable social networks are characterized by relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. A distinction can be made between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital. This distinction refers to social networks within a social group and social connections between different social groups (Hopkins 2011, 529). In the context of empowerment, social capital can be viewed as a tool to achieve certain (activist) goals. By undertaking activities for group members, social capital is actively created and the group identity is empowered. Moreover, by deploying bridging social capital in a strategic way, groups can influence their identity representation towards other groups.

So social capital can be actively produced and facilitate bridging and bonding activities. For example, the latter can take shape in the undertaking of autonomous community development and the former in the involvement in (local) politics and media. Although bonding activities are often viewed as an impediment for social cohesion in larger society, they can also be a precondition for undertaking effective bridging activities. Only when a social group has strong internal ties, they can effectively make connections to other groups. Bonding can be seen as "important for creating the self-definition and confidence that could allow more equal interaction"

(Hopkins 2011, 534). Hopkins (2011) links the social capital theory to religion and identity. Religious networks can form the basis for relations that constitute social capital. In the case of an asymmetrical power relationship between a majority and a (religious) minority, the minority's deliberations on identity must be sensitive to the experiences of it's members as a minority. This experience can influence how social relationships with others can be used to develop identities (Hopkins 2011, 538).

The contestation over religious identities can also be observed within the Muslim community. In defining their identities Muslims can rely on a 'reserve' of meanings and symbols to appropriate and deploy. The meanings that are given to key texts are contingent on the social, political, and economic context of those reading them (Hopkins 2011, 531). Therefore, identities are fluid social constructs and situational dependent. Karamustafa (in Omid 2003, 109) regards Islam as 'a civilizational project', for the people that see themselves as Muslims and represent themselves this way, *they* create Islam. Even though Muslims generally base themselves on the same key sources, there exists a great variety in Islamic practices. In addition, empowerment of these different groups can take on various forms. One group might need more internal social cohesion, while another is looking for better representation in the media. In contrast to this notion of fluidity, (religious) identities are often depicted as static, fixed, and monolithic. This incongruence has caused religious identities to be sites of on-going contestation and struggle (Hopkins 2011, 533). Several controversies which were given great (inter)national attention, like the Rushdie affair, have triggered a process among Muslims of increasing organization in terms of Muslim identity at (trans)national levels. These organizations have given Muslims greater bonding social capital and thus a stronger base for empowerment. Hopkins refers to these processes as an "on-going reimagining of Muslims' religious and national identities" (2011, 532). In the creation of this identity however, minorities often only have the option to employ the conceptual, rhetorical, and institutional resources that are available in contemporary politics of equality. But if the Muslim community in the United States succeeds in creating "greater levels of objective dialogue, shared experience, and collective practices" to heal past hurts (Wadud in Omid 2003, 282), they might be able to show the greater society what *their* Islam is and try to regain power over their identity formation and exercise their agency.

Increased social capital, both bonding and bridging, can form an important base for a religious group, like the Muslims, to take action in pursuit of empowerment. When they can

deploy their agency to create a stronger internal social cohesion and influence the structures around them, like for instance politics, the media landscape, and the entertainment industry, Muslims can attain this empowerment. Moreover, breaking the current exclusion mechanisms and becoming not only formal, but also experienced full citizens of the United States will grant the Muslim community a strong voice in the public debate. Consequently sending the message that they are not a dangerous Other, but part of the diverse collection of people that makes the United States what it is.

Chapter 2

Context of the Research

The Landscape of a Progressive City: Los Angeles

Context of the Research

The landscape of a progressive city: Los Angeles

> The building is situated right on the edge of Koreatown in Los Angeles, on a spacious lot on Vermont Avenue. The cars and buses are constantly rushing by. The blue arch shaped decorations stand out against the white walls of the enormous building. Golden letters on the front say 'Islamic Center of Southern California'. In front of the building a huge American flag waves in the wind. Inside the building the prayer hall with it's thick green carpet and big chandelier is an immediate eye catcher. It is also the place where there are always men studying the *Qur'an* or enjoying some rest in between prayers. On Fridays however the entire prayer hall is packed with people who come to listen to the weekly *khutba.* Most times extra pieces of carpet have to be unrolled in the event room, because not everybody fits into the prayer hall. The women have their own space to congregate in the lecture hall. After the *khutba* and *jummah*, the central hall fills up with people who are enthusiastically mingling and socializing. Some people have to rush back to work, but the others enjoy the time they can spend with their community.

This illustration shows the usual affairs at the ICSC, a religious center in Koreatown, Los Angeles. During our research, it functioned as an important place to meet new people, as well as an important location to collect our data. In this chapter we will provide background information of Islam in the United States and the role it takes on in Los Angeles.

As we discussed, 9/11 intensified the discourse on Islam and Islamophobia (Esposito and Kalin 2011, xxx). Muslims in the United States became the *dangerous Other* and this narrative is now being deployed and politicized by president Trump[2]. Within this process one can see exclusion from the civic national identity. Stratton and Ang (1994, 124) argue that the United States has a pluralist society, however it has a unified national identity, where multiculturalism is "alien to the way American national identity is imagined". With the emphasis on terrorism and

[2] See for examples of his rhetoric: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38886496, accessed on 18-05-2017.

extremism within Islam at the American public, the Muslim community "have sought to mobilize and assert their collective identity while reiterating their loyalty to the state" (Akbarzadeh and Roose 2011, 310). Muslims find themselves in processes of "on-going reimagining of Muslims' religious and national identities" (Hopkins 2011, 532). These processes result in a greater bonding social capital, and therefore a stronger base for Muslim empowerment. In our research field, we have seen the process of reimagining religious and national identities of Muslims at work in different ways. Many organizations that are advocating for the Muslim community are active in Los Angeles. The city of Los Angeles has a lively history of activism and many social groups are willing to stand up for each other and let their voices be heard.

The first section of this chapter provides some background information about Muslims in America and their historical context. The second part will dive deeper into the city of Los Angeles and the part this city plays in our theoretical concepts.

How Islam came to the United States

Although statistics show that Muslims make up just 0.9 percent of the total population, at the moment Islam is the third largest religion in the United States and it is strongly increasing in followers[3]. It is known that Christianity plays a big role in the history of the United States, yet Islam has been present in this country for a long time as well. There are several flows of migration that brought the faith of Islam to The United States. One of the first migration flows is through slave trade that lasted until the nineteenth century. African American Muslims we spoke with mentioned proudly that they brought Islam to the United States. One often used example is that Thomas Jefferson owned a Quran, this is something many Muslims spoke very proud about. It is estimated that tens of thousands Muslims were brought to the New World. It is possible to trace back the possible religions of these slaves, because they originated from western Africa, which was a mainly Islamic region at the time. Moreover, many names of slaves were based on Islamic important figures (Abdo 2006, 66). The second immigration flow to the United States can be traced back to the decline of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth century, therefore Muslims sought alternative countries to go to, including the United States. However, Muslims lived very scattered and in isolation, which made it hard for them to keep their faith alive. The migration of Muslims decreased after the actual fall of the Ottoman Empire and the chaos of

[3] http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/

World War I (Abdo 2006, 62). However the Immigration Act (also known as the Johnson Act, aimed at limiting the immigration of Europeans to the United States) caused a real effective halt of immigration in 1921.

During the mid-twentieth century the Nation of Islam movement arose, with Elijah Muhammad as its prominent leader (Abdo 2006, 76). However, Elijah Muhammad's focus was more on emancipation of race, declaring that white people are descendants of the devil (Ibid.). The focus on black identity caused that there is no solid Muslim-American identity, "for its adherents were clearly blacks first and Muslims second" (ibid., 81). Our respondents who took part in the Nation of Islam, stated that this period was necessary in order for the African American to create an identity for themselves.

In 1965 the Immigration Act was withdrawn and from this time onwards more Muslims migrated to the United States again. This migration flow brought many highly educated Muslims, schooled in mostly engineering and theology, and many of them became religious authorities for the American Muslim community (Ibid., 82). Mentioned before, the number of Muslims has increased rapidly in the last decades and Islam is soon expected to be the second largest religion, after Christianity. Muslims in the United States nowadays face an enormous challenge, as we have discussed above, in defining their Muslim-American identity after 9/11 due to discrimination.

The recent elections for the United States presidency (November 8, 2016) were won by president Donald Trump. His anti-Islamic rhetoric has caused many Muslims to worry about their safety and the protection of their civil rights. (Social) media can be a useful tool for them to express their concerns. One of the ideas President Trump expressed during his campaign was a registry of Muslim immigrants. As a response, almost 500 leaders of the Islamic world expressed their worries about this in an open letter.[4] They wrote that American-Muslim organizations received more reports of anti-Muslim hate crimes than during any other period of time since 9/11.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles counts almost four million inhabitants, with a Muslim population of about 69.000 in 2010 . Although this number might seem small, Los Angeles accommodates many organizations and around thirty mosques which are active in organizing seminars, social gatherings, and religious activities. Some of these organizations exist in order to promote the Islamic values to the

[4] www.muslimlettertotrump.com

American society and engage Muslims in politics, civil action, and the entertainment industry. An example of this type of organization is the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC, 2014). Their mission includes promoting the Muslim identity, educating the American public about Islam, building alliances with Muslim and non-Muslim groups, and promoting an accurate portrayal of Islam and Muslims in mass media and popular culture. This particular strategy of activism that is used in the American public sphere among others by MPAC, is what Cesari (2004, 86) means with moral persuasion.

CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) is the nation's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. It's mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding (CAIR, 2014). CAIR focuses among other things on lobbying in politics, to represent the interest of the American Muslim community "before various government agencies at the local, state, and national level" (CAIR, 2014). Both CAIR and MPAC aim to be a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding. This emphasis on mutual understanding illustrates what Abdo (2006, 5) argues in her book, that Muslims feel compelled to explain the true Islam to the American public in order to defend themselves.

The United States has a very diverse Muslim community with people from all over the world and Los Angeles reflects this diversity as well. The city also reflects flaws that come with the notion of multiculturalism. The Muslim minority experiences exclusion in the form of being a perceived threat to the American identity and security (Ali 2011). This fear leads to stigmatization and discrimination of Muslims nationwide. Holston and Appadurai (1996, 191) describe that in cities privatizing or dismantling public spaces is happening in order "to implant zoning regulations which in effect keep the undesired out." An illustration of this is from regulating plans back in 2007 in Los Angeles. There was a plan by the counterterrorism bureau of the Los Angeles Police Department to create a map detailing the Muslim communities in Los Angeles, to keep an eye on possible radicalized Muslims (Protest Greets Police Plan to Map Muslim 'Angelenos', 2007). This power play by the police was experienced as potentially causing segregation and exclusion of the Muslims. The Muslim community reacted angrily with demonstrations; they felt that the entire Muslim community was treated with suspicion. Because of the many protests from the Muslim community and Muslim civil rights organizations, these plans were cancelled. This

kind of activism is important for Muslims to know that they are able the exercise agency in order to influence structures. Consequently, this has an empowering effect.

We have chosen Los Angeles, California as a location to conduct research about the Muslim society and their response to stigmatization and discrimination. Through the previous illustrations we have showed that the Muslim community in Los Angeles is active in the American society to promote and defend their faith and traditions. The city of Los Angeles has a great ethnic diversity and great socio-economic inequality. Within this city a vibrant community of Muslims is negotiating their Muslim American identity and is standing up against discrimination and stigmatization. This context makes Los Angeles a very relevant location for our research.

Chapter 3

"Taking Back the Flag"

3. “Taking Back the Flag”

In November 2016 Donald Trump was elected president of the United States. Many people do not agree with the ideas and policies he was planning to carry out. One of the plans President Trump immediately executed after he got inaugurated was the travel ban[5] - also called a ‘Muslim ban’ by president Trump himself - like we discussed in the introduction. This caused big unrest, not only within the Muslim community worldwide, but also under non-Muslims. People started protesting at airports citing the constitution, the fourteenth amendment, which deters governing authority from denying any person the equal protection under the law. We flew to Los Angeles just a few days after president Trump executed the executive order. There were big protests going on at the airport of Los Angeles (LAX). This is the moment that we arrived at our field; as if we were thrown from the plane into our research.

Our first introduction to the Islamic Centre of Southern California was one of their weekly activities; the Foodpantry. This is a food bank organized by the mosque, and many volunteers help out. These volunteers were very diverse; Christians from different churches, Jews from a nearby temple and several Muslims from the area. We had some informal conversations with people about our experiences of the United States so far and what we think of president Trump. Something we noticed is that people started immediately with an apology for such a ‘stupid’ president like Trump. California is a very progressive state, the majority are democrats, and Los Angeles is no exception. Abud, a religious leader connected to the ICSC, noted that Los Angeles is very engaged and diverse environment:

> That is the beauty of Los Angeles, it’s like being hungry for like, discovering more and learning more about culture. [...] But here it is like really people are so hungry to know about each other so. (20-02-17)

Most of the non-Muslim people helping out at the mosque were there to show support to Muslims. During several interviews with Muslims people stated that they were very happy to live in America and loved the country despite the current situation. We found these patriotic expressions very interesting and paid attention to this notion in the field.

[5] http://documents.latimes.com/immigration-orders/; consulted on 28-05-2017

3.1 | Patriotism

At a workshop, organized by a Muslim Student group we got into a discussion about Americans and their love for the nation. We shared with them that in our group of friends it is really uncommon to express love for the country, people will look at you as a nationalist, but here in the United States people say it rather a lot how much they appreciate and love the US. One of the students explained that there is a big difference between nationalism and patriotism, for her there was nothing contradicting in the fact that she was a Muslim from an immigrant background and at the same time express her love for the United States. This idea was echoed by more of the people we spoke to in the field. Khalid, a former board member and actively connected to the ICSC, stated the same sentiment and became passionate concerning this subject:

> And the concept is that there is no conflict between being a practicing Muslim and being a patriotic American. [...] There's nothing, nothing, like I said, incongruent/conflicting, between being a Muslim and being an American. Being a very patriotic American! (19-04-2017)

Khalid's statement illustrates the difference between nationalism and patriotism given by Huntington (Huntington 2004). However the United States knows a unified national identity and multiculturalism is alien to the way American national identity is imagined (Stratton and Ang 1994, 124). So in reality there is a cultural exclusion in society, one that Muslims in Los Angeles experience. As a result of cultural exclusion we noticed that Muslims were very active in proving that they are actually very American. Soraya, who is part of the Hollywood Bureau from MPAC, stated the following:

> Because Islam is about democracy and fairness and equality and human rights, so is the constitution. I would hate to compare the *Qur'an*, the holy book, to the constitution, I mean I personally believe the *Qur'an* is sacred and you know, but my point is that there is no contradiction between the two articles. (12-04-2017)

Other informants echoed this idea extensively, many people even felt that if they would express their Muslim identity people would think they are anti- Western and can't be patriotic. Additionally patriotism is constructed visibly in the public landscape. In the Los Angeles landscape the flag is something natural and very present. The Islamic Center of Southern

California has a flag hanging outside and also inside at the background of the lecture hall. At the workshop where I had a discussion a student explained: “We are taking *the flag back*, otherwise the others will get it.” Meaning that you have to be active in being included in citizenship and defining it, otherwise others will decide what happens and define the meaning of one others citizenship. One very illustrating famous image is the one that was used during the women’s march in January where a woman is depicted wearing the American flag as hijab. Many women followed this example during the rally organized by the ICSC; women were wearing the flag as hijab in different styles.

In the field we noticed that Muslims would justify their right to be equally Americans on the constitution. This is one of the elements that Huntington (1983) described as part of the national creed; being American is defined by the belief in liberty equality, individualism, democracy and the rule of law under a constitution. To a certain extent, by appealing on the constitution, it brought the American Muslim community into the political arena. Previously it was possible to avoid political discourse in daily life. One example is when Zahra - one of the board members from the Muslim Student Union at USC born and raised in California, with Egyptian parents - shared with us that within the Muslim Student Union it was difficult to talk about politics, because many international students are members and all have different political views:

> And that decision was made years ago, because the politics had a potential dividing the community, since everyone had kind of a different political perspective, so it was important for us to stay as united as possible to keep politics out of it. (20-03-2017)

Zahra expressed that it was important for the MSA to stay united, and doing this by keeping politics out of their activities. However the movement of Muslims who are progressively more engaged and involved with politics asks for unification as well. Every member was affected by the political situation at the time and Zahra adds later on that that the MSU is required to be political in a united way. So through the need in the Muslim community to prove their ‘Americanness’ they need to be unified in order to create the Muslim American identity.

3.2 | Multiculturalism and Identity Politics

Identity becomes an important part of people's public life and influences civic life. One example is from Marwa, we met her at an evening for Muslim poetics, but everyone, Muslim and non-Muslim, was welcome. She told us that she wouldn't identify as Muslim before, she didn't practice her faith and considered it just her background. But now that the political situation changed and other people decided for her that she is a Muslim, even if she didn't identify as one. Her name and appearance meet the stereotype of Muslims, but she doesn't wear a hijab. Because of other people identifying her as a Muslim, she started to act like it and identified with being a Muslim herself.

In the beginning of our fieldwork we were very focused on discrimination and activism. Up to the moment we looked around in the bookshop of the ICSC, there was the book with the title 'The Muslim American Identity, speaking for ourselves.' We bought it and we read it, it was very interesting, well written with carefully researched information about Muslims in the US. A statement in the introduction left us very curious:

"Despite the growing number of community institutions, one question that has often been a subject of intense discussion and debates among Muslims is the identity of Muslims in America. The answer has never been simple. Three different schools of thought are present among Muslims. One group believes that the Muslim communities and their Islamic identity should be understood in the context of their historical experiences. For instance, the identity of African American Muslims or Pakistani Muslim or Egyptian Muslims is the product of their specific historical experiences and hence it should be accepted as a reality. The second group argues that Islamic identity is an un-hyphenated identity. Once a person joins the fold of Islam, he or she leaves behind all traits of previous identities whether ideological, racial or ethnic. The third school of thought believes there is nothing wrong with accepting a hyphenated Islamic identity and, in the US, it should be an American Muslim identity."

After reading this book we were interested how our informants thought about the Muslim American identity. Mustaqeem explained how, in his view and that of the ICSC, being a Muslim and being an American can go well together:

I don't think it's a matter of it trying to be different or being different, but it [the ICSC] is really grounded in the belief that Islam is something that doesn't need to be foreign. That a person could be really fully American and fully an observant and devout Muslim. And those two things can go hand in hand. Obviously things that are like incompatible with I guess American culture, are obviously not part of… You know, we're not condoning that. But in its values and in its pursuit of like freedom and equality and justice and a good life for all people and dignity for everyone, those are Islamic values as well. (15-04-2017)

Even though the Muslim identity and the American identity seem to go well together, friction does exist between Muslims and the idea of 'Americanness'. According to our informants this friction is mainly caused by a conflation of religion and culture. Sadiq, an immigrant from Pakistan, noticed this conflation first hand:

I would say from my personal experience. In America I have seen like people learn more about Islam then they actually have in their own country. Where we come from, most of the time it's not Islam it's culture and we get confused between that. And we tend to put that on other people as well. [...] So coming here, I was learning that some things that I was doing in Pakistan was kind of wrong, they were opinions, but Islam never said that, like talking to women, Islam is never against that. (15-04-2017)

The current political situation has forced the Muslim community to reflect on their own identity, their goals, and how they want to pursue these. The best strategies and methods of how to work with the government and how to reach out to non-Muslims are perceived very differently by different people, precisely because the Muslims in Los Angeles are not a homogeneous and monolithic group. Being an American is being part of a pluralistic society, just like Islam is a pluralistic faith within the United States. A similar statement about the Muslim American identity from the book we found in ICSC:

"The identity is defined as a commitment of the values of pluralism, democracy, liberty and human rights as guaranteed in the US constitution, as well as the commitment to the goal of making Muslims an effective part of American pluralism."

One of our informants mentioned that in order to accommodate the Muslim American identity it is important to come around one common theme. The commonality of Muslims in America is mainly diversity and their believe in the holy Quran.

3.3 | African American Muslims

However when speaking of the Muslim American identity there was one community within the bigger Muslim community that reacted differently to the question what the Muslim American identity is. The African American Muslim community have their separate history where they dealt mainly with racism, and Islam became part of their struggle for empowerment and inclusion. The African American Muslim community are an illustration of fighting for inclusive citizenship. They are in the United States already for a very long time and were part of the founding process of the US. We have noticed that sharing their story is something that they do a lot, to tell their own narrative:

> On Sundays Arabic classes and discussion group took place in the Masjid Bilal , South Central. The morning that I would attend a discussion class for the first time, after the Arabic class, imam Kareem was preparing the discussion group already while we were still plodding with Arabic grammar. Imam Malik was explaining the difficult grammar very lively and with a lot of patience from his side. Imam Malik asked me, after the Arabic class ended, if I wanted to stay for the discussion group, and of course I would. At that moment imam Kareem erased the whiteboard with his preparations so far and wrote a different text on the board: "Muslims in America: African American experience, ancestors, nationalistic movement and freedom." This was exactly what I was interested in, as if imam Kareem read my mind full of questions. Other people joined the group, some were sitting on chairs others silently in the back against the wall. Imam Malik had put up a chair in the middle of the carpet for me, where I sat down with my notebook. Imam Kareem started with his lecture: "We will discuss our history today, I will explain things sometimes for our guest (pointing to me), what is your name?". I introduced myself to the imam and he continued: "Us being here is world citizenry; we speak English, it's a world language and it tights us all together." He explained that African American people came into the US by involuntarily servitude for long time, from Africa. They all had to change their name to Christian names, while many of them probably had Islamic names, since Islam was a big religion back in the region, West Africa, where many came from. Imam Kareem explained that, since there was no slavery anymore it was difficult not to

know who you are, not having a cultural identity. Later on Imam Malik took over a bit and shared that during the 60's there was movement for freedom, from world oppression. The oppression was physical; the segregation, and mental. The mental oppression was the worst according to imam Malik, mental slavery he called it. Several moments rose during these times, but the one that affected the African American community the most was the Nation of Islam. The other people in the prayer room were listening very careful to the stories told by Imam Malik and Imam Kareem, I was writing very fast to keep up. Imam Malik continued: "Nobody heard of Islam before that time, it promoted freedom, justice and equality. We were given an identity. It was very psychological; to change the image from not sure of yourself to black men is God. " He writes very big on the whiteboard: 'BLACKMAN' and 'G*D'[6]. "We wanted to seek knowledge, our minds were getting out of the darkness." I asked them how they look back on that time. Other people started to answer now as well, they agreed on that the movement of the Nation of Islam, under the lead of Elijah Muhammad, was a social movement. They described it as necessary at the time to give people hope, people needed it at the time. One man said that the Nation of Islam helped him to get off of the street. At the time Elijah Mohammed referred to himself as a god-send man, but now they see him as a social reformer; through him the African American community came to Al Islam. Imam Kareem referred to the period as: "Islam with a brand of black nationalism."

Later on in our fieldwork we met Sahih, an African American Muslim who is very active in doing charity work for the community. In an interview with Sahih, he explained very clearly:

> The African American community is a special community, our history; you can look at us in three frameworks. As an African, as an African American, as a black man, and as a Muslim. So all four narratives exist within us, you know. The history of Muslim come sailing the seas, from the silk route. We come from the world, we are part of the history. (12-04-2017)

After hearing this story about the history of the African American Muslim community in the United States, we understood better why they are so distinct within the broader Muslim community. They all share the faith, but not the history. When we asked about the Muslim American identity the answer was very different, than when we would ask it at the ICSC. Whereas

[6] Within this community people don't write God with an 'o' in the middle, because when you would turn the word around it says 'dog', this is disrespectful towards God.

at the ICSC the element of culture and religion is important, among African American Muslims they are without doubt American, they are part of the American culture. I noticed that the Muslim American identity was not something they needed to think about or still needed to be established, they just are American and Muslims, therefore their identity is Muslim Americans. Mustaqeem noticed this as well and explained:

> It is also this whole race thing, it points out this immigrant vs. this indigenous Islam, because African Americans have been here for a long time. This whole American Muslim thing that I talked about is something they don't even talk about, because for them it is just natural, it is like: I am already of America and I am Muslim as well. It has a different flavor at it. (15-04-2017)

Imam Malik, one of the religious leaders at Masjid Bilal, stated it almost like the African American people are like teachers for the newer immigrants, to learn about life as Muslim in the United States: "They are new here in America and you need people who know how it is done here. If you want to know how politics, economics works in America you need to listen to African American also about history." The history of African American Muslims and Islam in the United States is also seen as the general history of Muslims in the US. An interesting remark made by people we spoke to from the ICSC about the Muslim American identity, was that they claimed this narrative as part of the history of all Muslims in the US. This rhetoric could work in a unifying way and includes newer immigrants into the Muslim American identity.

Although it sounds unifying, the African American Muslim community and the Arab and Asian immigrants have very different experiences. Up to this day many African American Muslims live in different circumstances than most of the immigrant Muslims. In the next chapter we will take a look at the discrimination experienced by the Muslims in the United States.

Chapter 4

Discrimination and Stigmatization

4. Discrimination and stigmatization

As noted in the previous chapter, the concepts of citizenship and patriotism play a central role in contemporary American society. Although the assumption could be made that citizenship grants equal rights and possibilities for all, mechanisms of exclusion *are* still at work.

In this chapter we will discuss how the Muslim community in Los Angeles experiences discrimination and stigmatization. First we will explain how exclusion from citizenship is experienced and what that means to the Muslim community. Moreover, we will explicate the different ways in which Muslims in Los Angeles experience discrimination. Then we will continue to discuss how the concept of race plays an important role in the experienced discrimination and racism of and within the Muslim community. Next, we will illustrate how 9/11 can be perceived as a turning point in the way Muslims are being framed in the public debate. Finally, we will examine the politicization of the narrative on Islam under president Trump and the different ways in which Muslims are being stigmatized, for example in the media and in politics.

4.1 | Exclusion from citizenship

When citizenship and civil rights are deemed as important as they are in the United States, the more frustrating it is when you are excluded from that. Even though the country legally does not discriminate particular ethnic groups and claims to offer everybody the same opportunities, many minorities face discrimination in daily life based on their appearance, religion, or other features. Different informants have explained to us why it is especially painful to be discriminated in the United States. For instance Abdel, one of the employees of the ICSC, explained to us:

> Other countries where I'm a guest, they treat me better, but in my own country, this is my home, they treat me like… a little bit different. So it's a bit discouraging, because I'd die for this county, I love the United States! (12-03-2017)

When the subject of citizenship comes up many, many people refer to the fact that Muslims have been in the United States for centuries. When the slaves were deported from Africa to the United States, many of them originally were Muslims. In their new country many of them were forced to

convert to Christianity and thus alter their identity. This narrative and the history of colonialism have been mentioned by different informants, most of whom don't have an African American background themselves.

Zahra told us she felt that Muslims had to prove their "goodness" to the American society:

> Bush junior [took] on a language of 'good Muslims' vs. 'bad Muslims'. Saying that good Muslims are helping us fighting the war and the bad Muslims are the ones that are attacking. But what this inherently does is it says that: One, to be a good Muslim is conditional; and two, it's a political condition; three, it's a political condition *outside* of our own control, like we didn't decide what makes us good or bad, it's someone else who is deciding that; but four, it means that our default is *against*, until we have proof that we're with the US. (20-03-2017)

She continued to explain that many Muslims were afraid to speak up or stand out as a consequence of this narrative. Some times when Muslims did speak up, this was met with so much controversy and reprimands, it scared others to be vocal as well.

Even when Muslims are not vocal, they are often the target of negativity. We have heard many different stories of people who experienced discrimination and stigmatization. Discrimination towards individual Muslims is often targeted towards *hijabis*, because they are easily recognizable as Muslims, as the Other (Saïd 1978; Esposito and Kalin 2011). Things like being called a terrorist or other offensive things, people trying to pull of the hijab, or actually being physically attacked are some of the experiences we have heard. Some of the men told us they have gotten into fights and were called names. But because the male Muslims are often not directly recognizable as Muslims, they experience less individual discrimination. Mosques are also often the target of negativity or hate. The Islamic Center of Southern California, for instance, has been vandalized, receives many threatening phone calls, and sometimes receives offensive packages:

> So we had somebody write on our wall 'Go to hell you f-ing Muslims'. Somebody spray painted it on the walls. So we covered it up. And another thing was where somebody wrote with a marker 'America belongs to Americans! Get out!'. Somebody threw a rock through our window one time. And things like that… Recently, and I'm glad we're done eating, so I can tell you guys about this, somebody put like, I think it was either human or dog, feces… They

> took a piece of the *Qur'an* and they put it in there and they mailed it to us. And when we opened it up, you could see the stuff. So we threw it away. But somebody sent it to us. Things like that. (Abdel 12-03-2017)

Mansuri, an employee from CAIR, explained that the elections and the politicization of the 'Othering' narrative by president Trump have had a big impact on the Muslim community in LA: "After the election CAIR received, ten days after the election, we received 111 reports of hate incidents or hate crimes occurring. So obviously hate crimes go up." He also elaborated on how that affects the community:

> Specifically with everything that's going on, in the community there is a lot of fear, there's a lot of hesitation. We hear things from people directly, but also from Facebook, social media, through other individuals. Parents are afraid to send their kids to school, people aren't attending the mosque as much. (Mansuri 08-03-2017)

There even have been incidents in which mosques have been set on fire and other cases where pregnant women were severely beaten up, one time with a miscarriage as a result.

4.2 | Racism within the Muslim community

An important topic that we have come across during our research is the racism and discrimination that takes place *within* the Muslim community. Especially the African American Muslims find themselves in a position where they are the subject of both racism and Islamophobia. The former takes place both from outside and within the Muslim community. Many of our informants have indicated that there are still issues around race and that the African American community and the Arab and Desi community - also named the 'immigrant community' - are not the confluence that they should be. Mohammad, actively engaged politically and within the interfaith community, stated that African American Muslims are sometimes 'used' during events, because it "looks good to have a black Muslim speaker" (11-04-2017), but they are not incorporated properly. This was confirmed by Sahih, who also underlined the many struggles the African-American community has had to endure in it's history, and still "African Americans are the poster-child for poverty" (12-04-2017). Sheikh Ismail, works for the Institute of Knowledge at both UCLA and USC,

illustrated the tension between the African-American community and the immigrant community with the following statement:

> [There is] definitely a lot of tension. Because the African American community often times looks at the immigrant community like these people who came in and made a bunch of money and basically became ‘white’ and forgot about their brothers and sisters in the hood. And didn’t care about them. And just came in and told them what Islam is and isn’t, but didn’t care for their well-being. […] And there’s a lot of racism also, in the immigrant community. So, there’s definitely a lot of tension there. And the immigrant community often times, they accept that the black people, that they deserve where they are [e.g. being poor, etc.]. (21-03-2017)

From the illustrations mentioned above we can derive that socio-economic factors are still perceived to be the main divide between the African Americans and immigrant Muslims. This clearly illustrates the persistent racial structures in the United States (Omi and Winant 2015), even within an aspiring unified community like the Muslims.

Next to racism towards African American Muslims, other internal discriminations take place as well. Back in the countries of origins people have stigmas of other people, just like everywhere else. However in the United States people from all over the world come together and live together, and these existing stigmas don’t just disappear. Especially the first generation of immigrants, as people told us, tends to hold on to stigmas. Moreover, people living in rather close knitted communities with the same background are more likely to retain to the stigmas they had in their home country. Many of these stigmas are based on the (perceived) socio-economic status of the other group.

4.3 | 9/11 as a turning point

A decisive moment in the history of the Muslim story in the United States has been 9/11. Many of our informants have stated that since the events that took place on that date, they suddenly felt the ‘Other’ and were looked at differently by people in their surroundings. The narrative around Muslims that has arisen due to those events - and that, according to some Muslims, had been building up for decades or centuries - is something many Muslims are still struggling with today. Yusuf, a man in this twenties with parents from Syria, explained to us that, growing up, he never

felt different or uncomfortable with his identity. But at the exact moment of 9/11 he "became an Arab" (03-03-2017). Many people who he grew up with started calling him names, calling him a terrorist or asking him if he was the nephew of Bin Laden. He said in the years after 9/11 he felt like he had to apologize for every bad thing Muslims did, on social media (MySpace back then) and in real life. Yusuf's father, Mustafah added that:

> After 9/11 I feel like a person who has been violated, literally. Not just as a Muslim, but violated as a human being. It doesn't matter how long I have lived here or how well I serve my country, I am seen as inferior. (03-03-2017)

As an example he says that he is always picked at an airport, 'randomly selected' and that this makes him feel very frustrated and angry.

Although Islamophobia and discrimination reached a peak right after 9/11 and continued to be present in the American society, much of this narrative was somewhat concealed, and at least not known to many people. When Donald trump entered the political arena with his narrative of Muslims as the dangerous Other and plans for a Muslim registration, nobody could deny Muslims were politically and publicly stigmatized. This caused many people who perhaps previously kept quiet about their resentment or fear towards Muslims to speak up and act on their thoughts. In this way, Islamophobic behavior has been legitimized by the blunt rhetoric used by president Trump:

> But essentially, what's been happening is that people have been emboldened to harass the Muslim community in ways we have never seen before, because that kind of language, rhetoric and behavior has been normalized by the current presidential administration. (Zahra 20-03-2017)

The president of the United States has not only stigmatized the Muslim community with his politicized narrative about the 'dangerous Muslim', in the experience of many Muslims we have spoken to he also discriminated against them by issuing several travel bans against citizens from Muslim majority countries.

4.4 | Stigmatization

Next to the fact that the current government expresses a stigmatizing narrative, the stigmas on Muslims and Islam that are still present in American society today are mainly created in the media and online in the experience of our informants. In the perception and experience of many people we have spoken to, the media is only interested in sensationalist stories which confirm the stereotype of 'the angry, violent Muslim'. People feel that Islam is presented as violent and monolithic, instead of peaceful and diverse. By being portrayed in a stereotypical way, many Muslims feel like they are being 'dehumanized'. Annoor, board member of the Shura Council and cofounder of Muslim Speakers Network, explained:

> Now you make these people non-human. You dehumanize them. They're not real in your mind. So you can say whatever you want and that's very, very dangerous. And I think we feel like the policy sometimes and a lot of the hate crimes come out of that. That people are really not seeing you as a fellow human being, a normal person right? And you see that sometimes, the looks of fear. Sometimes people give us this look like 'I am really terrified right now. I think I'm going to die because you're next to me.' […] I always feel bad for the person having that much fear. I wish I could just tell them 'Hello. I'm really not going to bite!'. (06-04-2017)

Although everybody agrees that the narrative provided by the media and current administration should be changed, most people see many difficulties in how to achieve that change. The media is often only interested in sensational stories that confirm the stereotypical depiction of Muslims, as Abdel illustrated with an example:

> We had an interfaith march and we're going to do it again in April. We did it last year and we walked from… We started at one of the Jewish synagogues, then we went to one of the churches, then we went to another church, and we ended at the Islamic Center. So, what happened was: there was a film crew from one of the news channels following us and they didn't know that Kristen was our communications coordinator. So one of the guys said: "Oh hey, you know what? I think we're going to pack up and we're going to leave. There's no story here!" And Kristen was like "What do you mean? There's like 2000 people who are walking on the street together in the city of Los Angeles. What do you mean, there's no story?" And then the reporter said: "Well, it's a bunch of peaceful Muslims. Nobody wants to watch that." He's like "If somebody starts yelling or somebody starts fighting, that's what

> people want to see! When that starts happening, we'll come back." And he said it as a joke, but he really meant it. And he didn't know Kristen was our communications coordinator, and she was like "Oh my God! These people are all leaving, because we're all peaceful." Nobody wants a story of peaceful Muslims walking on the street. They want to hear 'Oh, Muslims burned this down! Or Muslims are yelling at this!' The drama and the action, you know? (12-03-2017)

Although these negative depictions of Muslims circulate throughout the whole country, many of our informants are happy they live in California. Like we mentioned earlier, the state of California is generally perceived as a liberal and open-minded environment.

Another sensitive point is that term *jihad* is often translated as 'holy war' and portrayed as something inherently violent. However, for most people we spoke to jihad means the internal struggle to be a righteous and pious person. Many people feel frustrated and/or hurt if they see the – in their eyes – wrong depiction of this concept. Abud stated in connection to this subject:

> It is sad, saddening. When people are coming, from elementary school, middle school, high school, university, or adults I explain the basics of Islam and the most common asked question is about jihad or how we treat women that kind of thing. Misconception. It is sad, but I don't want to blame to much on the media, but the media at some point has huge influence on that, there is no doubt about that, and if they portray you in a bad way, it is really difficult to clean up that mess. (20-02-2017)

How Muslims are trying to "clean up that mess" will be examined in the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 5

Activism through Representation

5. Activism through Representation

5.1 | Representation

When we walked around in the streets of Los Angeles, rarely we saw recognizable Muslims in the public space. Not because there were no Muslims in those areas, nor because there are no Muslims at all. We knew that on Fridays the mosques would be full with Muslims from around the neighborhood. One of the reasons could be that they don't get their coffees and do their shoppings at the same places we do, or ride the same buses. One of the other reasons could be the overall diversity of Los Angeles, Muslims would just blend in the already diverse public. Not every Muslim wears the recognizable headpieces, walks with a *Qur'an* under his or her arm, or is saying 'Allahu Akbar' continuously, although some media are shaping this image. As discussed, media are perceived as one of the biggest offenders of the stereotyping of Muslims. During interviews with our informants the answer to our question why it is important that Muslim get more representation, would mainly be that changing the narrative is very important. Representing oneself is the best representation was a popular opinion. And they are right because in a pluralist society the different groups are required to represent themselves. As we have seen in previous chapters, rightful representation helps to (re)create an identity, that before had been imposed by others. However, it is important that the representation is claimed by the group itself. A leading assumption used to be, as Saïd (1985, 97) stated, that Islam needed representation by others than themselves, because others would have more knowledge of them. Manar, board member of MSA at UCLA, told us it is important for Muslims to take matters into their own hands:

> This claiming the narrative is for you to be out, and telling people what Islam is and give them more information about Islam. Which goes back to what we were discussing earlier, which is why I want to talk to people when I meet them, because that is me claiming my narrative. As a Muslim as a Muslim woman, as a person who is active in her community. I don't think anyone should hear about Islam through anyone else than me or other people who are Muslim. (17-04-2017)

However claiming a narrative is not easily done. We have discussed above that Muslims in the United States are a very diverse group, in countries of origin, as well as differences in interpretation of the religion. This is one of the reasons that makes it problematic and a hard

challenge for Muslims in the United States to claim their own narrative. Therefore Ada - active member of ICSC, employee of MPAC, and activist - proposed that within the representation the emphasis should be on the diversity of Muslims in the United States:

> I don't think that any one label represents everyone. And we also have to feel enriched by diversity. The shift in language that I have noticed, being supportive of, from talking about the Muslim community to talking about the Muslim communitie*s* is so simple and so major. It is this subtle major difference that helps people to understand diversity rather than us saying; we are not monolithic, right? Instead to say the Muslim communities of LA, or America, because there is no, there is very few unifying principles, we definitely have common consensus and stuff but um, that is one way I think about it. (05-04-2017)

The unifying principle of Muslims in the US is exactly this; they are Muslims in the US, although non-Muslim Americans, may still categorize them as one group, and probably often see them as a monolithic group. Different views and interpretations of Islam form an additional challenge in claiming the narrative for the Muslim communities in the US. All different cultural backgrounds bring different interpretations of the faith along. Many of the people we spoke with put culture opposite to religion, with culture as transgressor of the right interpretation of the religion, Islam.

> People just pass of things as religion all the time. 'You have to do this, you can't do that, you should do this, you shouldn't do that!'. I don't know where that person got that, but it's not true. So there's a lot of reprogramming with that stuff. […] Most mosques don't have an Imam that is properly trained. So what you get is all kinds of cultural stuff passed off as religious things. (Jamaal 21-03-2017)

Due to this internal challenge, representation unfolds into a twofold mission; internal representation and external representation. Since both missions are being defined and constructed, they need to be aligned in order to bring the right message. This is important, because representation expresses the narrative of Muslims and political forms of empowerment they want to achieve (Morey and Yaqin 2011). The Muslims we have spoken to were aware that representation is the expression of the American Muslim narrative, and therefor are looking for ways to improve their representation. Some of our informants even noted that before they could work on their external representation they had to work on their internal problems. And surely,

work is being done already in order of increasing the image of diversity; Mansuri from CAIR explained that to be able to represent the diversity of the Muslim community, the organization makes sure the board is diverse as well.

Within other organizations diversity is taken into account, they are trying to have diverse board members in order to represent the members of the community, although this is a process. For example the ICSC has a diverse board, however no African American representation on the board, although there are many African American visitors. On the other hand the center is putting effort in being diverse in terms of not subscribing to Sunni or Shia Islam. There is a bridge to gap between African American Muslims and Arab/Desi Muslims, as stated by Sahih, an African American Muslim: “We have a narrative that is very distinct within the Muslim story, and we are represented in a way that is distinct.” It could be on account of the distinct history of African American Muslims, representation is scarce within the other Muslim communities.

5.2 | Current Representation

The current situation of the Muslim representation in the US is mainly containing stigmas, as illustrated in the previous chapter. Since stigmas of the ‘dangerous Muslim’ arose after 9/11, the Muslim community was mainly concerned with condemning violence and actions of Islamist extremists. Some of the authors have stated that the Muslim community is engaged with asserting their religious identity and reiterating their loyalty to the state (Akbarzadeh and Roose 2011, 310), along with showing the positive and humane side of Islam. As an employee of the ICSC, Abdel also deals with the statements on terrorism that the Center puts out. He explained the complexity around these kind of statements:

> I think it’s important for us to of course say ‘We don’t condone this stuff’, but then at the same time I think we need to stay away from doing that. Because if every time we’re on the news, we say ‘Oh, those terrorists are bad’. Then we’re kind of feeding into that perception that you only see a Muslim when they’re either talking about terrorism or being a terrorist. So that association of terrorist and Muslim is still there. So that’s the cycle that we’re trying to break. (Abdel 12-03-2017)

What Abdel is saying - breaking out of the cycle of condemning violence - is a thought what we have seen more in the Muslim community in Los Angeles. Mansuri, from CAIR, also stressed he

is against statements condemning violence. Other people even added that Trump awakened Muslims to get out of the defensive corner and more on the assertive side, into claiming their own narrative.

5.3 | Education

So what is undertaken in order to claim the narrative? A large part of representation, both internally and externally, is education. All our informants described education as one of the most important tools for a better representation. In response to the travel ban issued by president Trump many organizations – among which the ICSC, and the MSA of UCLA and the MSU of USC, both in cooperation with CAIR – have organized 'Know your rights' events or workshops. We have attended two of these events and at both there were legal professionals present who explained to the audience what their rights are in case they get pulled over by law enforcement, when the police wants to search their property, when they are questioned at the border, etc. At both events many questions were asked and people told about personal negative experiences or things that happened to others. Everyone who attended seemed very glad to be better informed and more knowledgeable afterwards. Manar, the president of the UCLA MSA, stated that these events were organized to give people more clarity and understanding of the situation. Moreover, it reassured the community and helped them to "move forward". Events like these give people concrete tools to deal with discrimination and give them a sense of empowerment and agency. Ismail explained that educating yourself and becoming more knowledgeable about Islam is a essential for a Muslim these days:

> We [my wife and I] don't like the dumbing down of everything in Islamic studies. Because the reality is that they need to read that stuff. Because they're going to go to class and they're going to be challenged. (21-03-2017)

Here we can see the idea that knowledge can help one to stand stronger in confrontations. Manar also emphasized the importance of education in the process of empowerment:

> I feel like the first step to empowering any group of people is knowledge and education. So being able to provide them with more opportunities to learn more about, like about either

faith, or politics, or just current events, you know. And then also be able to like, build a solid relationship with the community outside the MSA [e.g. the Muslim community]. (17-04-2017)

Moreover, being a knowledgeable and unified community is a precondition for proper representation and activism towards non-Muslims, according to many of our informants. This observation is in accordance with Nick Hopkins (2011, 534), who argues that bonding activities can be important for confidence and self-definition that enables more equal interaction between different groups. An illustrative example of these bonding activities are the many leisure activities that the MSA organizes - like kayaking, comedy nights, and hikes -, next to the weekly religious gatherings. Religious development and community building are two of the main goals of the MSA according to Manar. She also stated very clearly that she thinks it is her responsibility to educate people about Islam and to make Islam feel "more normal" to them.

This kind of outreach towards non-Muslims is one of the most important components of the reaction to Islamophobia we have seen with our informants. Almost everybody we have spoken to argues that Islamophobia is rooted in ignorance. By reaching out and educating people about Islam, Muslims aim to show the human and peaceful side of Islam. This outreach takes on many shapes: the Islam Awareness Week, invitations to schools to join Friday prayers, and political lobbying are just a few examples. Annoor explained that people who are scared of her make her

> want to do more. I'm always out, I'm always talking to people. I'm always approaching people, "Ask any question you want, you won't offend me!". I feel like these conversations are very meaningful. We actually train youth, a lot of Muslim youth, to have meaningful conversations. [...] People are scared, talk to them! We really try to empower these students. (06-04-2017)

An important platform for educating people about Islam and normalizing/humanizing Muslims is the internet and media. Soraya argued that Hollywood and the media are more powerful than the government to change the narrative on Muslims:

> [...] we work with decision makers, number one. We engage with studio-executives, producers and content-providers. Just to educate them about what we do within the organization and

> about Islam. And when we tell them, we are a resource for you to tell a better story, because audiences aren't stupid. They know when something is false. And they are getting better now. Especially in the post- 9/11 era, they are doing their own research. You can't pull a over their eyes and tell a fake story, like you did before. (12-04-2017)

Another important aspect of representation is engaging, both with the Muslim community and also the non-Muslim communities in order to get to know people and to let people know the Muslims in the US. As Sahih stated - and we heard this more often within the community: "We like to be at the table so we won't be on the menu." So when people are actively engaging they can decide what they tell people about their own community, instead of letting other people decide that for them. Additionally Ada explained that it is important to know Muslims first hand in order to form a positive image of a Muslim, since the single greatest predictor of somebody's perception of an American Muslim is whether they know a Muslim or not, according to her. So here we see two different approaches to engaging: a more personal, relational way with Ada, and for Sahih it is more about engaging in terms of being present at committees and part of the public dialogue.

Furthermore engaging within the political arena is seen as important as well. Politics is a difficult and broad term and indicates to local and national government. There are different opinions among our respondents how to work with government. Skocpol (Skocpol 2003) stated that less people are involved in civic organizations, due to the disconnect between the political elite, and lack of interaction with the normal people. We could see something similar happening within the Muslim community in Los Angeles. People were talking about the difference between two leading organization who are operating within politics. Cesari (2004, 86) argues that the Muslim strategy in the American public sphere has taken two routes; lobbying and moral persuasion. These two routes were visible between the two biggest Muslim advocacy organizations we came in contact with during our fieldwork. The first organization, MPAC, is engaging and lobbying with political leaders and Hollywood people. The other organization, CAIR, is active in civil liberty activism and promoting justice and mutual understanding through advocacy, more connecting to the concept of moral persuasion (Cesari 2004).

Many conversations we had with our informants were about president Trump and we noticed it really had a twofold effect on the Muslim community in terms of representation. On the one hand the chance that Muslims are able to have a Muslim within this administration is very

small, on the other hand - because of Trump's strong and often offensive rhetoric - there are more politicians willing to work with and/or for the Muslim community as an ally against president Trump. Not only within politics is the presidency of Donald Trump having a positive effect but also on the media, as stated by Soraya:

> […] Because there was barely any good Muslim representative in Hollywood before. And now it is very active, directors, writers, actors, producers. It is funny, because it is never what I would have expected from the presidency of Trump, but people want to listen and learn about it. (12-04-2017)

Media is seen as a very important, if not the most important, tool of representation of Muslims towards the American people. Considering internet as a contributor to expanding social bonds in a society (Castells 2010), we see media, and social media, in general fulfilling this role. People use social media to share their thoughts, articles and recent affairs in order to update their followers. By sharing these stories on Facebook they were creating a bigger awareness of both the injustices done to the Muslims in the US and the achievements of American Muslims as well. Many informants stated that it felt encouraging and inspiring to see Muslims in media, not playing terrorists, or oppressed, but getting the story right by being advised by Muslims and casting Muslims for positive roles as well.

All the examples above are improvements on representation of Muslims in the American society. But it is just the beginning. The Muslim we have spoken to expressed their ideal future situation and what needed to happen. One of the most important and most mentioned element in ideal representation was to a great extent about diversity. Moreover in order to tell the story of diversity and being able to display the Muslim communities of the US, they need a chance to tell their story. Most of our informants mentioned that media is one of the tools to change and realize this. Zahra was very inspired by this idea and compared their situation with the gay community's situation:

> […] One argument is that we need a show like Will and Grace, which had a main character who is gay… to normalize being Muslim in America on a public visual level. Shows like 'Fresh of the Boat' 'Blackish' shows like 'Modern Family'. That [these shows] put these

> issues on a human level that it is easy to see an x and to see us, I think that is something we need. We need more Muslims being allowed to create media as well. (20-03-2017)

This notion was echoed by many others; it was important that Muslims were on shows just as though they could be anybody else. Not because there is a thread of violence coming in the show and Muslims show up, or because they are the very religious family living in the street, but just living their lives as like other characters. The last sentence of Zahra's quote - more Muslims being allowed to create media - was something respondents mentioned as well. Not only need they more Muslims visibly present in the media, but also creating media, politics, and within all sorts of sectors.

5.4 | Community building

> Except for a few older men, who are sitting next to the prayer hall, the hall of the Islamic Center of Southern California is empty. The Spiritual Night was supposed to start at 7 pm, but as usual everybody's running late. Abdel comes up to me and greets me with his typical friendly smile. He explains the event will be held in the prayer hall instead of the lecture hall, because it is more intimate. When more people have arrived and everybody is sitting down on the thick, green carpet of the prayer hall, Abud starts with the recitation of *Qur'anic* verses that connect to the theme of the evening: 'Hope and resilience in challenging times'. His deep voice echoes through the hall and apart from two children chasing each other on the carpet, everybody listens in full concentration. When he is finished, Abud stands in front of the *minbar* and announces the main speaker of the evening, Khalid, with the words: "This is what we need these days! Allah is inviting us to be hopeful". Ricci, a bald middle aged man with glasses, takes place behind the microphone and starts his speech by making the collective intent of the evening clear: "to come closer to God and to freely submit our will to his will". He explains that there is no escaping the fact that we will all go through pain and difficulties. However, there are two reassurances to deal with these struggles. The first is the knowledge that faith comes with tests, if you like it or not. It is our responses that serve as an example to your family, community, and nation. The second is that God does not give you more than you are able to bear. Ricci encourages everybody to let this thought into their hearts, because it will make them "powerfully resilient". At the end of his speech almost everybody applauds Khalid's strong words. One older man gets angry and shouts "No! This is a *masjid*!". Abud reassures him and says "It's all right brother". Abud closes the evening with the prayer and

> strongly encourages everybody to come to the event room afterwards: “Don’t pray and run away!”

Events like this Spiritual Night, organized by the ICSC, are examples of efforts for community-building. Like this example shows, the emphasis in these type of events lies on reassuring and strengthening the community. The current political situation was mentioned a few times during the evening, but mostly as an example of the tests God gives you. Faith and your personal responses to these tests were offered as essential things to remember during these difficult times. This particular night revolved especially around religious and spiritual development and empowerment - although the imam did encourage everyone to stay and socialize -, but other community-building events focus more on fun activities or volunteering, for example.

There are many different ways in which Muslims take action against discrimination and stigmatization. Events that are specifically aimed against this are often organized by masjids or interfaith groups. The message of these kind of events is often related to themes like unity, solidarity, and strength. Moreover, we have observed that the concept of citizenship if often integrated in these events. For example, at the rally organized by the Islamic Center of Southern California the constitution was handed out and referred to many times. The phrase ‘We’re all Americans’ was also said by many speakers and it was emphasized that they were protesting for American values and rights. Moreover, the American flag was very present at the rally and is also displayed at many other events, or in front of Islamic buildings for instance. In response to the travel ban many organizations – among which the ICSC, and the MSA of UCLA and the MSU of USC, both in cooperation with CAIR – have organized ‘Know your rights’ events or workshops. We have attended two of these events and at both there were legal professionals present who explained to the audience what their rights are in case they get pulled over by law enforcement, when the police wants to search their property, when they are questioned at the border, etc. At both events many questions were asked and people told about personal negative experiences or things that happened to others. Everyone who attended seemed very glad to be better informed and more knowledgeable afterwards. Manar, the president of the UCLA MSA, stated that these events were organized to give people more clarity and understanding of the situation. Moreover, it reassured the community and helped them to “move forward”. Events like these give people concrete tools to deal with discrimination and give them a sense of empowerment. Another way in

which mosques try to empower and console their members is through the weekly *khutbas*. Although explicit statements about politics are not common in these sermons, almost every *khutba* we have heard was about how to deal with hardships, struggles and/or emotions, often mixed with implicit criticism to the Trump administration. One speaker even bluntly attacked Trump and started listing all the ways in which Muslims are being discriminated in present-day society. After this he offered the audience consolation by quoting the *Qur'an* and encouraged them to "engineer your intellect. So we can respond to the challenge of Islamophobia". The *khutbas* seem to provide religious support and consolation in a time where many people feel anxious and uncertain. There are two quotes from the *Qur'an* that we heard in *khutbas* and are also often being mentioned by our informants and on social media. "Repel evil with good deeds" [41:34] has been mentioned by Abud multiple times and Mustafah, among others. "And whoever saves one - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely" [5:32] was mentioned during the Oscars, repeated on social media, and also quoted by Mustafah.

Unifying the Muslim community is also done in less serious ways. The ICSC is starting to organize more family activities to bring people together in a positive way. Imam Abud stated:

> It's not just to pray together, but also after the prayer people mingle around and they seek and try to find comfort in each other. It's like all of us, when we have difficult times, we just seek people, like close friends that you could sit with and then talk. Any issues, you know, relationships or work or school. You just seek comfort through conversation. The religion, or the Islamic Centers, or mosques are giving that opportunity, you get together and pray and then spend time together. (20-02-2017)

Community building can also take on the shape of actively empowering the community, as Annoor explained:

> I also try to educate in the Muslim community. Once we start acting like victims, we stop being productive. So it's very key to me. What is it that you need to be empowered? You want to get a training, how to talk to people? You want to learn how to answer questions? Do what it takes! Because the minute that we feel victims again, that's the minute we're going to give up. (06-03-2017)

The opinions on how to work towards a solution and working with the government also vary. Generally there are two lines of thought. The one generally follows the policy of MPAC and is in favor of working together with law enforcement and the government to stimulate mutual transparency and create policy. The other one is distrusting towards law enforcement and the government, like CAIR, and focuses mainly on civil engagement and working against policies.

The actions that are being taken against racism towards the African-American Muslim community are still quite small. Many people that we speak to acknowledge there is a problem, but also admit that not much is being done about it. The efforts that *are* being made to tackle this issue mainly consist of starting to speak about the subject and show solidarity with one another. Both Sahih and Annoor were hopeful for the future and saw the solution in focusing on the big picture and the common goals of all Muslims, "making a connection through diversity" as Annoor (06-04-2017) described it.

5.5 | Interfaith and intersectional activism

> A group of police officers in training are standing in a group nervously smiling at the people walking by, with flyers in their hands about safety in Los Angeles. The other police officers are standing on the street, stopping the traffic at the big intersection of Wilshire and Vermont. One of the police officers beckons the group to cross the street, he has a friendly face and is smiling already the whole day. The three men in the front lead the big group of people marching today. The men are holding a big banner with the text: "United We Stand." Carefully they march on, making sure the big banner keeps straight. The three men are followed by a few men with brightly colored turbans , they call themselves Sikhs. Their heads are protected from the sun, which decided to shine brightly today, creating a nice temperature. The group of people marching today is very diverse with regards to religion and other movements. People with purple t-shirts designed for today's march, walk by, the text on the t-shirt includes the theme of the march: "Interfaith Solidarity March: Strengthening Diversity, Plurality and Unity." Two people engaged in conversation pass by, one wears a hijab and the other holds a sign with the text: "Atheists United for Peace." As the group marches by, no loud voices of chanting are heard, just voices busy having conversations with other voices. A photographer from a local news agency walks back and forth, taking pictures of the mix of people and the signs with peaceful texts. He asks at some people to put their fists in the air so he can take a picture. The people look at each other and with hesitation they put their fists, not

> convincing, in the air. The photographer takes a picture; he doesn't look satisfied and walks away. The group arrives at the final destination of the day: the mosque.

An element that turned out to be a big theme for Muslims in the US is interfaith work. In California there are institutes, organization and committees dedicated towards working cross faiths. The interfaith march, described above, was organized by the Institute for Religious Tolerance, Justice and Peace; an interfaith organization aimed to promote dialogue. One of goals of this march was to show that different faiths can work together in peace and to raise awareness that these religious groups, as minorities, need to work together in order to have a voice in society. This connection between the different faiths reflects the idea of social capital that creates beneficial social networks (Putnam 2000, 19). Furthermore, the different Muslim communities have distinct ways of working on interfaith activities.

The Muslim students we have spoken with in the field are involved in interfaith work in two ways. One way is through activism, actively organized by members of the union in coalition with other communities such as Latino students, LGBTQ students, Korean students, Black Lives Matter, Jewish students and more. The other way is through an already existing coalition in the structure of student unions of the university. Manar told us that the MSA is a mother organization, together with eight other mother organizations their form a coalition. She explained that part of this coalition are the Filipino group, the African American student group, Korean student group, and a couple of other ones. She added: "We're supposed to be a coalition, we're supposed to be like plan things together, organize big things together." She regrets not making more use of this coalition, especially in these political times.

> Unfortunately, this year, it hasn't been this strong. But we did like, we had, right when we knew, when we found out that Trump got the nominee, was the republican nominee, we as a coalition had a reflection session where all our communities came together. And we were able to reflect on it and how does this affect me, how does this affect my family, so that was like one good event that we set up together. Other than that we have bi-weekly meetings, we are in touch, we all that that we exist, but it hasn't been as strong as it could have been and probably as it should have been especially this year. (Manar 17-04-2017)

As a board member Manar felt that it could have been a stronger coalition that the community could have benefited from. However the Muslim students community took matter in own hands

by organizing events and campaigns by themselves. One example an event like this is an evening with the theme 'Activism in Islam', organized by The Beautiful Minds Project. They discussed why it is important to work together and discussed concrete ideas and created working groups for the several ideas. Some examples of the ideas were: 'ally ship training; to learn about different identities, a workshop 'coalition building', creating a Multicultural Center, advocating for mental health that is culturally competent, and many others.

The African American Muslims of Masjid Bilal are very open for interfaith coalitions and work together with other communities occasionally. When I asked about interfaith work, Malik pointed towards a tree and said: "It is the love-tree, you see them around LA, and a Jewish community planted it here." Several times when we spoke about interfaith work people mentioned to work in example of prophet Mohammed, who taught to improve the human condition.

The ICSC is very active in interfaith work, they have a special interfaith committee and they host interfaith events at the mosque:

> Under the interfaith umbrella all the religious leaders, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Buddhists are coming together regularly. And the idea is to get to know each other, first. And then what can we do, together, collaborate and learn from each other. That's the whole idea. […] So there are at least five/six entities working to strengthen our relationship with others. (Abud 20-02-2017)

Furthermore, the ICSC organized a rally in February with the title 'United for America; out of many we are one'. Their goal was to send a message to the administration that the faiths are not divided, but they are unifying. There were many speakers from different Muslim communities, government representatives, and people from Muslim organizations. They all spoke about the right of ideal and religious liberty in the US, and how important it is to unify in times like these. Abdel explained the motivation for organizing a rally like this one:

> All of the time, especially when we have events like that, we want to show interfaith, because a lot of people think that Muslims believe that Muslims have to be isolated from everybody, that we want sharia law and all this stuff. But that's all nonsense, that's like people making things up to divide everybody. In our religion it says like 'nothing by force' and to let people believe what they want to believe. (12-03-2017)

So it is important for the Islamic Center to show that they are inclusive towards other religions and the message of the rally was really about showing that Muslims have the right to be in the American public space and that Muslims are not something oriental (Saïd, 1978).

The Muslim organizations we spoke to experience support from others than Muslims as well. After the travel ban was initiated by president Trump, organizations and mosques got calls from people saying that they support them and express their empathy. Soraya from MPAC mentioned: “As much as we got the hate calls, we also got the love calls, and that was so nice!”. This notion was echoed by other leaders in the Muslim communities; supporting letters, calls, and many non-Muslim volunteers from all around Los Angeles.

On the one hand Muslims are very thankful for all the support they experience in these times of discrimination. On the other hand, Ada mentioned that, although Muslim communities are very active in interfaith spaces, until now it is not a reciprocal relationship:

> […] there are so many community around the chopping block and many of those communities have stood for us and with us, since 9/11. And I think that the question for us now is ‘how do we show up for them?’. (05-04-2017)

Although there are some outreach events organized, the Muslim community is in process of going from receiving support, towards showing up for others as well.

5.6 | Effects of Activism, acquiring empowerment?

The Muslim community in LA is attempting to acquire empowerment through several methods. Previously, we have discussed how they are trying to improve their representation in the public arena, the media, and politics. Increased visibility in the public sphere will normalize Muslims for the greater public, as argued by many of our informants.

Education of the community itself and non-Muslims also plays an important part in this. Improved knowledge on police and customs regulations, for instance, gives the community more empowerment, because it helps them to stand strong and claim their rights. Another example is that having more understanding of their own religion, gives Muslims the knowledge to stand up for themselves when they are being challenged on their religion. Different informants, among which Abdel and Annoor, have stated that in depth knowledge of Islam helps them to counter people’s stereotypes in personal conversations. Looking back at the definition of empowerment -

"the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights" (Oxford Dictionary 2016) -, one can see these efforts clearly fit into that category. Becoming stronger and more confident is something that is being pursued in both bonding and bridging activities. The many community building activities that are being organized by the Muslim community increase their bonding social capital. Like we have argued before, having strong bonding social capital can be a prerequisite to increase bridging social capital, in the case of Muslim activism this constitutes for instance interfaith and intersectional social ties.

If Muslims would succeed to turn the stigmas around and break through the exclusion mechanisms at work, they would feel more recognition as full citizens of the United States, which would mean a great increase in empowerment. This recognition they are pursuing, would give them an increased sense of safety and of belonging in the United States. Although they are working hard to prove that they are indeed full and equal citizens - e.g. by using the constitution, the flag, and the national anthem during rallies -, most of our informants feel that they are not there yet - like we explained in the chapter about discrimination and stigmatization. Khalid explained how he thinks the Muslim community should be empowered and what the difficulties are in that:

> I think it is two things. I wanna start with having a strong spiritual center. And then number two, getting out there! Participating in your civic groups, going out to your local PTA [Parent Teacher Association], being active in your kids school, being active in your police force, you know getting involved in interfaith dialogues and communities, helping the homeless, you know. Just being *out* in society and being a responsible voice in society is *very* empowering. I think if one, whatever the problem is, there is so much of this principle that can be applied to one's personal life, or communal life, that if you are dealing with a problem, if you just recluse and lock yourself in your house or whatever and trying to keep society away, that is never going to resolve anything. [...] So, you know, activism is I think a huge part of how I would say we need to respond.
>
> Eliza: And do you think people do that enough, going out into the world?
>
> K: [...] I think it takes a lot of energy to be an activist. I mean, I am not supposed to be here right now, I've got work to go back to [...]. My point is that you gotta be able to multitask and realize that you are not doing this for yourself and so you know, it's all sorts of things. I think

> there needs to be more, yeah. There needs to be more. And it's gotta be done with maturity. (19-04-2017)

Luckily, most of our informants mentioned that this process is already happening. For instance, Muslims are starting to take risks in their career choices and instead of becoming doctors and engineers, more of them are becoming journalists, social scientists, and teachers, as told to us by Ada and many of the students. So representation in different fields might change for the better with the new generation growing up. Additionally, when we look at how Muslims are represented within politics, we can see a transition from absent to slowly becoming more present. Names that were mentioned quite often in connection to this were Dalia Mogahed and Linda Sarsour. Dalia Mogahed used to work under the Obama administration as a senior advisor. She did important research about the Muslim community, which wasn't done before. Many Muslims look up to her and some girls we spoke to saw her as a big example. Furthermore, significant efforts are being made to empower the African American Muslim community as well. The first step is to recognize and talk about the problem, as explained during a panel discussion about taboo subjects in the ICSC (26-02-2017). At different activist events we attended the difficult narrative of the African American Muslims was recognized and discussed. What is important to realize, however, is that this group has a their own particular history in the United States and their empowerment requires a different approach than that of the immigrant Muslim community as well.

Khaïr Insha'allah (In everything is something good)

Once there was a Sultan of a big kingdom. He had a good adviser, who was a good friend as well. On a free day the two, the Sultan and the adviser, went out to hunt. They packed their hunting gear: bow and arrow, knives and ropes. The Sultan was busy sharpening his knife, when he cut his finger. It was a deep cut and it hurt very much. The adviser, however, said: "Khaïr Insha'allah!" The Sultan became furious at his advisor for being thankful for a cut in the Sultan's finger. The Sultan was so angry he sent his advisor to prison. Nevertheless, the Sultan went on his hunt alone. Although the Sultan was a very good hunter, he didn't know the forest that well, this was the specialty of the advisor, and the Sultan got lost. Out of nowhere strange, aggressive looking people appeared. And yes they were violent! They imprisoned the Sultan and brought him to their camp. It seemed they needed a human sacrifice and they wanted the best of the best for that. The Sultan sure did look good, with his fine clothes and fancy equipment. The strange people were preparing the Sultan for the sacrifice when they suddenly found the deep cut in his finger. They were shocked, this meant their sacrifice would be imperfect, and their Gods wouldn't be happy with an imperfect sacrifice. So they sent the relieved Sultan away. When the Sultan arrived at his palace he ordered the release of his advisor. When the advisor came to him, the sultan asked what he could give the advisor in order to make the mistake up to him. The advisor walked up to the Sultan smiling and again said: "Khaïr Insha'allah!" The Sultan didn't understand why the advisor was so happy. The advisor explained that if the Sultan hadn't put him in prison, he would have been the sacrifice of the strange people. "Khaïr Insha'allah!" said the Sultan and smiled.

Conclusion and Discussion

Conclusion and Discussion

Throughout our research we have met many different people. Different in the way that they were Muslim and non-Muslim, and if they were Muslim they ranged from very conservative to liberal and progressive Muslims. They varied in age, gender and class, education, ethnicity and political preference. However all were connected by their involvement in activism and Islam in Los Angeles. The aim of our fieldwork in Los Angeles was to find an answer on how activism of the Los Angeles Muslim community addresses discrimination and stigmatization in the pursuit of empowerment. Throughout this thesis we have examined and discussed the notion of citizenship in order to comprehend the experience of discrimination of Muslims in Los Angeles. We have tried to the best of our ability to understand the complex discourse behind discrimination in the United States and the search for empowerment. Throughout our fieldwork we observed some factors that needed more attention. As a result we also started focusing on the Muslim American identity within the immigrant community and the role of African American Muslims within the greater Muslim community. In this conclusion we will answer our research question by giving an overview of the key arguments we have found during our fieldwork in Los Angeles and our analysis afterwards.

One of our focuses was on the American identity and citizenship; this turned out to be a very important element in the lives of Muslims living in Los Angeles. Throughout many conversations with Muslims we noticed subtle expressions of their love and gratitude for the United States. Sometimes informants expressed their love for the country very clearly, especially within the immigrant community; informants spoke of gratitude to be in the ‘land of opportunities’ and the land where dreams come true, if you work hard. This is the opposite within the majority of countries in Europe, where nationalist statements are negatively associated. Most of our informants noted that California, and especially Los Angeles, was a good place to be in within the US. California is a progressive state, and Los Angeles is experienced as a very multicultural and open minded city. We noted that expressing gratitude and love for the US was of substance for Muslims to express their Americanness. These patriotic expressions, experienced as the ‘good’ representation of nationalism, are what we saw in Huntington's (1983) remarks about the ‘national creed’: Americanism is defined through the belief in liberty, equality, democracy and the rule of law under the constitution. Patriotism is symbolized within the streets through the flag,

it is unmistakably present within the LA landscape. Within mosques and Islamic organizations the flag is notable, as an expression of belonging to the American nation-state.

Because the United States knows a unified civic national identity, multiculturalism is alien to the way American national identity is imagined (Stratton and Ang 1994, 124). Despite this, in reality there is a cultural exclusion in society, one that is experienced profoundly by the Muslims in Los Angeles. Many of our informants thought that people deemed them are anti-Western and not patriotic, because of their Muslim identity. As a result of feeling cultural excluded we noticed that Muslims were very active in proving that they are actually very American. One visual example we observed during the rally organized by the ICSC, was a woman making a hijab from the American flag; literally putting the the Muslim and the American identity together.

People showed that Islam is compatible with their American identity by using the constitution among other things. Often they referred to the section about freedom of speech and religion. Idealistically, the American identity and the Muslim identity go well together; however friction *does* exist between Muslims and the idea of 'Americanness'. According to our informants this friction is mainly caused by a conflation of religion and culture. People expressed that the immigrant American Muslims tend to mix up cultural traditions from the country of origin with general religious ideas and rules. Many different interpretations of Islam come together through the diversity of the Muslim American community. The argument that this diversity should also be part of the definition of the Muslim American identity, something we heard many times throughout our fieldwork.

African American Muslims constitute a large part of the American Muslim population in the US. As a result of their history - having endured slavery and a struggle for emancipation within the American nation-state - they perceive the Muslim American identity quite differently. The African Americans have been in the US for a very long time and it is only logical that they are American, so they don't feel the same need to prove themselves as Americans as the immigrant community. The already existing Americanness of the African American community causes the immigrant community to sometimes claim their narrative as part of the history of all Muslims in the US. Despite the possibility of unifying the narratives and therefore including all Muslims within this Americanness, there are still significant differences between the different communities within the greater Muslim American community. Socio-economic status often plays a big part in this.

In the United States, the Muslim community as a whole also experiences discrimination, through exclusion from the civic national identity. Through patterns in history Muslims were mostly seen as the Other (Saïd, 1978) and as not part of a secular Western society, like the United States. This rhetoric is now also being deployed by Trump's administration, which in turn emboldens groups and individuals in society to discriminate against Muslims. Informants told us that despite the fact that they love their country - some even claim to be willing to die for their country -, they are still treated differently. When people shared discriminative experiences they sometimes expressed this through a patriotic sentiment, because it is painful to experience discrimination in the country and from the country that you love. Within political rhetoric about Islam and the 'war on terror', the idea of 'good' Muslim vs. 'bad' Muslim arose and is still present within American political discourse. Informants shared that proving their Americanness was and is very important in order to be a 'good' Muslim. Here we noticed a difference in generation and time. The first Muslim immigrants had less desire to speak up and were more afraid to be seen as a 'bad' Muslim. Especially after 9/11 people tried to keep their heads low. Other forms of discrimination constitute of Muslims being scolded, physically and verbally attacked, different treatment by law enforcement, and being bullied at school. From both our male and female informants we heard that the hijab was often subject of bullying, it's been pulled off or women have had negative remarks about it. Mosques form a popular target for hate crimes as well, as the employees of the ICSC, among others, told us.

As mentioned before, the African American community and the immigrant Muslim community are very different and in terms of unity they are not the confluence they should be. During our fieldwork we noticed some tension between these groups and that there are still issues around race. For example, African American Muslims tend to have their own mosques. A reason for this segregation between African American Muslims and other Muslims is that many African Americans live in other - mainly African American - neighborhoods. This is often a consequence of poverty. Although efforts are being made to cross these divides, for instance some cooperation between the ICSC and Masjid Bilal, this does not happen regularly. So despite the aspiration for a unified Muslim community, there are still many difficulties due to persistent racial structures in the United States (Omi and Winant 2015) Socio-economic factors are still perceived to be the main divide between African American Muslims and the immigrant Muslims.

The discourse on Islam and Islamophobia had a significant intensification around 9/11 (Esposito and Kalin 2011) and to many Muslims this meant a significant increase in discrimination and stigmatization. Muslims were labeled with a cultural and political stigma and consequently became the dangerous Other. This narrative is deployed and politicized by president Donald Trump with the 'Muslim ban' as an example. Now, after sixteen years, the popularity of Donald Trump has both indicated and shown an increase and legitimization of Islamophobia. The Islamophobic narrative of president Trump has legitimized and emboldened discriminatory behavior towards the Muslim community. In this process the role of media is substantial as well.

People told us that many media outlets are only interested in sensational stories about terrorism and Islamist extremism. This way the stereotype of 'the angry, violent Muslim' becomes affirmed. Although Muslims organize many events to promote peace and justice, informants stated that getting attention for these activities is very hard. Through this kind of stigmatization many Muslims feel dehumanized. Because of this misrepresentation, many Muslims fear that the American people have a wrong idea of what Islam really is.

Muslims are currently putting a lot of effort into changing perspective of the American public on Islam. A big part of our fieldwork in Los Angeles was about activism within the Muslim community. We focused on representation, education, and empowerment. Representation and effectuating change in this field, is a big component of what Muslims are aiming for within activism. We have shown that Muslims are being stereotyped within media reports and are in this way they are wrongfully represented. Therefore the first step for a better representation is for Muslims to represent themselves, so this is one of the things they are pursuing. Within a pluralist society different (minority) groups are indeed required to represent themselves. Informants felt the importance to claim their own narrative within the dynamics of the current political situation, now that they have been cast in the national spotlight. Many of them see this as the ultimate opportunity to show the country and the world what Islam really is and to rectify the stereotypical image of a Muslim terrorist.

However, the great diversity within the Muslim community and the conflation of culture and religion makes it difficult to have a unified representation. Some informants resolved this issue with the idea that the diversity of the Muslim American community- in both perspectives, interpretations and ethnic backgrounds - should be part of their representation outwards. This external representation is carried out through different approaches. One approach used by the

Muslim community is condemning violence of Islamist extremists and terrorists. Although other feel like this is something that the community has been doing too much in the past sixteen years. People told us that by putting for example terrorist attacks in the same sentence as Islam, people will automatically connect the two. So for Muslims to show who they really are and to represent themselves rightfully, they need to present another narrative to the public than one only of condemning violence.

Most of our informants declared education as an important tool to explain their own narrative towards the American public. Informants told us that Islamophobia is mainly caused by ignorance and education subsequently is the best way to counter this. Educating the Muslim community itself is especially seen as important in order to give people concrete tools to deal with discrimination and subsequently give them a sense of empowerment and agency. An educated community is better able to do effective outreach towards non-Muslims. This focus on education is one of the most important components of the reaction to Islamophobia we have seen in the Muslim community.

Additional to education it is the importance to engage with people and organizations. Engaging happens in many ways, one of which is through personal relations. According to our informants having contact one on one is the best way to change the view of a person on Islam. A result of personal contact is that an existing stereotype disappears and Muslims become a human again. Another way of engaging that was mostly agreed on was to be part of the dialogue: “We like to be at the table, so we won’t be on the menu” (Sahih). Being part of the dialogue happens through taking part in committees, having representatives within politics, and through interfaith dialogue, among other things. Informants expressed that is important to have normal Muslims become part of popular culture to show they are normal people, just like you and me. A way to achieve the normalization of Muslims within popular culture is through the media. People argued that you need normal Muslims on TV-shows and in movies, so people get used to them, in the same way the TV-show ‘Will and Grace’ normalized homosexuality in a way.

Although there are many difficulties the Muslim community experiences in their pursuit of empowerment, their efforts to achieve their goals remain undiminished. Through education of both the non-Muslim and the Muslim community they try to claim their own narrative. Especially education of their own community helps them to become empowered. Muslims who take on the

role of public figures, like Dalia Mogahed and Linda Sarsour, form important role models for American Muslims and empower them in their identity.

In conclusion, Muslims in Los Angeles address the different forms of discrimination and stigmatization they experience by focusing on a better representation of the community, educating and engaging with the public, and building a stronger community. The different forms of activism have different effects and although activism most times only brings the Muslim community small steps forward, it *is* moving in the right direction. The imposed identity as the dangerous Other (Saïd 1978) is being challenged by an increased emphasis on the American Muslim identity through explaining Islam in their own way to the American public, underlining their Americanness (Abdo 2006, 5). The current political situation in the US has cast a spotlight on the Muslim community and has given them the opportunity to place emphasis on and mobilize their collective identity (Akbaradeh and Roose 2011). Moreover, the hostility towards Islam they experience, results in intensification of the adherence to Islam and a way to "establish personal identity in relation to the outside environment and the discrimination it presents" (Cesari 2004, 42). By engaging in politics, media, and community development, Muslims are deploying their agency to influence the structures around them (Sewell 1992). This engagement is an important source for empowerment, as we have argued throughout this thesis. The Muslim community in Los Angeles is also making great efforts to increase its social capital (Putnam 2000, Hopkins 2011), both bonding and bridging. For instance, the former through community building activities and the latter through interfaith work. Although important steps towards empowerment and recognition already have been made, we argue that creating an even stronger and more unified Muslim community is a prerequisite for future activism.

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Appendices

Summary

On November 8th, 2016 Donald Trump was elected as the next president of the United States. His election was met with great resistance and protest from citizens all over the country. One of the groups that felt especially worried by this development was the Muslim community. The way Trump's rhetoric framed Islam in a stigmatic way and his intentions to set up a Muslim registry, caused great apprehension within the Muslim community. This thesis aimed to explore how the Muslim community in Los Angeles, California addresses discrimination and stigmatization through activism, in pursuit of empowerment. We chose Los Angeles as a research location, because a relatively large number of Muslims lives in this city and there are many Islamic organizations operating within this area of great diversity.

To be able to study this case properly, we needed to combine several theoretical debates. First of all, we explored the experience of citizenship in the United States. The notion of identity politics within a multicultural nation-state - as being inclusive on civic or cultural grounds-, and patriotism and the national creed. Next, we looked at the processes behind discrimination, the consequences of orientalism in the West, and how these concepts apply to Muslims in the United States. Furthermore, we examined the importance of proper representation for a social group by defining the nation-state as a system of representation and we emphasized the importance of political participation. Finally, we discussed how social groups can acquire empowerment by deploying their agency and increasing their social capital. For Muslims in the United States this means they need to break through current mechanisms of exclusion and take action to strengthen their community and to represent themselves properly.

Subsequently, we have used these theoretical concepts to analyze and discuss the empirical data we have gathered during our fieldwork. In the first empirical chapter, we have looked at the way Muslims in Los Angeles experience citizenship. Our informants, all living in Los Angeles, expressed that they are happy to live in California, for it is a progressive state. Many of the people we spoke to expressed their love for the United States and wanted to prove that they are in fact real Americans. Showing their patriotism as a Muslim was not seen contradictory; they emphasized that there was no mutual exclusion. People spoke of a conflation of religion and culture, which could cause a possible friction for their Muslim American identity. However,

Muslims felt the need to have a Muslim American identity and they need a commonality in order to acquire this. Two commonalities are their American nationality and their diversity. The African American Muslims know a different history than the immigrant Muslims. Their first struggle was mainly about racism and is continued in a fight for inclusive citizenship. Their experience of the Muslim American identity is different from the immigrant community, since they have been in the United States for a longer time and a mass conversion to Islam came later on. Because of the established American identity of the African American community, we noticed that the immigrant community sometimes claimed this narrative in order to be included within their Americanness.

The second empirical chapter has dealt with experienced discrimination and stigmatization of the Muslim community. The fact that many Muslims feel excluded from full citizenship is very painful for them, since they are often very patriotic and happy to be living in the United States. There are many different ways in which Muslims are being discriminated in daily life. The incidents that we heard most were among others: being called names, like terrorist or member of ISIS; being physically and verbally attacked by strangers; *hijabs* that get pulled of; Mosques that are being vandalized; both individual Muslims and Islamic organizations receiving hate mail or hateful messages online. Next to the discrimination that happens to Muslims from the side of non-Muslims, we found that internal racism and discrimination is still a big issue. African American Muslims and Muslims with an Arab or *Desi* background often have a different socio-economic status and are not equally represented in committees, boards, etc. In addition to discrimination, Muslims also experience stigmatization. This mostly takes place in the media and in politics. A difficulty in finding a solution to this problem is that media are often only interested in sensational stories that confirm the stereotypical image of an 'angry, violent Muslim'.

In the third empirical chapter we have examined how Muslims take action against discrimination and stigmatization. An important way to actively oppose stigmatizing narratives that subsequently cause discrimination, is to improve representation. Informants expressed that now is the time to claim their narrative. However the diversity within the Muslim community makes it difficult to have one narrative, therefore diversity should be part of the representation Muslims want to carry out. The current representation contains stigmas as mentioned before and one of the reactions of the Muslim community has been to condemn violence each time violence was related to Islam. However we often heard that people want to break out of this cycle, and be in control of the portrayal of Islam in the United States.

To improve representation the Muslim community is active in engaging in politics, on a personal level with people, and through being part of dialogues. Informants expressed that it is important to be part of committees in order to be included in the dialogue. Media is used extensively in order to share stories on the one hand about injustices done to the Muslim community, and on the other to represent Islam the right way. Another important method to improve representation is to educate the American public, since Islamophobia is often rooted in ignorance according to our informants. Furthermore, education of the Muslim community itself is essential as well. By receiving education on subjects such as civil rights, important religious debates, and personal development, the Muslim community is being strengthened and empowered. This is also the goal of the many community building activities that are being organized by mosques and MSA's. By increasing their bonding social capital, Muslims are subsequently better able to strengthen their bridging social capital. Although it is difficult for the Muslim community to claim their narrative entirely, now that the spotlight has been cast on them as a result of the current political situation, they have a chance to show the nation what *their* Islam is and let their voice be heard.

In conclusion, we argue that Muslims in Los Angeles address the different forms of discrimination and stigmatization they experience by focusing on a better representation of the community, educating and engaging with the public, and building a stronger community. The different forms of activism have different effects and although activism most times only brings the Muslim community small steps forward, it *is* moving in the right direction. This is embedded within the notion that Muslims deploy their agency and influence the structure around them, through engaging in politics, media and community building. A great part of empowerment is obtained through social capital: bonding, through community building and bridging by interfaith and intersectional work.