ISPU

Harvard Conference

(Re)Presenting American Muslims:

Broadening the Conversation

The Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program
At Harvard University

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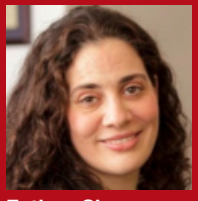

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Introduction

On Friday and Saturday, April 11 and 12, 2014, the Alwaleed Islamic Studies Program at Harvard University hosted a two-day workshop *(Re)Presenting American Muslims: Broadening the Conversation* to discuss the ways in which American Muslims define themselves, and are defined, in the twenty-first century. The workshop brought together a diverse slate of American Muslim activists, artists, scholars and advocates in a constructive dialogue on a wide range of issues affecting Muslims in the United States. In five sessions over two days, the group addressed challenges regarding the ideas of American Muslim identity and representation while encouraging a discussion of the opportunities and a broader view of the communities encompassed in the umbrella term 'American Muslims'.

On Friday morning, Dr. Ali Asani, Director of the Alwaleed Islamic Studies Program at Harvard University (Alwaleed Program) welcomed the workshop's 25 participants and guests. The concept for this workshop arose from conversations at the conference, *Perceptions and Realities of Muslims: New Paradigms for Public Policy, Media and Academia* hosted by the Alwaleed Program, in partnership with the British Council, USA in December 2013.

This workshop continued and broadened conversations started during the *Perceptions and Realities of Muslims* conference while also offering a unique opportunity and format for American Muslim change makers to come together. They were able to address important and potentially emotional issues around the complex ways in which Muslims are represented in society, and to explore opportunities to represent Islam through effective storytelling and narrative building.

The Alwaleed Program's role as host and co-convener of the workshop was to offer a facilitated and supportive environment for open and honest conversations among the participants, and to provide funding and staffing. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) as co-convener has captured and translated those discussions into this document as both a snapshot of the workshop, as well as a framework and starting point for future conversations.

To encourage open conversation and free discussion, the workshop honored Chatham House Rules. Comments have not been attributed to participants. No live tweeting or social media was allowed during the sessions and no individual audio- or video-recording in the room was permitted. Several participants submitted post-conference insights, which are included at the end of this report.

Over the course of the two-day workshop five 90-minute sessions were hosted:

1. American Muslim-led Organizations;
2. American Muslim Storytellers;
3. American Muslims in Public Service;
4. American Muslims Making Inclusive Space; and
5. American Muslims Seeking Inclusion.

Nadia Firozvi and Asim Rehman facilitated the discussions among the 25 participants. Ms. Firozvi and Mr. Rehman navigated each of the discussions from initial remarks by five pre-selected participants ('panelists') to a longer and broader conversation among all participants building on those initial remarks.

To identify participants, a list of potential invitees was developed based on geographic, religious, ethnic diversity and the individuals' ability to contribute to the themes and topics included in the workshop. The 25 participants selected were individuals who met these criteria and were willing to participate in the two-day set of discussions.

In addition to participants, approximately 20 observers including Harvard undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and visiting scholars and fellows attended the workshop.

The discussions were broken into three parts:

1. Level setting:

Five panelists in each session set the stage by addressing the group for 2 minutes on the topic.

2. Whiteboarding:

All workshop participants 'flared' for approximately 30 minutes responding to panelists' comments, uncovering additional issues and delving into the topic further.

3. Digging deeper:

All panelists and participants then identified high- level trends, refocused and fleshed out those issues along with recommendations.

Each discussion was rich and thought-provoking and covered a great deal of material in a short amount of time. Due to time constraints, numerous critical issues were identified, but not all issues were fleshed out. The discussions are summarized in this document and have been organized according to the major themes discussed.

Session 1:

Muslim-led Institutions/ Organizations

"Faith-based organizations play an important role in social service provision, advocacy, public education, community development and organizing, and other arenas within the American public square."

- Brie Loskota and Nadia Roumani, 'Enhancing Impact in the Public Square'[1]

The Constitution's guarantee of "freedom of thought and worship" supports a "religiously diverse and vibrant society."[2] Achieving religious pluralism in the United States is challenging, but faith-based organizations are the vehicle by which many minority religious groups navigate their way to the American public square.[3] As American Muslim-led organizations continue to establish their place in the American public square "institutional development will be integral to how American Muslim communities will operate in the American public square."[4]

In this discussion, a Muslim-led organization can be best defined as *an organization or institution that is founded, run or led by American Muslims*. These organizations are faith-based[a] and to date focus primarily on the needs of American Muslims.

The invited panelists were from a range of institutions but did not and were not meant to, represent all American Muslims or all American Muslim-led organizations. Their role was to share insights, establish a broad context for the group and start the conversation on the state of American Muslim-led organizations.

[a] Faith-based: Affiliated with or based on religion or a religious group.

Representation

The United States' several million Muslims are diverse and decentralized.[5] Two-thirds of American Muslims are under 40, and are culturally, ethnically, ideologically and socio-economically diverse. [6]

American Muslims and their communities are not monolithic. Their make-up and needs vary, and thus no one organization can or does represent all American Muslim communities and organizations. However, many of the older and more established national American Muslim organizations were founded for the sake of identity formation. They seek to advance the causes and interests of American Muslims, and consider representation part of that mission. With Muslim as part of their name, their focus is primarily on "American Muslim causes."

In their efforts to represent "American Muslim causes", these organizations have become enmeshed in the politics of representation. Because these organizations have not come together strategically to identify or agree upon a broad platform of relevant, critical and common issues impacting American Muslims, they are not united. Their efforts are fragmented, and not enough time and resources have been spent investing in human resources, creating complementary networks or developing broader coalitions. As a result, levels of trust are low among them and these organizations compete with each other for power, visibility and funds.

Future Sustainability and Infrastructure

The American Muslim-led organizational landscape is complex. It is dotted with organizations, primarily non-profits small and large; local and national; community-based and faith-based; advocacy and research focused; and top-down and grassroots. Though the organizations are numerous and diverse in size and scale, they are less so in scope and support.

One of the biggest structural questions these organizations face is that of sustainability and infrastructure. Workshop panelists and participants agreed that to sustain themselves, American Muslim-led organizations need to "get their houses in order." The session focused on three major hurdles:

- increasing and strengthening organizational human capital,
- expanding and diversifying revenue streams, and
- developing focus and good business models.

A human capital deficit limits an organization's capacity to conduct its work, restricts its impact, hampers investment in its employees, and often results in burned-out workers. This deficit needs to be overcome by accepting the generational gaps that exist and finding a way to tap into and incubate the potential that exists in the next generation.

The lack of expanded and diverse revenue streams limits an organization's financial capacity, and increases its dependence on private contributions from

"When the Muslim non-profit sector is so anemic – why would anyone choose to work in this sector? There is no appreciation, no money and no career opportunity."

- Workshop Participant

private individuals and community members. As a result, organizations are forced to chase smaller contributions and are beholden to the vagaries of their donors. For future sustainability, organizations need to diversify their revenue streams and reach beyond the community by seeking foundation money, funding from local and state governments, and exploring earned revenue streams.

Developing focus and good business models. American Muslim organizations have good intentions and high aspirations but many have limited resources. Many have strong missions and seek to act within those missions, but they are often reactive and become involved in activities far beyond their stated missions (often referred to in non-profit management as "mission creep"), particularly at the grassroots level.

Overreaching, or "mission creep" negatively impacts organizations because it takes away time and resources from the organization's core objectives and goals.

Over time, the best ways for organizations to achieve more with limited resources include:

- strategically assessing the organization's legitimacy, revenue streams, network strength;
- developing a strong business model, theory of change, and strategic plan;
- identifying best practices;
- using benchmarks, models and case studies;
- considering how faith plays a role in the organization and mission;
- professionalizing the organization;
- being focused, proactive and mission-focused while also focusing on longer term sustainability and infrastructure;
- managing every day 'fires' and learning how to say no to "mission creep"; and
- focusing on efficiency but also on cross-pollination, building allies and tapping into other organizations for support and collaboration.

Continuity and Relevance

"Relevance and continuity cannot be achieved if the next generation is not on board. It is not about sacrifice, it's about the long term gain of the community."

- Workshop Participant

In addition to the question of sustainability and infrastructure, American Muslim-led organizations and the overall organizational landscape are in transition. The intergenerational hand-off is proving to be a challenge as the next generation of leaders is ready with new ideas, but many older leaders are either not ready or not willing to step down in order to make way for new blood. Additionally, few organizations are focused on succession planning.

Workshop participants categorized American Muslim organizations as "1.0", "2.0", and "3.0". 1.0s are the larger and more formal legacy organizations; 2.0s are the newer niche organizations; and 3.0s are the "third spaces", loose, independent, and personal networks and "unorganizations" that are emerging.[7]

The older and more established national Muslim-led organizations, or 1.0s were established 30 or more years ago for the faith servicing, identity formation and religious preservation needs of American Muslims. Although the majority of these organizations are structured as non-profits, their leaders and founders rarely have a formal education in non-profit management. As a result the organizations have often had weak missions, visions and strategies, and have been run by non-elected leaders with no term limits. Also, "Founder's Syndrome" is common, and founders hold undue influence over the organization.

Over the years, 1.0s have tried to be "everything to everyone" and have not differentiated themselves based on vision, mission and goals. Now, their donors and founders are graying, and 1.0 organizations are struggling financially and operationally.

This is primarily because a growing constituent group, younger American Muslims or "NextGens" (Generation Y and Millennials) have a different set of expectations for American Muslim-led organizations than their parents. If American Muslim NextGens do not view an existing 1.0 organization as relevant or responsive to their needs, or if they perceive it to be inert on issues of gender, race and inclusion, for example, they will not support or engage with the organization.

1.0s cannot achieve organizational continuity and sustainability without American Muslim NextGens. American Muslim-led organizations are meant to serve the community. If constituents (in this case American Muslim NextGens) do not feel an organization is serving their needs, can (and should) the organization be saved? As with any marketplace of services, it is extremely likely that over time some 1.0 organizations will not survive.

"What has worked is failure. We are focusing as a result of our failure. We are more focused because of our limitations. I have created a referral network and become a better delegator. Boutique organizations are a big win. They add value to 1.0 and 2.0 organizations."

- Workshop Participant

Religious Imagination

Younger American Muslims or NextGens (Generation Y and Millennials) seek religious imagination and a return to the prophetic ideals of selflessness and compassion, and serving the broader needs and issues of Americans. Like other American NextGens[8] they are inspired by value and impact and seek to make meaningful and lasting contributions in their lifetimes.

As mentioned previously, many American Muslim NextGens are dissatisfied with existing organizations. They are also disappointed with the lack of support, naysaying and criticism they receive for efforts and initiatives. This coupled with the growth and ease of use of social media, virtual networks and technology have fueled the establishment and rise of new, flexible, responsive niche boutique organizations and initiatives (2.0 and 3.0) by small groups of young American Muslim NextGens.

In today's world, even one person's efforts can make a difference. 2.0 and 3.0 organizations and their natural personal networks work from the grassroots to fulfill specific needs of American Muslims. 2.0 and 3.0 organizations are not being capitalized on because they are not always on the radar, and because they are not always validated by larger organizations. However, their work can complement the work of 1.0 organizations.

"Nitpicking has held us back. Maybe it's time for disruption."

- Workshop Participant

1.0 organizations seek relevance and continuity, and 2.0 and 3.0 organizations seek legitimacy. If each recognizes the other's value and acknowledges the other's good work, they can all benefit each other and the American Muslim ecosystem.

Inclusion

"We are having a privileged conversation – these are Sunni conversations… Be aware, Shias are less institutionally developed nationally..."

- Workshop Participant

American Muslims make up less than 2% of the American population, and are diverse and decentralized. Being a demographic minority, American Muslim organizations need to employ inclusive strategies to gain broad based support on critical issues. They also need increased cultural competency and sensitivity training to promote an understanding of common problems and solutions.

Ensuring that American Muslim conversations are intentionally inclusive and representative takes extra effort, but is necessary and can greatly benefit American Muslims and their communities. For example, many American Muslim organizational conversations are primarily from among the Sunni majority. During this session a participant pointed out that although Shias of several sects were present at the convening, there were no Shia organizational leaders present. Similarly, women, minority communities and the younger generation are not always at the table for critical conversations. Organizations and their leaders need to seek broader inclusion and recognize when all constituents are not at the table.

Additionally, mosques and community centers are not always viewed as American Muslim organizations and are not part of thematic conversations about American Muslims and their needs. Yet, mosques and community centers are often heavily connected at local levels. Just as "all politics is local," so are social and civic efforts. American Muslim communities need civil society and public leaders who understand the American psyche and their local communities. Imams and community center leaders are critical community players. Helping these players build capacity in fundraising, civic engagement and social service is a huge opportunity to promote integration and inclusion, as well as a stronger local voice in the public square.

Session 1:

Ideas Generated by Panelists and Participants

1. **Identify what Organizations Need and Gathering Information.**
   a. Review existing leadership programs.
   b. Conduct a needs assessment and an organizational mapping of organizations.
   c. Gather information and case studies.

2. **Develop Training and Other Forms of Information Dissemination.**
   a. Develop leadership curricula and programs for American Muslims.
   b. Share organizational maps.
   c. Share information and case studies.
   d. Develop cultural sensitivity and competency training.

3. **Develop Flexible Infrastructures.**
   a. Create structures to connect people who need human capital with the people trained as leaders.
   b. Expand bandwidth and leverage money and people.
   c. Develop trusting, legitimate networks.
   d. Pursue multi-pronged inclusive approaches and solutions.
   e. Build alliances and cross-pollinate.
   f. Promote increased religious literacy and our knowledge of the vast traditions of Islam.

4. **Honor the Ecosystem – We are not Silos.**
   a. Create a referral system.
   b. Pursue partnering opportunities.
      i. Recognize gaps and try to fill them. For example, ISPU partnered with British Council.
      ii. Leverage personal networks. For example, MPAC partnered with the White House on an event for American Muslim women in March 2014.

5. **Create a Culture Shift and Focus.**
   a. Define or redefine mission and vision of organizations.
   b. Learn to say NO to "mission creep".
   c. Adopt a policy of YES to help Muslims and push us all up together.
   d. Be accountable to each other.
   e. Legitimize 2.0 and 3.0 organizations and seek solutions from the grassroots.
   f. Reassess impact, goals, and measurement.
   g. Seek inclusion and connect beyond comfort zones.
   h. Recognize that diversity and inclusiveness among American Muslims should be recognized and celebrated.
   i. Recognize that barriers and discrimination do exist; and recognize our own bias.

Have an "Attitude of Gratitude". Post 9/11, the American Muslim narrative has been framed through a battle of press releases. Organizations seek to establish relevance and legitimacy through press releases. Instead organizations need to validate each other to create legitimacy and trust.

Session 2:

American Muslim Storytellers

"Communicating through the arts, including storytelling is very important, and a wonderful way to humanize and highlight the Muslim experience without diluting it."

- Workshop Participant

A multi-disciplinary group of American Muslim storytelling professionals framed the storytelling session. These storytelling professionals *seek to represent American Muslim experiences, fiction and non-fiction to Muslims and non-Muslims*. The panelists spoke about the importance, challenges and benefits of telling authentic and multi-dimensional stories, while the broader discussion focused on storytelling for all. Summarized below are themes that emerged in the conversation.

Irresistible Stories and Storytelling

"We need to tell irresistible stories – true and complex stories told from diverse perspectives that expose our imperfections, humanize us and constantly challenge us and others to be more inclusive."

- Workshop Participant

Echoing 20th century novelist and poet, James Joyce, who said, "in the particular is contained the universal" the panelists and participants emphasized the universal value and power of specific stories and the great need for Muslims to tell personal stories, fiction, and non-fiction. Personal stories are a bridge back to our community's stories, and to our larger stories. Impactful, personal stories are authentic, objective and focused, and portray both the positive and the negative aspects of one's personality and life.

American Muslim communities have been under intense scrutiny since 9/11, and as a result have been extremely vulnerable. Vulnerable communities tend to shield themselves from further scrutiny and criticism by presenting only favorable, positive stories to the world, and by expecting individuals in their communities to do the same.

Yet telling only favorable and positive stories, fiction and non-fiction is not authentic or objective and does not serve American Muslims or the American mainstream well. Portraying American Muslims as "good" Muslims is potentially as stereotyped and one-dimensional as the binary opposite "bad" Muslims often portrayed in the media.

American Muslims want to see themselves in the stories they read and watch. And they want to see themselves portrayed objectively… and irresistibly. American Muslims need "to tell more irresistible stories about ourselves" and tell them irresistibly.

Audience Feedback and Pushback

As a storyteller anticipating one's audience and the potential feedback, positive and negative is important. According to the New York Times, when Sana Amanat, an editor at Marvel and the co-creator of Pakistani-American teenager Kamala Khan (the fourth Ms. Marvel) and her creative team prepared for Ms. Marvel's release in 2013, they "braced for all possible reactions."[10]

Authentic personal stories by and about American Muslims are impactful and will be supported by many American Muslims and Americans alike. Having said that society often projects how they think a story should be told or who should tell it, and so there will always be naysayers, both from outside and within the American Muslim community.

Additionally, the global and viral nature of social media makes predicting audience, impact, and feedback challenging. When Habib Yazdi of Sheikh and Bake Productions released the MIPSTERZ video, *Somewhere in America* in December 2013, he had no idea it would be viewed over 100,000 times in two days, [11] or that in the ensuing months over half a million people would view it globally. The video was well-received by its target audience "the American mainstream"[12] but received varying feedback, more critical than supportive, from American Muslims.[13]

Fear of backlash, however should not limit storytellers from honestly telling their story. To "be authentic you need to tell the story you want to tell" and be proactive, not reactive in conveying its message. The responsibility of an American Muslim storyteller is to "pick a vision, and tell a story that is interesting and multi-dimensional" not to feel obligated or accountable to anyone.

The goal of storytelling is to tap into certain feelings and emotions. American Muslim storytellers do not have to "shame for the sake of shaming" if recalibrating a story would protect people who may otherwise be hurt.

"I do expect some negativity not only from people who are anti-Muslim, but people who are Muslim and might want the character portrayed in a particular light."

– Sana Amanat, "Mighty, Muslim and Leaping Off the Page," The New York Times, November 5, 2013[9]

Storytelling is a Profession

Today, Muslims have a limited influence in Hollywood and in media in general. This is changing as more American Muslims enter and advance in media-related fields as writers, actors, screenwriters, newscasters, producers, directors and editors of multiple forms of media including television, film, video, graphic novels and print.

For now, storylines about outrageous extremism playing to existing negative Muslim stereotypes (i.e. terrorists, bomb makers) sell,[14] and will continue to do so until more American Muslim storytellers are involved in the development of more storylines with more diverse and multi-faceted Muslim characters.

When American Muslims actors and screenwriters are offered stereotypical and negative roles, they struggle to accept them, but also find them hard to refuse because this is their livelihood. Careers in storytelling are competitive and unless and until they get a big break, they have to pay the bills. The hope is that these short-term struggles will result in lasting longer-term benefits for American Muslim storytellers, and American Muslims at large, including gaining visibility and inroads in the industry, and more decision making power regarding future projects and stories.

Leveraging Pop Culture

"Looking out into pop culture – you should see yourself."

- Workshop Participant

Pop culture is pervasive and plays a critical role in American Muslim storytelling. The Canadian sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (2007-2012) illustrated the power and impact of storytelling by bringing "the funnier side of Islam into living rooms all over Canada."[16] The hit FOX series *Bones* is an example of an American television show with a recurring Muslim character. Since 2005, *Bones* has featured Arastoo Vaziri portrayed by Pej Vahdat,, a workshop participant.

"Superman was created by the American Jewish community. People don't know that Superman has a Jewish heritage. Two Jewish boys decided they wanted a superhero to represent them and their heritage."[15]

- Workshop Participant

Although not all American Muslim storytellers want to include faith and religion in their work, those that do believe it is important to show Islam and the goodness it has and appreciates. The writers of *Bones* have strived to be accurate and the *Bones* character and the storyline itself illustrate the maturing quality of storytelling. Arastoo began as a Muslim character overt in his practice praying on the show and speaking about religion. Over time, Arastoo is transforming from an overt Muslim character to a character that happens to be Muslim.

As Muslim characters and stories become more common and familiar, they will become less stereotyped and outwardly projecting one's Muslim identity will become less important. It will also be possible to explore more facets of a Muslim character's identity. For example, Arastoo Vaziri was developed in 2005 and spent several years as an overtly Muslim role. By comparison, Ms. Marvel's Kamala Khan was developed in 2013 and "being a Muslim is [but] one aspect of who she is."

Supporting Stories and Storytellers

"…all of these markets are consumer driven, profit driven. So, when it comes to publishing, to media, we as consumers have a lot of power by stepping up and buying the product, the book, the film, the art… that is how you send a signal to power brokers, culture makers and Hollywood that these are the stories you want to hear."

- Workshop Participant

Storytelling is part of the Muslim tradition, and it is how we understand the world[17] and our place in it. In post-9/11 America, American Muslim storytellers have been the unofficial representatives of Muslims and Islam. This is a traumatic burden on storytellers. Storytellers need trust and the unconditional emotional, financial and spiritual support of American Muslims to pursue storytelling without undue naysaying, co-option, or obligation.

"We need to set our agenda with our buying power."

- Workshop Participant

By supporting storytellers and storytelling emotionally and financially, American Muslim communities can tell their rich stories of "positive contribution and active participation in American society."[18] They can tap into their histories and identities to tell the stories of the most ethnically diverse faith community in the United States.

Changing the Broader Narrative

"What is the expression? 'If you don't stand for anything you fall for everything.' What are we standing for? What are our big stories?"

- Workshop Participant

"We are always defining ourselves based on what we are not…What are the joyous, beautiful creative aspects of who we are as individuals and communities…We also need to get so much more specific. The more specific the more universal the resonance."

- Workshop Participant

As a result of national security issues since 9/11, American Muslim narratives have emphasized the otherness that many American Muslims feel. Because American Muslims feel attacked and misrepresented, the larger stories American Muslims tell tend to fall into one of three categories:

- **Defensive:** They come in the form of organizational press releases condemning the latest terrorist act;
- **Reactive:** These are calls for boycott of, and disengagement from detractors. An example is the 2006 Danish cartoon controversy; and
- **Ad hoc:** Examples include the 2012 Lowes' ad controversy and the 2014 call for the cancellation of *Alice in Arabia.*

These narratives and efforts are not part of a larger strategy. They focus on what American Muslims are *against* and not what they are *for.*

The inherent external risk of these negative and reactive larger stories is being seen as the "angry victim" who reacts to everything and is difficult to engage and work with. Most American Muslims are not angry victims, and so the American Muslim community needs to create counter narratives that illustrate just how entrepreneurial, hard working, creative, successful and "almost freakishly normal"[19] American Muslims are.

Unfortunately, the tone of the narrative among many American Muslims is often critical, censorial, and judgmental. A participant mentioned the scathing American Muslim critiques of the 2012 series *All-American Muslim*. Another mentioned being told by fellow American Muslims not to tell stories that "exposed" the community and created fodder for Islamophobes.

"We are all storytellers, and are all part of the larger narrative" thus American Muslim storytelling at large needs to be supported and encouraged. If the environment is toxic and judgmental, American Muslims will hesitate to step forward to tell their powerful, diverse, and unique stories.

A well-known hadith states that "God is beautiful and He loves beauty."[20] Appreciating storytellers, supporting the art of storytelling, and transforming American Muslim internal and external narratives from reactive to proactive, from 'can't do' to 'can do'--with an emphasis on empowering and thoughtful storytelling--are the keys to changing the way American Muslims are viewed in the American mainstream. They are also the keys to engaging and empowering American Muslim youth and the next generation of American Muslim storytellers.

Inclusion Prevents Backlash

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States. In fact, in 20 states, Islam is the largest non-Christian faith tradition.[21] As the number of American Muslims grows so will their importance not only as storytellers, but also as viewers, receivers and consumers of stories.

For example, in 2011, the Metropolitan Museum of Art ("the Met") in New York City was planning the reopening of its expanded Islamic galleries. The Met feared backlash from the American Muslim community because several of the pieces portrayed images of the Prophet.

The Met understood that New York City Muslims needed to be heard, and that they were critical to the success of the Islamic galleries, and created a big tent process. The Met invited New York City Muslims to a series of workshops, convenings and exhibit previews in the months leading to the opening of the Islamic galleries as a way to receive feedback and establish a relationship with American Muslims, a critical audience. The Met's efforts paid off. The Islamic galleries opened successfully amid little controversy and with the support of the New York City Muslim community.

Session 2:

Ideas Generated by Panelists and Participants

1. **Have the courage to be honest.**
   a. We are all storytellers and should be proactive not reactive in telling our stories, and in reacting to stories that are about us.
   b. American Muslims are multifaceted, as are American Muslim storytellers. The community needs to accept that and realize that American Muslim storytellers are not accountable to other Muslims and do not have to represent Islam or all Muslims; they need to honest.

2. **Support American Muslim fiction and non-fiction storytelling and storytellers.**
   a. Provide emotional support, i.e., encourage authentic storytelling, support storytellers in case of backlash.
   b. Find the money for storytelling, art, messaging and provide financial support to sustain the stories we want to hear, i.e., scholarships, fundraising, sponsorship, patronage.
   c. Encourage and empower all generations of American Muslims to tell their stories, i.e., oral history projects, youth storytelling competitions, youth mentorship.
   d. Include real life case studies in research reports, i.e., ISPU's June 2014 Marriage and Divorce Study.

3. **'Open our doors' and fill the grassroots gap between Muslims and non-Muslims.**
   a. Book clubs and movie evenings at mosques that are open to everyone.
   b. Non-profit organizations can help promote and educate non-Muslims.
   c. Create workshops for the younger generation.

4. **Find American Muslim storytellers.**
   a. Mine the web, Muslim and non-Muslim online blogs and magazines (Altmuslim, Patheos, Illume, The Islamic Monthly, Muslim Observer, etc.) and social media – the storytellers are unlimited.
   b. Create and promote artistic events and the storytellers will come forward.

Session 3:

Muslims in Public Service

This session brings together political appointees and elected officials. The panelists spoke about being Muslim and engaging with the American political system. In this discussion the panelists represented local, state and federal levels of government and were appointed, elected or employed public servants.

Supporting American Muslims in Public Service

"Unless and until Muslims get engaged at various levels in addressing the needs of American society… it will be very hard to become part of the mainstream."

- Workshop Participant

One common definition of public service is "a service rendered in the public interest" and serving the public good.[22] Public service has evolved and expanded over the past fifty years from a focus only on the local, state and federal levels of government to include broad and interconnected networks of organizations and sectors.

In the Muslim faith tradition, public service and faith are closely aligned. A panelist stated, "Faith requires us to do public service. Muslims are God's representatives (*khalifa*) and stewards of the earth."

Despite the strong alignment between public service and Islam, many American Muslim communities are ambivalent in their support of and investment in American Muslim public servants and public service. There is a general mistrust of government because it has "failed us" - an expression of despair and anger over national security policies that have eroded American Muslims' civil rights and civil liberties domestically and caused harm to innocent Muslims globally since 9/11.

However, American Muslims are increasingly entering and advancing in public service careers. As they do, it is critical for American Muslim communities to appreciate and support American Muslim public servants and their invaluable contributions, while also contributing time and money to public service.

Managing Expectations

Despite their ambivalence of and limited investment in public service, many American Muslim communities expect American Muslim public servants to affiliate with and advocate for their issues and causes. The public servants on the panel have all felt this pressure, and some have faced pushback when they do not acquiesce.

Many American Muslim communities have not yet fully internalized the role and value of American Muslim public servants. Ideally, the relationship between American Muslim public servants and American Muslim communities should be one of reciprocity, understanding, support, trust, and tempered expectations. American Muslim public servants are allies to American Muslim communities and can offer advice, access, and expert insights.

Today, some American Muslim communities mistake the person for the position they hold. They assume that American Muslim public servants are obliged to their communities, and are only allies if they are on the same side of an issue and willing to affiliate with and advocate for the issue. By the same token, American Muslim public servants assume that American Muslim communities understand the importance of civil discourse, and the limitations and challenges that public servants face, internally and externally. These mismatched expectations strain the relationship between American Muslim public servants and American Muslim communities.

Truth to Power and Social Justice

The root of American Muslim communities' expectations may be tied to its deep emphasis on social justice. Social justice and speaking truth to power are prophetic traditions. One of the participants in the discussion said "working in public services is a tightrope." Another felt that there is a "fine line" that public servants navigate between the opportunity to be at the table and the responsibility to speak truth to power.

There is no doubt that faith and social justice are linked. Yet, there are a variety of ways to engage in social justice work. Since American Muslim communities often approach social justice work through grassroots mobilizing, perhaps the notion of social justice can be extended to include public service.

Role and Value of Public Service

Public service is a career and requires planning. Achieving success in public service "requires being methodical" and either working one's way up vertically from within the system, or gaining transferable skills and moving laterally from another field.

Many American Muslim public servants are driven by faith to serve (*fisabilillah*). They are doubly committed, both by their pledge of office and by Islam to serve and advance the goals of their office; and to represent America and serve the American people, including but not only American Muslims.

"American Muslim communities have a skewed view of truth to power, an oppressed to oppressor view. We belong to a system that gives outputs based on investments and inputs. We cannot excuse policies that work against us, but we have not invested the time and the money. Truth to power is a big burden we put on youth and on our public servants."

- Workshop Participant

American Muslim public servants are uniquely positioned to elevate the perception and understanding of Islam and Muslims by personifying the Islamic ideals of excellence, patience, persistence, integrity, dependability and trustworthiness in their work. And within their realm of expertise can also promote projects that advance the goals of their employer while also doing justice to the community. For example, in 2011, panelist Shahed Amanullah, former senior advisor for technology at the U.S. Department of State, engaged Precious Rasheeda Muhammad to create a timeline of Muslims in the United States from 1776 to 2011 for then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.[23] Another recently completed State Department project is the report, *American Muslims.*[24]

Political Engagement and Running for Office

"My cousin volunteered for the Obama campaign. She said it was the first time she felt like an American."

- Workshop Participant

"My upbringing was very conservative. We were told voting is haram – don't vote. And then 9/11 happened – there was a big mob scene. Catholics protected the mosque and that was the beginning of interfaith in our community."

- Workshop Participant

In the session, it was mentioned that some ultra-conservative Muslim communities consider civic participation and voting impermissible based on the hadith "we do not give leadership to those who seek it." And, that in the time of the Prophet (Peace be Upon Him), leaders were appointed not elected because elections are divisive. However, it is important to note that this is not a dominant position. In Ihsan Bagby's report *The American Mosque 2011, Report 1 from the US Mosque Study*, 91% of American Muslim mosque leaders surveyed agreed that Muslims should participate in the American political process.[25]

In the United States, the right to vote and the right to run for office are the fundamental rights of a citizen. American Muslim political involvement is critical because political involvement promotes integration and a sense of belonging. And because all politics are local, and elections can be decided on a few votes.

Running for office can be both humbling and empowering – and an internal struggle for a candidate who is not used to self-promoting, knocking on doors, and asking for money and votes. As with anything, it became easier over time, but panelists who had run for office expressed disappointment that American Muslims were superficially supportive, standing behind a candidate until asked to contribute time or money.

Candidates need support and working for campaigns and candidates is a service. In the age of Facebook marketing, it's also a valuable opportunity to learn by doing, and for political outreach through on-the-ground canvassing and issue-based advocacy.

Cultivating potential American Muslim candidates and creating a vertical pipeline is critical. Potential candidates may be found through leadership development at mosques and Islamic centers, through grassroots mobilizing efforts, or through candidate campaigns.

Session 3:

Ideas Generated by Panelists and Participants

1. **Create a Vertical Pipeline of Candidates.**
   a. Develop an awareness and training campaign.
   b. Disseminate it strategically.
   c. Identify candidates based on their skills, not only based on their desire to run.
   d. Design a curriculum to prepare candidates.

2. **Create a Marketing and Learning Campaign for Public Service in Islamic Centers and Islamic Schools.**
   a. Create curricula and a speakers' list.
   b. Speak to audiences about the journey and "being the change we want to see."

3. **Develop Case Studies.**
   a. Create real life case studies documenting the experiences of public servants, local and national, i.e., Rashida Tlaib.
   b. Deconstruct the experiences, celebrate the achievements and learn from the mistakes.
   c. Develop best practices and lessons learned from these experiences.

4. **Create a Network of Muslim Public Servants.**

Session 4:

Muslims Making Inclusive Spaces

In this session, the panelists, leaders of Islamic community centers and Muslim-run community spaces discussed what inclusive community means to them, and how they are working to create spaces embodying inclusivity. The participants discussed:

- Inclusivity and its challenges
- Leadership and creating space that encourages spirituality
- "Sacred" versus "safe" space
- Third spaces
- "Spiritual abuse"
- Pluralism

Inclusivity[b] and Islam

Islam encourages inclusion and pluralism. Thus far, many American Muslim community discussions address inclusion superficially at best and are only beginning to internalize inclusion from an Islamic standpoint.

The Islamic tradition is diverse and allows for the establishment of inclusive theological and ideological frameworks. Thus, American Muslim communities can create inclusive spaces and inclusive communities in keeping with Islam and its traditions by following frameworks that encourage inclusivity.

Using the Islamic center[c] as an example, most Islamic centers in America come from a specific theology and point of view. However, there does not seem to be a specific theoretical theological framework for American mosques that can help define the 'red lines'. Without a theoretical theological framework from American Muslim scholars to ground or guide decisions, Islamic centers and their leaders find themselves reacting to topics and issues like gay rights based on cultural norms. The Islamic tradition is very inclusive and Islamic centers need a framework to help promote inclusivity in an intellectually honest way that is in keeping with Islamic traditions.

[b] Inclusivity: being able to meet a person, Muslim or non-Muslim 'where they are at' not 'where they should be.'

[c] Islamic centers, more expansive than mosques, have *prayer* spaces as well as additional spaces for community-centric programming addressing the community's religious and community life needs.

Today in American Muslim communities and their spaces, the conversation on inclusivity, if it occurs revolves around gender equity and Sunni-Shia issues. For conversations on inclusivity to be truly relevant to most American Muslims, they need to start with acknowledgement and consideration of the most marginalized segments of communities. These discussions also needs to be expanded to include, at a minimum, topics such as:

- Racism,
- Sectarianism,
- Intergenerational dynamics,
- Classism,
- Sexual orientation, and
- Sexism.

Strong and Inspired Leadership

Inclusivity, according to one of the panelists is, "being able to meet a person, Muslim or non-Muslim 'where they are at' not 'where they should be'". Creating inclusive spaces and communities starts with strong leaders and a strong leadership philosophy. Sometimes it is necessary to be "exclusive in order to be inclusive" and adopting a zero tolerance policy regarding norms and parameters of behavior at an Islamic center.

To illustrate this principle, a workshop panelist said:

"If Rihanna came to the mosque to pray, our leadership's job is to facilitate that - to allow her to pray and protect her right to pray. If anyone badgers her and is judgmental – questioning her right to pray or critiquing her prayer or clothing - leadership would talk to that person and if the issue escalates, that person would be disallowed from the space."

As American Muslim communities grow in America encouraging inclusivity is critical, as is leadership cultivation and developing a leadership pipeline. Additionally, American Muslims need to identify and consciously cultivate their own talents and skill sets, and give back responsibly to the community. The leadership of Islamic centers and other Muslim organizations also need to nurture and cultivate leaders by creating development programs and opportunities for their members and congregants with a focus on underrepresented groups including women, youth and others.

"We preach and teach the concept that everyone comes to the Islamic center at their own point in their spiritual journey."

- Workshop Participant

"Muslims have an obligation to create respectful spaces."

- Workshop Participant

Physical Space

Beautiful and spiritually inspired physical spaces can promote inclusivity and a sense of belonging. Each community has different requirements, and thus architecturally designed places of prayer (mosques[d]) and Islamic centers where possible, allows for more optimal programming and planning of these spaces than the "retrofitting of cookie cutter Chuck E. Cheese mosques of the 1970s, 80s and 1990s".

[d] Mosque: places of prayer and religious life for Muslim communities.

Space is porous and can be interconnected, dynamic and overlapping. In fact, historically, in Muslim countries, mosques and community spaces were built next to educational spaces, marketplaces, and living spaces. Mosques and Islamic centers in America are not reflective of the planning tradition in Muslim countries. Instead, they have been influenced by church architecture and the planning philosophy of one of the most celebrated American architects of the 20th century, Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright's concept Broadacre City[26] was the antithesis of the city and the apotheosis of suburbia supporting automobile dependence and separating areas for community, education, living and commerce.

In the early 21st century, the United States is seeing a resurgence of urban areas and a reemergence of overlapping, interconnected spaces for community, education, living, and commerce. This trend is also influencing contemporary Islamic center design in the United States.

Serving Community Needs

Depending on the local community, Islamic centers may require conference space, banquet halls, recreational space, classrooms and cafés. For example, the Islamic Center of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC) has a café on its premises that was designed by Maryam Eskandari. Young Muslim professionals and high schoolers needed a place to meet and this space was designed to serve their social needs, and is open to the whole Boston community.

Community needs can be served outside of Islamic centers too. For example, the Nur Center in Virginia has a café, albeit a very different kind of café - a center for art, fulfillment and enrichment (CAFÉ). The Nur Center is not an Islamic center; it is a center that serves the broader local community, many of whom happen to be Muslim. The center offers art and martial arts classes in addition to a Montessori school.

The CAFÉ model was developed to guide children and adults along the intimate and faith building journeys of art and fitness, both non-confrontational, universally accepted practices with appeal for Muslims and non-Muslims. Ahmad Khatib, Founder of the Nur Center, believes that the CAFÉ model is a valuable addition to an Islamic center.

Mosques, Community Centers and Third Spaces

The terms Islamic center and mosque were used interchangeably in the discussion. To clarify, mosques are *places of prayer and religious life for Muslim communities across the United States*[27] whereas Islamic centers are more expansive — with *prayer spaces as well as additional spaces for community-centric programming addressing the community's religious and community life needs*.

Initially, Muslims in the United States established mosques in local communities for Friday prayer. These mosques later expanded their mission to include educational classes or Sunday school and some have evolved into Islamic community centers.

According to a 2011 mosque survey, *The American Mosque*[28] there are over 2,100 *mosques* in the United States. Some of the oldest mosques in the United States were established in the 1920s and 30s in North Dakota, Michigan and Iowa.[28] Approximately 6% were established in the 1960s coinciding with the Nation of Islam movement and the 1965 immigration surge. Between 1970 and 2000, many of the approximately 1,300 mosques and Sunday schools were funded through the Middle East and their imams, their theology and ideology were controlled by Salafis and Wahhabis.[29] Since 2000 there has been a surge in mosques and Islamic centers with over 900 new mosques being built.[30]

Despite the establishment of so many new mosques, many American-born Muslims, especially Millennials and GenXers feel disconnected, judged, excluded and unsafe in the mosques. Feeling unwelcome, they have become 'unMosqued.'[31] This has led to the establishment of third spaces as substitutes for the traditional mosque or Islamic center.

Third spaces for private gathering and prayer including mausoleums (*mazars*), Sufi shrines (*dargas*), lodges (*zawia*) and private congregation spaces (*jamat khanas*) have been a legitimate part of the Islamic ecosystem for centuries. Although the concept of third spaces or non-mosque spaces is not new, it is worth understanding the new third spaces and their role and place in the American Muslim ecosystem.

Sacred vs. Safe

Are mosques sacred or safe? Christianity influences Islam in the West and calling mosques sacred reinforces this by interpreting the mosque as a church. This emphasis on the mosque as sacred space takes away from the focus on it as a safe space[e] for prayer, intellectual discussion, idea generation, free self-expression and parity of men and women.

The conflict between sacred and safe has led some of the panelists away from the mosque toward third spaces where the focus is on active engagement including discussing issues rather than accepting what is said as the status quo, and internalizing teachings of the Quran over rote memorization.

"Life is sacred – everywhere we are is sacred. What makes something unsacred – is when it is not safe."

- Workshop Participant

Promoting Intrafaith Pluralism

Inclusive space can foster inclusive communities. Pluralism can take the conversation beyond inclusivity to respectful engagement and coexistence.

However, choosing "pluralism over prejudice"[32] is easier said than done. Religious pluralism presupposes religious literacy and respect of the faith or tradition.[33]

"The theology of pluralism is absolutely critical. We have thought about the theology of interfaith pluralism – but hardly any discussion theologically speaking - on intrafaith pluralism."

- Workshop Participant

e To clarify the term, Advocates for Youth describes safe space as a "space where anyone can relax and be fully self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe…" In an American Muslim context, a safe space was described in the discussion as a space for non-judgmental prayer, intellectual discussion, self expression and parity of men and women.

From an interfaith perspective that is knowledge of one's own faith as well as of other faiths. From an intrafaith perspective it is knowledge of one's own faith traditions and beliefs as well as those of other sects of Muslims. Developing an intrafaith pluralistic environment is challenging but possible if there are safe spaces.

Anger, Judgment and Abuse

"What do you see on people's faces? Anger and judgment. Resting bitchface. So many Muslims have resting bitchface."

- Workshop Participant

"Muslim men prefer back door Meccan diplomacy, but we need a Medinan revolution."

- Workshop Participant

There is power and strength in American Muslim diversity, but according to several participants, anger, judgment and spiritual and cultural abuse are not uncommon in mosques and Islamic centers. Minority communities, women, youth and others are made to feel that they do not fit in and that they are not welcome. According to one of the participants, to "fit in" people are asked to "subsume their identities" because it's better for the community as a whole for everyone to fit one narrative.

Several participants mentioned male privilege and the need for Muslim male allies to publicly support and stand behind women's participation in Muslim settings. There have been discussions among Muslims regarding the need for women's participation,[34] and in this workshop a participant anecdotally mentioned that a group of orthodox Jewish men petitioned for the equal representation of women at conferences saying that otherwise they would boycott the conference.

The future vitality of the American Muslim community depends on the prophetic traditions of inclusiveness and pluralism. Seeking intracultural pluralism through thoughtful programming and dialogues may help American Muslims better understand each other based on gender, ethnicity, age and economic status.

Session 4:

Ideas Generated by Panelists and Participants

1. **Create a Vision.**
   a. Creating a vision of Islam in America now and in the next 50 years.

2. **Develop an Intrafaith Pluralism Campaign.**
   a. Programming to celebrate various communities.

3. **Promote Active Engagement.**
   a. Active Learning and Family Participation at Mosque and Islamic Center - Example – Children recite suras and speak to everyone about what the sura meant to them.
   b. Talk to people, be an ambassador of Muslims.

4. **Push Community Change.**
   a. Make space for women.
      i. Support projects like SideEntrance.
      ii. There is male privilege in the Muslim community. Women need male allies to publicly support women.
   b. Be more inclusive of the poor.
   c. Establish Training program for Imams.
   d. Create a comprehensive package of khutbas.
   e. Change the Conversation in mosques.
      i. Move from can't do to can do.
      ii. Strategic leadership.
   f. Rate Mosques.
      i. There are over 2000 mosques in this country. The Salatomatic app allows the review of mosques. It is a way of publicly outing mosques and pushing change through social media.

5. **Promote Self-Change.**
   a. Self-Work - The feeling of sacred space can also be achieved from within. Working on one's self will create a feeling of a sacred space within.
   b. Be skeptical of one's self instead of skeptical of others. This is a personal journey to shift from skepticism of others to skepticism of self.

6. **Develop the Theological Framework of Inclusion.**
   a. Document and educate communities on the historical and sociological evolution of inclusive Muslim spaces.

Session 5:

Muslims Seeking Inclusion

"Underscoring all of this is the imperative – How do we rebuild a culture of pluralism among Muslims? How do we start rebuilding that culture step-by-step?"

- Workshop Participant

The discussion on inclusion and Islam that began in the earlier session continued in this last session. In this session select participants focused on the ways in which they are asking to be included, steps they have taken to ensure inclusion, and successes and challenges they have encountered in doing so. These select participants want safer spaces, as well as more inclusion and plurality; and are willing to have the hard conversations necessary to make that happen.

Empathy, Constructive Criticism and Creative Outreach

"Raised in a dual faith home, I chose Islam – and was never accepted in the Islamic circles. I have three kids and they hate to go to the masjid. We need to figure this out."

- Workshop Participant

As new Muslims learn their religion and way of life they are pulled in multiple directions - to learn Arabic, to learn prayers, to learn Islam. To help them on their evolutionary journey, new Muslims require space, resources, and support from American Muslim communities for education and language training.

New Muslims also require empathy and constructive criticism to help them learn and grow in Islam. As an example, one of the panelists mentioned a comic strip in which a man is shown doing his ablutions (*wudu*) incorrectly. Instead of criticizing his ablutions, the protagonist in the comic asks the man to judge a competition and select the person who performs the ablution most perfectly.

New Muslims represent American Muslims and Islam to their non-Muslim networks and are natural bridges. To be powerful ambassadors, they need creative messaging and videos like Kareem Salama's 2007 *Land Called Paradise* to help them tell others about Muslims.

An increasing number of American Muslims are unaffiliated with a mosque, and American Muslims in all communities vary in their levels of observance and practice. As American Muslim communities grow community outreach, designing solutions and educational programming will have to be reflective with a deep

understanding of American Muslim communities and their spiritual, intellectual and social needs. Empathy, constructive criticism, and creative outreach will be key to supporting, attracting and retaining all American Muslims not just new Muslims.

Protection

Marginalized American Muslim communities that are discriminated against, and run the risk of being harmed by Muslims and non-Muslims need to be exclusive in order to feel safe. These communities seek protection by providing safe and sometimes private and confidential spaces for their constituents before asking for acceptance or a voice in larger Islamic centers and American Muslim communities.

However, the work that marginalized communities like the transgender and LGBTQ communities are doing is transformational. If 'taboo' topics like homosexuality can be discussed in traditional American Muslim spaces (organizations, mosques and community centers) it will lead to more understanding, empathy, compassion - and more open conversations.

"To understand inclusivity, one has to start with the most marginalized and try to understand their needs and their context."

- Workshop Participant

Leveraging Social Media

To move towards more inclusion and plurality in American Muslim communities, there has to be space and room for dialogue, for opening up conversations and pushing questions and ideas. The virtual space is that place and social media is the tool.

According to one of the panelists, having a voice on social media is a boon for marginalized communities, namely women, minority American Muslim communities and young people who do not traditionally have a voice in their communities. Naysayers criticize social media activists saying their work does not create solutions. It may not, but it does democratize, promote awareness and give voice to the voiceless - all of which are cathartic.

Social media also creates support and affinity networks. These networks can be used for social media campaigns, and for disseminating information such as trainings, Friday prayer sermon (*khutba*) outlines, and reading lists.

As illustrated during the Abu Eesa controversy[35] on Twitter earlier in 2014, social media is a powerful tool that is easily misused. Disagreements can quickly escalate. Thus to be effective, social media requires internet etiquette and Islamic manners (*adab*).

"I was told, 'You're airing dirty laundry, it lacks diplomacy. Use back channels.' What they don't realize is, I can't walk into a mosque and have my voice heard."

- Workshop Participant

New Organizational Structures

As discussed in earlier sessions, third spaces are critical. In some ways, third spaces are first spaces because so many American Muslims are not affiliated with mosques.

These spaces are not always alternatives to other spaces. Sometimes, they are niche spaces providing programming that is not available in the larger organizational ecosystem to serve the spiritual, intellectual, and social needs of a community.

The Next Wave Muslim Initiative (NWMI) is an example of a third space. It is a platform space that supports and curates community activities.

> **Vision:** NWMI envisions a diverse community of American Muslims seeking spiritual, intellectual, and social growth towards Allah that is guided by the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (saws) as transmitted through his family, the Ahlul Bayt (as).
>
> **Mission:** NWMI strives to achieve its vision by providing an open platform supporting a variety of programs including community engagement, intellectual discourse, spiritual practice, and social consciousness.

NWMI follows a private sector model and selects programs based on a bidding process. If the program is selected, the successful bidder runs the program. Any and all programming has to fall within the vision and mission of NWMI. To address the challenges other American Muslim organizations have faced NWMI has:

- codified the inclusion of women (at least 20%)
- addressed Founder's Syndrome by ensuring that all founders will leave in the next 10 years

Concluding Exercise

At the end of the five sessions, the facilitators Nadia Firozvi and Asim Rehman suggested two group exercises to conclude the workshop. One of the exercises is summarized here. Each invited panelist was asked to identify ONE feature a Muslim community center in the United States should have. The varied responses are mentioned below:

"Your community center should . . ."

- Have a community garden
- Be sustainable – self-sufficient and a teaching tool
- Be progressive – accommodating and adaptable
- Have place for playing – children are our future
- Have dialogue – openness for diverse conversation – discussion over repetition
- Be fun and colorful
- Be responsive to the needs of its constituency. Should conduct a climate survey – essentially a set of questions ("poll the parishioners")
- Learn and listen – It should work on multiple levels for convert and born Muslim, child and parent
- Strengthen relationships – with God, within families, across cultures – good imam, good family programming, coffee house
- Have board members and leaders that are certified
- Be welcoming to all who seek Allah without judgment – protect the people in your space – place to seek refuge – 'let me in the door'. Once someone enters the door they should see a smiling face, equal space for men and women (even if separate)
- Have a large space for prayer/dhikr, theater, basketball court, pool, gym – and should be open to everyone
- Be a safe space – offer access to all
- Have equal distribution of staffing and leadership by gender
- Be a good neighbor – Be the voice for the voiceless in your community – who is hungry, where are the seniors, who has financial difficulty. The center should identify those with needs and take care of them
- Have an imam that has a spiritual plan for the community – like Moses took bani Israel
- Have a board that is representative
- Have interfaith outreach, and a counselor for youth
- Create a youth group and allow them to govern themselves
- Make parents attend Sunday school

Panelist Biographies

Zain Abdullah, Associate Professor in the Religion Department, Temple University

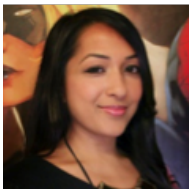
Zain Abdullah holds a doctorate in cultural anthropology from the New School for Social Research in New York City. He is Associate Professor in the Religion Department at Temple, and a faculty affiliate in the Department of Geography & Urban Studies. Professor Abdullah's current research focuses on the interplay of race, religion and ethnicity, and his writings cover an array of topics including Islamic Studies and contemporary Islam, African American Muslims and Islam in America, religion and society, African Diaspora Studies, globalization and transnationalism and inter-group dynamics. Professor Abdullah's articles have appeared in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Anthropological Quarterly, the Journal of Islamic Law and Culture, the Journal of History and Culture, African Arts, the Middle East Journal, and other periodicals. He has earned awards from the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the National Museum of African Art, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), the International Center for Migration, Ethnicity, and Citizenship in New York City in addition to a New Jersey State Assembly Resolution in recognition of his service to the citizens of the state.

Shakila Ahmad, President and Board Chair, Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati

Shakila Ahmad is dedicated to numerous civic and community causes in addition to heading business development and management for the Allergy & Asthma Specialty Center. Mrs. Ahmad was appointed in December 2013 as the first woman to lead the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati as President and Board of Trustees Chair of the Islamic Educational Council. She also serves as Vice Chair for the YWCA Cincinnati heading Racial Justice, is on United Way of Greater Cincinnati's Board of Directors and on the regional FBI multicultural task force. She has been an active member of the Board of Trustees at the Islamic Center since 1995 and is the founder for the Muslim Mothers Against Violence initiative and Tours & Talks Education and Outreach programs at the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati. Civically, her work has included board leadership roles at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, BRIDGES for a Just Community (formerly NCCJ), Ohio Humanities Council, Cincinnati Enquirer Editorial Board, WCET Community Advisory, Academy of Medicine Alliance and the Martin Luther King Jr Coalition. She has conducted lectures and programs related to inclusion, education, interfaith, Islam, women and the cultural and demographic diversity of Muslims. She spearheaded the creation of the nationally recognized *'A Visit to a Mosque in America'* DVD. Mrs. Ahmad is a Cincinnati Enquirer Professional Women to Watch 2014, regional Chamber's Women of Excellence 2011, 2010 FBI Director's Community Leadership Award recipient, Enquirer Women of the Year 2001, and NCCJ's 1997 Community Service Award recipient. She is a member of Leadership Cincinnati XXXI.

Debbie Almontaser, Muslim Consultative Network

Debbie Almontaser is the founding and former principal of the Khalil Gibran International Academy. A 23-year veteran of the NYC Public School system, she has taught special education, trained teachers in literacy, and served as a multicultural specialist and diversity advisor. Ms. Almontaser lectures widely on Arab culture, Islam, cultural diversity, interfaith coalition building and youth leadership at local, national and international conferences. Her published work includes a chapter in *The Day Our World Changed: Children's Art of 9/11*, for New York University's Child Study Center and the Museum of the City of New York, and in *Forever After: New York City Teachers on 9/11* for Teachers College Press, as well as numerous articles and op-ed pieces. Ms. Almontaser served as a consultant to Nickelodeon's Nick Jr. Muslim American Series Project, Independent Production Fund's Islam Project, Islam Access Project Channel 13, the Interfaith Center of NYC, and CAMBA's Diversity Project. Ms. Almontaser was a founding board member of The Dialogue Project, Brooklyn Borough President's New Diversity Task Force, Women in Islam, board advisor for the Same Difference Interfaith Alliance, and a member of Women Against Islamophobia and Racism (WAIR). She is also a cofounder of Brooklyn Bridges, the September 11th Curriculum Project, and We Are All Brooklyn. Ms. Almontaser received a Revson Fellowship from Columbia University and was named a Muslim Leader of Tomorrow by the American Society for Muslim Advancement. She is currently a doctoral student at Fordham University's Graduate School of Education in the Urban School Leadership Program and the Board President of the Muslim Consultative Network.



Sana Amanat, Editor, Marvel Comics

Sana Amanat has been in the publishing industry for the past nine years. Currently, she is an Editor at Marvel Entertainment, developing and managing creative content for the company's various publishing lines. Her notable credits include the critically-acclaimed Ultimate Comics Spider-Man Miles Morales, the first African American and Latino Spider-Man, as well as the breakout hit Captain Marvel, a series that changed the image of the female super hero. Most recently, she co-created the first solo series to feature a Muslim female super hero, Ms. Marvel, which gained worldwide media attention, sparking excitement and dialogue about identity and the Muslim American struggle. She has had made multiple national media appearances and gave a Tedx Teen talk about the transformative power of storytelling.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

Shahed Amanullah, Founder, Halalfire LLC

A founder of several Silicon Valley startups, Shahed Amanullah currently serves as CEO of LaunchPosse, a platform that helps leverage the power of social networks to shape and launch entrepreneurial ideas. Prior to starting LaunchPosse, Mr. Amanullah served as Senior Advisor for Technology at the US Department of State, where he worked on digital diplomacy in the bureaus of Secretaries of State John Kerry and Hillary Clinton. He also worked closely with the White House and other agencies on social entrepreneurship, combating online extremism, and fostering innovation. Mr. Amanullah also serves as CEO of Halalfire, a producer of online content and market research for global Muslim communities. He founded altmuslim.com, an online magazine with 2.5 million annual unique users, and served as its editor-in-chief for 10 years before its 2011 acquisition by Patheos. In 1998, he created zabihah.com, the world's largest Halal restaurant guide, with 10 million annual users and 500,000 app downloads. Mr. Amanullah was also co-founder and CEO of Relatia, a venture-backed mobile software company acquired in 2001. Mr. Amanullah has written and/or been featured in pieces about technology, foreign policy, and media trends in venues such as CNN, has spoken at the Council on Foreign Relations and Center for American Progress, and has published essays in academic journals and newspapers such as the Washington Post. He has been named three times (2009, 2010, and 2011) as one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world and one of 10 visionary young Muslims by Islamica Magazine (2007).

Saud Anwar, Mayor, South Windsor, CT

Saud Anwar is a physician who specializes in Lung Diseases and Critical Care Medicine. Currently, he serves as Chair of the Department of Family Practice and Internal Medicine of Manchester Memorial and Rockville General Hospitals. His wife, Dr. Yusra Anis-Anwar, maintains a private practice in Internal Medicine in South Windsor. Both of their sons, Taha and Taseen attended elementary and middle schools in South Windsor. Saud's parents also live in South Windsor.

Dr. Anwar is involved in humanitarian and peace initiatives nationally and internationally. He is frequently invited to consult for our government and has organized medical missions for disaster relief. His efforts have been recognized at the state and federal levels and by several professional organizations. Dr. Anwar has received citations for his service to the State from Governor Rell, Attorney General Blumenthal, Secretary of State Bysiewicz and members of the Connecticut General Assembly.

Urooj Arshad, Associate Director, International Youth Health and Rights, Advocates for Youth Steering Committee member, Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD)

Urooj Arshad builds the capacity of organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean to empower young people as advocates within their countries and at international forums on reproductive and sexual health and rights. She has also designed a project that addresses the reproductive and sexual health needs of Muslim youth.

Ms. Arshad has presented at domestic and international conferences, including the International HIV/AIDS Conference 2010 in Austria and 2012 in Washington, DC; the European Science Foundation's conference on Religion, Gender and Human Rights 2011 in Sweden; the LGBT Pride and Heritage Event hosted by the White House Office of Public Engagement and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; the State Department; the National Press Club; Georgetown University and Princeton. Ms. Arshad also keynoted at the LGBTQ Symposium 2013 at American University.

Ms. Arshad is a steering committee member of the Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity (MASGD) which addresses the impact of Islamophobia, homophobia, and transphobia. Ms. Arshad has been a member of the Center for American Progress' Women's Health Leadership Network and the Faith and Reproductive Justice Institute. Ms. Arshad was an American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute fellow and a current member of the Kalamazoo College Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership Global Advisory Board.

Ali Asani, Professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures; Director, Alwaleed Islamic Studies Program

Ali Asani is Professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures and the Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Islamic Studies Program at Harvard University. He holds a joint appointment between the Committee on the Study of Religion and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He also serves on the faculty of the Departments of South Asian Studies, and African and African-American Studies. Since joining the Harvard faculty in 1983, Professor Asani has offered instruction in a variety of South Asian and African languages and literatures, as well as courses on various aspects of the Islamic tradition including Understanding Islam and Contemporary Muslim Societies; Religion, Literature and the Arts in Muslim Cultures; Muslim Voices in Contemporary World Literatures; Introduction to Islamic Mysticism (Sufism); Ismaili History and Thought; and Muslim Societies in South Asia: Religion, Culture and Identity. A specialist of Islam in South Asia, Professor Asani's research focuses on Shia and Sufi devotional traditions in the region. He also studies popular or folk forms of Muslim devotional life, and Muslim communities in the West. Professor Asani has been particularly active post-Sept 11 in improving the understanding of Islam and its role in Muslim societies by conducting workshops for high school and college educators as well as making presentations at various public forums. More recently, he was a consultant for the National Endowment for the Humanities Bridging Cultures Muslim Journeys Bookshelf Project. In 2002, Professor Asani was awarded the Harvard Foundation medal for his outstanding contributions to improving intercultural and race relations at Harvard and the nation.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

Kathryn M. Coughlin, Executive Director, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Islamic Studies Program

Kathryn Coughlin serves as the Executive Director of the Alwaleed Islamic Studies Program at Harvard. She studied Arab Studies at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service and holds a masters' degree in Middle East History from Georgetown University's Graduate School. Ms. Coughlin completed her doctoral exams in Islamic history specializing in Islamic law and gender but abandoned her dissertation for active public service in 2001. She has taught, lectured and/or delivered papers in the Middle East, North America, Europe and Asia on a wide range of subjects including religion and gender; Islamic law; religion and modernity; and US foreign policy and the Middle East. As recipient of over 25 grants and fellowships, including the prestigious Congressional Harry S. Truman Graduate Fellowship for Public Service, Ms. Coughlin's research has been supported by a number of American and international foundations including the Social Science Research Council and the Arbeitskreis Moderne Und Islam (Germany).

As the President of Global Research Group, a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering public diplomacy in Muslim communities worldwide, Ms. Coughlin served as a consultant to U.S. State Department, National Geographic, the U.S. Census Bureau (International Division), Smithsonian Institute and the Human Rights Association in Nazareth.

Maria Ebrahimji, Journalist, Consultant, & Co-Founder, I Speak For Myself Inc.

Maria Ebrahimji is journalist, strategist, speaker, and independent consultant. Her clients include media organizations, academia, and non-profits. As a former executive at CNN Worldwide, she led a team in guest coverage, newsgathering, and story planning for CNN's special events, breaking news, and multi-platform programming. While at CNN, she was involved in the coverage of ground-breaking news stories including four Presidential elections; 9/11; the Iraq War; Madrid train bombing; Pakistan and Haiti earthquakes; 2011 Arab uprisings; Royal Wedding; Boston Marathon bombing, and the deaths of Yasser Arafat, Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, Benazir Bhutto, and Pope John Paul II. She has produced live events with luminaries and newsmakers – during breaking news and in the backdrop of major global events such as Davos, CGI, and the Fortune Global Forum.

Ms. Ebrahimji played an instrumental role on CNN's Diversity Council, serving as its Vice Chair for several years and shaping diversity strategy in the areas of marketplace, content, workplace, and workforce. In addition she launched and executed CNN Dialogues, a three-year partnership between CNN, the National Center for Civil & Human Rights, and Emory University's Johnson Institute for the Study of Race & Difference.

In 2012, Ms. Ebrahimji co-founded I Speak for Myself, Inc. (ISFM), a book and multimedia enterprise that publishes narrative collections on interfaith and intercultural issues. The company has published five volumes in the series, with many more forthcoming. She has also served as an advisor to the International Museum of Women's 2013 online exhibition, "Muslima: Muslim Women's Art & Voices," and as an advisor and panelist on the Aspen Institute's Inclusive America project, a nonpartisan effort on pluralism and interfaith coordination. She was recently named a one of 100 Most Influential Muslims in Georgia by the Islamic Speakers Bureau of Atlanta and is currently working with the University of California's Humanities Research Institute on a project entitled, "Sharia'h Revoiced," exploring California Muslims' interpretation of Islamic law in daily life.

Ms. Ebrahimji is on the Board of Directors of the Atlanta Press Club, serves as an advisor to Tau Chapter, Alpha Chi Omega, Inc., and is a member of the Marketing Committee for the Board of Directors of Girls Inc., Atlanta. Her community affiliations include the World Affairs Council of Atlanta, the Georgia Diversity Council, and Refresh South - an events series in Atlanta featuring innovators and global thinkers. She holds a B.A. degree in Mass Communications from Brenau Women's College and a Master's of Arts degree in Political Science & International Affairs from Georgia State University.

Imam Makram El-Amin, Masjid An-Nur

Imam Makram El-Amin's commitment to service and civic leadership has made him a pillar in the Minneapolis community. As imam of the historical Masjid An-Nur, he's led a growing, culturally diverse congregation in his hometown to the forefront of interfaith dialogue and neighborhood outreach. For the past 15 years, Imam El-Amin's work as a religious and community leader has been firmly rooted in the principle of our inherent human dignity.

In addition to his weekly teaching duties, Imam El-Amin has led the masjid's numerous community service initiatives, including Al Maa'uun Neighborly Needs Community Outreach program, feeding more than 300 families monthly since 1997. Along with his congregation, he helped raise more than $1 million for the initial phase of the masjid's recent expansion, with future plans to house classrooms, a library and social services center. He's done so by garnering support for the masjid's efforts not only from the local Muslim community, but from some of Minnesota's most prominent religious, social and corporate institutions.

A student of the late religious leader and scholar Imam W. Deen Mohammed, his thoughtful and moderate approach to Islam has afforded Imam El-Amin opportunities to share the stage with Bishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. He was a delegate to an historic interfaith event in Rome with Pope John Paul II and member of an interfaith clergy delegation to the Holy Land. As advisor to Rep. Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to Congress, Imam El-Amin has counseled Ellison on religious issues and accompanied him on international trade trips.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

Ahmad El-Khatib, Founder Nur Center

Ahmad El-Khatib was born in Jerusalem, Palestine in 1984. He had a passion for Martial Arts at a young age. In 2001, he earned the Grand Champion title of The World Cup Martial Arts Finals and was ranked 3rd in the United States, by the National Blackbelt League.

Mr. El-Khatib then decided to look beyond competition and focus on what he loved most, teaching. He aimed to instill, in his students, what he felt were the most valuable principles of Martial Arts: self-control and perfection of character. Through his own practice and study of these two principles, he found a deep love for the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his message. Mr. El-Khatib has had the privilege of studying directly under Habeeb Umar bin Hafiz of Tareem, Shaykh Muhammad al-Jamal of Jerusalem, and is currently a student of Lokman Effendi of the distinguished Osmanli Order.

In 2010, with the collective efforts of his mother, a Montessori teacher, and sister, an art teacher, he founded The NUR Center for Art, Fitness, and Enrichment, a community center serving people of all faiths, in the D.C metropolitan area. The Center offers a Montessori School, an Art Studio, and a full time fitness facility providing Martial Arts and private group fitness classes for women. The center also hosts a variety of performances, film-screenings, and workshops emphasizing environmental education, sustainability, and spiritual wellbeing.

The NUR Center was recently featured in the documentary film Unmosqued and described as “an up and coming third space that is really fulfilling the needs of its community”.

Maryam Eskandari, Architect & Artist

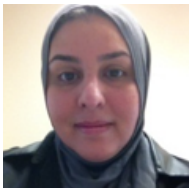
Maryam Eskandari, founder of MIIM Designs LLC, an architecture and research studio based in Palo Alto, California and Cambridge, Massachusetts. She graduated from the Aga Khan Program in Islamic Architecture at Harvard and MIT. MIIM Designs uses the concept of design and architecture to resolve conflicts and build solutions through the means of “Design Communities, Create Culture”. In 2012, MIIM Designs was awarded the “Faith and Form Award” from The American Institute of Architects. The International Museum of Women in San Francisco awarded MIIM Designs for the “Sacred Space” exhibit reconfiguring gendered spaces in religious architecture, and in 2014 Huffington Post named Maryam as one of the “10 American Muslim Women”. Currently, Ms. Eskandari is working on numerous projects in the US, Kuwait, India, Sudan and Ghana.

Nadia Firozvi (Facilitator), Attorney in Washington, DC

Nadia J. Firozvi serves as a Policy Advisor in the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. She previously worked as a Domestic Policy Analyst at the Arab American Institute and for three years, served as Staff Attorney with the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (APALRC), where she worked on immigration and civil rights matters for low-income, limited English proficient Asian Pacifica Islanders in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region.

She is a founding board member of Many Languages One Voice (MLOV), a nonprofit organization which fosters leadership and facilitates community-led initiatives to increase the meaningful inclusion of people in the District of Columbia who do not speak English as their primary language.

She received her BA from Loyola University in Maryland, her J.D. from the University of Baltimore School of Law, and her LL.M. in the international protection of human rights from American University, Washington College of Law.



Tannaz Haddadi, Co-Founder/President, Board of Trustees, Next Wave Muslim Initiative

Tannaz Haddadi is a founder and president of the Board of Trustees of the Next Wave Muslim Initiative (NWMI), Inc., which works to engage the Muslim community in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area. NWMI is an organization that provides an open platform supporting a variety of programs including community engagement, intellectual discourse, spiritual practice, and social consciousness.

Ms. Haddadi has extensive expertise and experience in privacy and policy analysis, legislative tracking, research, and compliance. She is currently a Senior Privacy Analyst at FEMA. Ms. Haddadi’s prior professional experience includes serving as a congressional staffer, a lobbyist for a grassroots organization, an Equal Employment Opportunity investigator for the Department of Defense, and privacy consultant to several federal agencies.

Ms. Haddadi’s passion is to facilitate inter-community dialogue to build bridges of understanding between Shi’as and Sunnis. She is an alternative dispute resolution practitioner with experience in collaborative consensus building within groups and organizations, and the application of such techniques to problem-solving models in various settings.

She holds an MS in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. During her undergraduate studies at GMU she majored in Philosophy & Religion.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

Altaf Husain, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Howard University

Altaf Husain serves as an Assistant Professor in the Howard University School of Social Work, in Washington DC. He holds a joint appointment as a Research Fellow in the Center for the Study of American Muslims and the Center for Global Health at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding in DC. He received his Ph.D in Social Work from Howard University and his M.S.S.A. from the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Husain's research interests include displaced populations (homelessness, victims of disaster, immigrants and refugees), mental health and psychosocial well-being of adolescent immigrants and refugees of color in the U.S.; immigration policy and its impact on the family; cultural competence; and the development of social service agencies in the Muslim community. An invited lecturer on Islam and Muslims in the US, Dr. Husain has delivered keynote addresses on college and university campuses and communities throughout the US and Canada. His professional involvement includes serving as a co-chair of the Islam and Muslims track of the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and as a founding member of the CSWE Religion and Spirituality Working Group. Dr. Husain's community involvement includes serving as a member of the board of trustees of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), and a former two-term national president of MSA National. He also serves as an advisory board member of the Peaceful Families Project (PFP), dedicated to preventing domestic violence.

Zeba Iqbal (Report Author), Consultant to ISPU

Zeba Iqbal has been active in the American Muslim community since the aftermath of 9/11, when she helped found Muslims Against Terrorism to educate fellow New Yorkers about Islam and Muslims. She led CAMP (Council for the Advancement of Muslim Professionals) from 2007-11 transforming it from a networking platform to an inclusive space for professional dialogue among American Muslim professionals. She founded and developed the CAMP Leadership Summit and was its Conference Manager in 2008, 2009 and 2011.

A 2009-10 Fellow of USC CRCC's AMCLI (American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute), she has been a board member and advisor to the Muslim Democratic Club of New York; Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas' Festival; and *The Domestic Crusaders.*, among others. She spearheaded #MuslimVOTE, a month long social media campaign and article series leading up to the 2012 elections.

Ms. Iqbal has 15 years professional experience. She managing off-campus residential real estate development at Princeton University (2009-2013), and was a management consultant with Ernst & Young's Real Estate advisory group (1998-2008). She has an MBA from The George Washington University, and an undergraduate degree in architecture from Bangalore, India.

Farhan Latif, Interim Executive Director, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Policy Impact, Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

Farhan Latif is currently serving as Interim Executive Director at ISPU. He assumed this leadership role after serving as the Chief Operating Officer & Director of Policy Impact, a position where he provided focus to the Institute's strategy, further strengthened its impact in policy circles, and expanded support and awareness of its research. Mr. Latif previously served as a director in the Office of Institutional Advancement at the University of Michigan - Dearborn, where he led efforts to build a culture of philanthropy and engagement. As a social entrepreneur and non-profit strategist, he founded Strategic Inspirations, a consulting firm focused on building the capacity of non-profit organizations and scaling for greater social impact.

Mr. Latif holds a BBA in Business Management and Marketing, and has completed graduate work in non-profit management at the University of Michigan Dearborn. He received an M.A. from Harvard University, having completed a specialized interdisciplinary program with graduate coursework at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Business School and Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Celene Ayat-Ibrahim Lizzio, Islamic Studies Scholar-in-Residence at Hebrew College and Andover Newton Theological School

Celene Ayat-Ibrahim Lizzio is the Islamic Studies Scholar-in-Residence at Hebrew College and Andover Newton Theological School where she facilitates Muslim and interreligious outreach as Co-director of the Center for Inter-Religious and Communal Leadership Education [CIRCLE]. Ms. Lizzio lectures and publishes widely on topics including the histories and theologies of inter-religious relations, Islamic religious leadership and higher education, Islam and Muslims in North America, Islamic family law, Muslim feminist theology, and Qur'anic studies. Ms. Lizzio earned a Masters of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School and a bachelor's degree with highest honors in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University. She is completing a doctorate at Brandeis University in Arabic and Islamic Civilizations. She has been recognized as a Harvard Presidential Scholar and a Fellow in Religion, Diplomacy and International Relations at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, among other distinctions. She contributes regularly to *The Journal of Muslim World Affairs,* among other publications. She is deeply committed to Islamic scholarship and to fostering interreligious learning environments.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

Hind Makki, Founder & Curator of Side Entrance and Co-Founder of Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative

Hind Makki is an interfaith educator who develops and delivers trainings on civic integration through interfaith action, anti-racism education and youth empowerment. She travels throughout the United States and Western Europe, working with diverse communities, leading workshops for civic leaders, interfaith activists and university students. A writer for the Muslim Channel at the national religion news site Patheos.com, Hind often dissects the challenges facing Western Muslims, including sexism, racism, sectarianism and Islamophobia.

Ms. Makki is the founder and curator of Side Entrance, a crowd-sourced website that documents women's prayer experiences in mosques around the world. This site won the "Best Female Blogger" Brass Crescent in 2013, an award that honors the best of the Muslim blogosphere. Side Entrance has helped to catalyze a national conversation, spearheaded by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the Institute for Social Policy & Understanding (ISPU), on the spaces women occupy in North American Muslim communities. She is also a founding member of MuslimARC, a collective of Muslim activists who lead social media dialogues, develop tools and educational resources, and work with religious, educational and lay leaders to address racism within North American Muslim communities.

Ms. Makki has appeared on Al Jazeera's and Chicago Public Radio; her work is featured in Alarabiya News, AltMuslimah, The Cambridge Companion to American Islam, Common Ground News, The Economist, The Huffington Post, Islamic Horizons, National Public Radio, PolicyMic; and she has published pieces in The New York Times and The Washington Post. Hind holds a degree in International Relations from Brown University.

Rizwan Manji, Actor

Rizwan Manji is a Canadian actor. He is chiefly notable for his role as Rajiv in the now cancelled NBC Universal TV series *Outsourced*. Mr. Manji was born in Toronto, Canada to Indian parents who had immigrated from Tanzania. His family is Ismaili Muslim, and he states that his religion is very important to him in life. He was raised in Calgary, Alberta, and went to Crescent Heights High School. He later moved to the United States, where he attended the American Musical and Dramatic Academy. Mr. Manji played small parts in various films and television shows with recurring roles in *Privileged*, *Better Off Ted* and *24*. In 2010, he auditioned for the role of Gupta on the NBC comedy *Outsourced*. Although he lost the part to Parvesh Cheena, the producers decided to cast him as the scheming assistant manager Rajiv. Mr. Manji resides in Studio City, California, with his wife and two children.

Ayesha Mattu, Writer and Editor of *Love Inshallah* and *Salaam, Love*

Ayesha Mattu is a writer, editor and international development consultant who has worked in the field of women's human rights since 1998. Her first book, *Love, InshAllah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women*, was featured globally by media including the New York Times, NPR, the BBC, Guardian, Times of India, Dawn Pakistan, and Jakarta Post. She was selected a 'Muslim Leader of Tomorrow' by the UN Alliance of Civilizations & the ASMA Society, and has served on the boards of IDEX, the Women's Funding Network, and World Pulse. Ayesha is an alumna of Voices of Our Nations writers' workshop and a member of the San Francisco Writers' Grotto. Her second book, *Salaam, Love: American Muslim Men on Love, Sex & Intimacy* is now available from Beacon Press.

Nadeem Mazen, Cambridge City Councilor

Nadeem Mazen is a local business owner, educator, and innovator and recently elected city councilmember in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After moving to Cambridge for undergraduate and graduate work at MIT, Nadeem fell in love with the city and opened two small businesses in Central Square. Nadeem also holds a faculty position at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, where he teaches entrepreneurship and small business practices to emerging artists.

Hussein Rashid, PhD, Founder, Islamicate, L3C

Hussein Rashid is a contingent faculty member, most often affiliated with Hofstra University. He taught at SUNY Old Westbury, Fordham University, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and Virginia Theological Seminary. His specialty is Muslims in America, with a background in South Asian and Central Asian Studies, and Shi'i justice theology. His larger research interest is in the representation and self-representation of Muslims in American popular culture. He published on music, and delivered papers on the American Muslim blogistan and Muslims in comics. He regularly gives talks on his areas of interest. He owns a consultancy, islamicate L3C, that works in policy and media spaces. He is a term member on the Council of Foreign Relations, a fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, The Ariane de Rothschild Fellowship in Social Entrepreneurship, the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute, and the Truman National Security Project. He serves on the advisory boards of the British Council's Our Shared Future Program, Everplans, Project Interfaith, and Al-Rawiya. He is on the editorial boards of Religion Dispatches, The Islamic Monthly, and Cyber Orient, in addition to being a contributing scholar to State of Formation. Hussein appears on mainstream media, including CNN, Channel 4 (UK), Iqra TV (Saudi Arabia), Al-Jazeera America, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and has published at On Faith (Washington Post), Belief Blog (CNN), On Being (NPR), and The Revealer.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES, *continued*

Asim Rehman (Facilitator), President and co-founder, Muslim Bar Association of New York

Asim Rehman is former President and co-founder of the Muslim Bar Association of New York, a professional organization for Muslim lawyers and law students. MuBANY provides services to its members, builds bridges with members of the legal community, and advocates for rights of the Muslim Americans.

Through MuBANY, Asim consulted with community organizations on matters concerning civil liberties and law enforcement engagement. He writes and speaks on issues concerning the rights of the Muslim American community and has been a liaison between national civil rights organizations and grassroots Muslim groups. Asim has testified before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and was sent by the U.S. State Department overseas to talk about civil rights, civic engagement, and the U.S. legal profession.

Asim is currently General Counsel for the Office of the Inspector General for the New York City Police Department, a newly-created independent office charged with investigating, reviewing, studying, auditing and making recommendations relating to the operations, policies, programs and practices of the NYPD. He began his legal career as a clerk for a Federal District Judge and has worked as an attorney with two international law firms, as a Special Assistant District Attorney in the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, and most recently as Corporate Counsel for MetLife where he advised on global litigation, internal investigations, and corporate risk.

Asim currently serves on a multicultural advisory committee at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and on the Board of the Greater New York Councils of the Boy Scouts of America. Asim has been a Fellow with the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute and a Term Member with the Council on Foreign Relations. He attended the University of Michigan Law School and Haverford College.

Fatima Shama, Vice President, Strategic Development and External Affairs, Maimonides Medical Center

Fatima Shama joined Brooklyn's Maimonides Medical Center as Vice President of Strategic Development and External Affairs, following four years serving as Commissioner of the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, having been appointed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2009. A nationally recognized expert on municipal solutions for immigrant integration, Ms. Shama provided guidance and counsel to cities and municipal governments across the United States and to several European national and local governments as well.

Prior to her appointment as Immigrant Affairs Commissioner, she was a senior policy advisor on education to then-Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, while also working on a public health initiative on health literacy and language access.

Born in the Bronx to Brazilian and Palestinian parents, Ms. Shama, a mother of three boys, earned a Bachelor of Arts from SUNY Binghamton University and a Masters of Public Administration from Baruch College's School of Public Affairs Executive Program. She completed a management program at the Institute for Not-for-Profit Management at Columbia University's Graduate School of Business.

Fatima Shama has twenty years of experience in the public sector working in the fields of policy and advocacy in public health and human services, education, workforce development, economic development and human rights.

Haris Tarin, Director, DC Office, MPAC

In his capacity as the DC Director of MPAC Haris Tarin engages various agencies within government including the White House, Department of Justice, State Department, Department of Homeland Security and offices on Capitol Hill. He was among three leading young Americans President Barack Obama called in a one of its kind discussion on public policy issues; the President called and then met with Haris, specifically to discuss policies pertaining to national security, countering violent extremism, the American Muslim community and civic engagement. Haris has been published in various domestic and international publications including the *LA Times, CNN, Washington Post* and has a regular column on the *Huffington Post*. He has spoken at various domestic and international conferences and media outlets on topics such as National Security, Islam and governance, US-Muslim World Relations, Role of the American Muslim institutions in Policy Formation, Religion and Public Life, and Civic Engagement. Mr. Tarin is an Ariane de Rothschild Cambridge University Fellow and a USC/Georgetown AMCLI Fellow and is also the author of *Intro to Muslim America and Rethinking the Redlines: The Intersections of Free Speech, Religious Freedom and Social Change.* Mr. Tarin is currently completing his graduate work at Georgetown University in Washington D.C.

Pej Vahdat, Actor

Pejman Vahdat is a Persian-American actor most known for his role of Arastoo Vaziri in Bones. He has been on the show since 2009. Before his acting career, he attended San Diego State University, where he was a member of the tennis team.

Yusufi Vali, Executive Director of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center

Yusufi Vali is the Executive Director of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center. This center serves over a 1,300 congregants during Friday services and is the largest Islamic institution in the New England area. Previously, he was a community organizer with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, a chapter of the Industrial Areas Foundation. Mr. Vali is a graduate of Princeton University, a Marshall Scholar, and a Fulbright Scholar.

Habib Yazdi, Director, "Somewhere in America"

Habib Yazdi is an Iranian-American filmmaker whose projects have taken him from Thailand to Syria and Mali to India. At home in New York he has directed nationally broadcast spots and more recently web films for the National Geographic Channel's Emmy-nominated series 'Brain Games'. His work has been featured by the *London Times, NPR, Slate, Huffington Post, Jezebel, BuzzFeed, Glamour, Cosmopolitan*, and *Canal+*.

Endnotes

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ISPU is an independent, nonpartisan research organization specializing in addressing the most pressing challenges facing the American Muslim community and in bridging the information gap between the American Muslim community and the wider society. ISPU conducts objective, empirical research and offers expert policy analysis on some of the most pressing issues facing the United States. In addition, ISPU has assembled leading experts across multiple disciplines and built a solid reputation as a trusted source for information about American Muslims and Muslim communities around the world.

ISPU scholars provide insight into the major debates taking place across the country. They offer context-specific analysis and recommendations to journalists, policymakers, and the general public through reports, policy briefs, articles, op-eds and books. ISPU disseminates its publications through a variety of channels and holds regular congressional briefings, policy events and academic conferences.

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