

A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN THE U.S. SOUTH

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Immigration, Islamophobia, and xenophobia have been subjects of much public discourse for decades. However, the recent re-emergence of nationalist populism in the U.S. and western Europe and the refugee crises in Syria have arguably brought a more intense focus on Muslim individuals and immigrants, particularly in light of President Trump's issuance of Executive Order No. 13769 in January 2017. Although the original travel ban has since been struck down in courts, the travel ban signaled to many a move to further stigmatize Muslim individuals. The authors conducted a document analysis to understand the collegiate experiences of Muslim college students in the U.S. South, as reported by a student newspaper, and how these experiences have changed since the issuance of Executive Order No. 13769. Findings revealed four themes: hostile climates for students with minoritized identities; support and lack of support from institutional agents; the utilization of counterstories, acts of resistance, and solidarity; and the specific impact of the executive order. We conclude with implications for practice for supporting Muslim students and areas for further study.

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During the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign, Islamophobia took center stage as Republican front-runner Donald Trump (re)ignited fear against Muslim people (Bridge Initiative Team, 2015; Foran, 2016). Shortly after securing the presidency in January 2017, Trump issued Executive Order No. 13769, Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, in an attempt to ban individuals from seven countries, where the majority identifies as Muslim (Braaten, 2017). Executive Order No. 13769 was designed to limit U.S. entry for individuals the current White House administration deemed as a potential terrorist or having potential terrorist ties (Executive Order No. 13769, 2017). The basis for this decision was the 2001 September 11th terror attacks, as the Trump administration purports the current visa and entry process is too lax. Seven nations were impacted by this order.

The seven countries bound by Executive Order No. 13769 included: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. In the days following the ban announcement, several professional associations in higher education (such as the American Association of Universities, College Student Educators International, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators), students, campus leaders, and others sought to minimize the impact of the ban on students studying in the U.S. (Braaten, 2017). There are many think pieces and conceptual articles detailing the events leading to the executive order and its subsequent ramifications. However, few peer-reviewed publications describing the experiences of Muslim college students navigating the executive order exist despite agreement that the order has specific implications for this population (Ayoub & Beydoun, 2017; Chacón, 2017; Stegmeir, 2017). Accordingly, two research questions drove this qualitative research study: 1) What are the collegiate experiences of Muslim students attending an institution in the U.S. South as reported in the student-run newspaper at that institu-

tion?; and 2) How, if at all, have Muslim students' reported experiences been shaped by the January 2017 issuance of the executive order?

Review of the Literature

Since the 1970s, U.S. laws and policies have targeted foreign-born Arab Muslims to limit their U.S. entry, selectively interrogate them, presume their involvement in terrorism, and deport them (Akram, 2002). Given their approximation to U.S. cultural practices and norms, U.S. institutions of higher education are not immune to perpetuating discrimination against these historically marginalized groups despite institutional declarations of inclusion. As Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood (2017) shared, U.S. institutions of higher education have shared similar commitments in "cross-cultural engagement in the pursuit of knowledge" (p. iii), welcoming students from different cultures to pursue an education.

For students identifying as Muslim, their religious identity has a significant impact on their collegiate experience (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Bowman, Morin, & Riggers-Piehl, 2017). Entering college, Muslim students tend to be more open minded to others' perspectives, report higher levels of engagement in diversity-related extracurriculars, and tend to befriend more people across races compared to peers who follow one of the other Abrahamic religions (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010). Muslim students are also more likely than others to actively practice their religion throughout college (Bryant, 2006). Campuses that provide spaces dedicated to interfaith engagement and activities are more likely to better support the development of relationships across religions that may contribute to positive attitudes and perceptions of Muslim students (Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Yet, college campuses also present hostile environments for Muslim students. Studies indicate that Muslim students and students originating from Islamic countries have experienced Islamophobic en-

vironments, including being stereotyped and verbally attacked by faculty, staff, and peers (Ali, 2014; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). As a result, Muslim students reported feeling vulnerable and highly visible; bearing the burden of representing all Muslims and disproving stereotypes; and—in some cases—ceasing to wear religious coverings, withdrawing from school, and/or returning to their home countries (Ali, 2014; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; McMurtrie, 2001; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Muslim students are also more likely to struggle with their spirituality throughout college and try to pass as part of the accepted religious majority (Bowman & Smedley, 2013). These students also report being uncomfortable in discussing religious matters compared to others of dominant religions (Bryant 2006), thus limiting opportunities for positive interfaith and cross-cultural engagement on campus (Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Non-empirical works about Muslim students in the U.S. South have confirmed similar instances of stereotyping, hostility, and profiling (Marouan, 2015). Evidence exists indicating that this region is hostile for Muslim people living in the U.S. South. Anti-Islamic rhetoric has intensified since 9/11, particularly amongst white evangelical Christians—a group disproportionately represented in the U.S. South (Pew Research, 2019)—stemming from fears that a “distinctive American way of life” is vanishing (Nagel, 2016, p. 286). Nine of the twelve U.S. states that have passed anti-Sharia bills are in the U.S. South (Elsheikh, Sismore, & Lee, 2017). These laws foment Islamophobia, promote unfounded fears that Sharia law will infiltrate the legal system, and prevent some Muslims from engaging with their religion as it pertains to certain contracts, trusts, and estates (Elsheikh et al., 2017).

Theoretical Frameworks

Postcolonialism framed this study, as well as concepts of nativism, nationalism,

and Islamophobia. Postcolonial theories focus on the historical legacies of Western imperialism; their continued presence in contemporary global institutions; and their psychological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions (Meer, 2014; Prasad, 2010). These theories also emphasize the relationship between discourse and various forms of power and the pervasive nature of the privileging of Western ideas and practices (Prasad, 2010; Said, 1978). In his seminal work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) described how the Occident (Europe and the United States) created epistemological and ontological distinctions between themselves and Middle Eastern peoples and cultures. Said (1978) argued that legacies of colonialism contributed to these distinctions and have manifested in various representations of Middle Eastern peoples. Such representations—which cast Middle Eastern peoples “others” who are simultaneously exotic, deprived, and degenerate—have served to legitimize the political and ideological subjugation of Middle Eastern peoples by the West (Chatterjee, 1986; Said, 1978).

Nativism and Nationalism

Chatterjee (1986) described nationalism as an “acceptance of a common set of standards by which the state of development of a particular national culture is measured” (p. 1). Undergirding nationalism is the related concept of nativism, which Higham (2002) defined as “an intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., un-American) connections” (p. 4). Nativism emphasizes a binary of American/Other meaning it stems from the core belief that influences from abroad threaten the life of the nation within (Essenberg, 2014). Scholars have discussed various styles and strands of nativism, including: *racial nativism* (or *white nativism*), which is the belief that the United States belongs to white people and white supremacy should exist; and new nativism, which is shaped by the War on Terror and identifies Muslims and Latinos as state enemies (Essenberg, 2014;

Higham, 2002; Huntington, 2004).

Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Sentiments

Nativism and Orientalism both fuel anti-Muslim sentiments: nativism through rhetoric that portrays Muslims as a national threat, and orientalism through the legacies of imperialism (Essenberg, 2014; Meer & Modood, 2010). *Islamophobia* refers to an unfounded hostility towards Islam and a fear or dislike of Muslims (Runnymede Trust, 1997). The term gained prominence with the publication of a report by the Runnymede Trust's Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. The commission's work illuminated eight manifestations encapsulating Islamophobia: (1) reduction of Islam as a monolithic, static and unresponsive to change bloc; (2) Islam as separate and 'other'; (3) Islam as inferior to the West (barbaric, irrational, primitive, and sexist); (4) Islam as violent, supportive of terrorism, and engaged in a 'clash of civilizations'; (5) Islam as a political ideology—used for political or military advantage; (6) Outright rejection of criticisms of the West; (7) Hostility to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims; and (8) Anti-Muslim hostility as natural or normal (Runnymede Trust, 1997).

Islamophobia alone, however, does not capture the racial and cultural dynamics constituting anti-Muslim sentiments. In elaborating on this gap, Meer & Modood (2010) acknowledged anti-Muslim sentiments

“draw upon signs of race, culture, and belonging in a way that is by no means reducible to hostility toward a religion, alone... discrimination in most Western societies does not usually proceed on the basis of belief, but perceived membership of an ethno-religious group” (pp. 70-71).

Hostility toward Islam and Muslims is a product of their racialization—a process that connects the “otherness” of Islam and Muslims to centuries-old European racial hierarchies (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008; Meer

& Modood, 2010). Understanding these intersections is critical to properly situating Muslim students' experiences in the U.S. South; others have frequently noted that nativism in the U.S. South is distinct from nativism in the U.S., as a whole (Cantrell, 1992; Hellwig, 1982; Rabinowitz, 1988; Winders, 2007). This distinction stems from the fusion of national anxieties about the U.S. border and immigration with regional concerns across the U.S. South about the racialized boundaries of social and cultural communities amid rapid immigration to the region—both of which have given rise to numerous legislative actions intended to produce borders and immigrant exclusions on multiple scales (Winders, 2007).

Methodology

Two research questions guided this study: 1) What are the collegiate experiences of Muslim students attending an institution in the U.S. South as reported in the student-run newspaper of that institution?; and 2) How, if at all, have Muslim students' reported experiences been shaped by the January 2017 issuance of Executive Order No. 13769 (2017)? Originally, we intended to conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews with Muslim international students from the countries listed in Executive Order No. 13769. Interviews provide first-hand accounts about participant experiences and allows researchers to probe participants' stories and statements to collect rich data (Patton, 2015). However, as we reached out to various campus offices to contact these students, we learned they were unable to assist us due to a policy enacted by the Board of Regents in the wake of the Executive Order No. 13769. Attempts to recruit students through other means met similar resistance; all of the individuals to whom we reached out pointed to this policy as the reason they were unable (or unwilling) to assist us. In addition to the Board of Regents policy, a climate of fear and uncertainty also served to dissuade students from participating in our study. In fact, one stu-

dent who had initially expressed interest in participating in the study was strongly discouraged from doing so by an advisor who raised concerns about the possible risk of deportation.

To answer our research questions in spite of these barriers, we focused on Muslim students in the U.S. South (regardless of nationality) and conducted a document analysis—a systematic process of reviewing and evaluating documents, and selecting, making sense of, and synthesizing the data within them (Bowen, 2009). While document analysis often entails multiple forms of data collection in research studies, it can also serve as a stand-alone method in specialized forms of qualitative research in which documents are the only viable source of data (Bowen, 2009). Given the policy that prevented us from effectively engaging with students directly, a document analysis of student newspaper articles and other institutional documents provided an alternative means of answering our research questions. Although these documents are secondary (and sometimes tertiary) sources and newspaper articles can misrepresent (or fail to fully represent) individuals' voices, documents are valuable for understanding contexts relevant to the research (Bowen, 2009). Accordingly, we believed a document analysis would be useful for exploring how campus, local, and national socio-political climates shape Muslim students' collegiate experiences—insight that cannot necessarily be obtained through participant interviews.

We used convenience sampling (Patton, 2015) to select a large, public research university located in the Southeast United States, roughly 70 miles away from a major metropolitan area. The institution was chosen due its location in the U.S. South, its robust international student population, the presence of a Muslim student association, and the presence of a student newspaper that covered topics relevant to the research study. We believed these characteristics would serve to provide rich data for our

document analysis. Approximately 5% of the students enrolled at the university were international students during the Fall 2016 semester. Sixty-five percent of the students identified as White, 10% identified as Asian, 9% identified as Black, 5% identified as Hispanic, and various other ethnicities comprised the remaining 11% of the student body. The political context surrounding the institution is a mix of conservative and liberal viewpoints; although the majority of voters in the institution's state voted for President Trump in the 2016 presidential election, the majority of voters in the surrounding county voted for Hillary Clinton.

Data Collection

We conducted a search on the student newspaper website using the search terms "Muslim," "travel ban," and "executive order." We filtered results for the time span between November 8, 2016 to November 27, 2017 to examine the reporting of both the campus and broader socio-political environments connected to the implementation of the executive order. We started our search with the U.S. presidential election, rather than the implementation of the executive order, due to media reports about spikes in hate crimes targeting immigrant and Muslim communities on college campuses since the 2016 presidential election (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). We only selected articles that made a reference to Muslim individuals. From this search, we narrowed the findings to eleven articles that fit our criteria. Lastly, the researchers collected two statements from the university president issued on January 30, 2017 in response to the implementation of the executive order. We collected these statements for the study because institutional agents play vital roles in shaping campus climates (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999).

Researcher Reflexivity

Including multiple researchers can be used as a means of reflexivity (Cohen &

Crabtree, 2006). None of the research team members in this study identify as Muslim. In fact, our privileged identities coupled with a desire to complete research beyond a Christian religious identity context in the U.S. South directly influenced completion of this project. As a four-person research team, we engaged in reflexivity through individual journaling and research group discussion. As a team, we identified with a multitude of social identity categories but spent the bulk of our reflection on identities that came up for us as we worked on the project.

Our reflexivity also included each member writing down their salient identities. Upon completing this, all researchers engaged in a dialogue of these identities and how they might impact our individual and collective analysis and interpretation of the documents. Such dialogue is effective in identifying assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives of the researcher, while also allowing them to be challenged (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Two members of the research team identified racial identity as salient with one reporting their identity as Black and the other as white. Two of the research team members did not include racial identity in their writings for the subjectivity prompt but do identify as Black and white. Given the ways in which colorism, anti-Blackness, and othering contribute to views on Muslim people in the U.S., we thought it important to mention racial identity.

Three of the researchers detailed their Christian upbringing: two researchers reported dissonance with their Christian upbringing and a third suggested it was not a salient identity for them. A fourth member identified as a religious Mormon and reported having a degree of respect for people from marginalized identities due to their experiences as an "outsider" in work and experiences in educational spaces both within and outside of the U.S. One research team member spent three years serving as an educator in a conservative, Muslim country and suggested this experience deepened their respect and appreciation for Islamic faith.

Another reported significant connections to other Black American expatriates living in Abu Dhabi who contributed to their nuanced view of Muslims and practices of Islamic faith. Another member reported working to unlearn the ways in which their western worldview led them to take a sympathetic stance toward Muslim students, particularly Muslim women—and to see the ways in which students reported feeling pride rather than oppression through religious practice.

Data Analysis

We divided the collected documents evenly among the group, with each researcher initially receiving three documents to read. Each researcher conducted an initial round of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) on the documents in their initial set. We then swapped documents and each document was then read and coded by a second researcher. Given the differences in our positionalities, we each used an open coding process followed by constant comparative coding to hold one another accountable for the ways in which our identities manifested and interacted with the analysis process. This form of investigator triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed us to bolster the trustworthiness of the findings. Although this method allowed each article to be read and coded by two different researchers, a review of all documents by all the researchers would have further enhanced our triangulation methods. We also engaged in peer debriefing conversations with doctoral level research scholars (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Prasad, 2010; Patton, 2015). Upon the completion of open coding, the researchers met as a group to conduct focused coding (Saldaña, 2016), grouping codes by their thematic similarity. Researchers divided these themes for more in-depth axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Saldaña, 2016). Given the aforementioned barriers to finding participants for the first iteration of this study, we did not attempt to verify findings with Muslim students.

Findings

Four themes emerged from our data analysis process. These themes included: 1) hostile climates for people with minoritized identities; 2) support from local communities and institutional agents; 3) counterstories and acts of resistance and solidarity; and 4) impact of and reactions to Executive Order No. 13769. Further explication is included below.

Hostile Climates For People With Minoritized Identities

The signing of the executive order in the first days of Trump's administration parallels the rapid growth of an increasingly hostile climate on college campuses for Muslim students. This is part of a larger trend of hostility toward minoritized individuals following the presidential election. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC; 2017) has noted the largest spike ever in reported incidents of harassment following the election. Anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim harassment were the largest reported forms of harassment (SPLC, 2017).

Muslim women have felt the broader U.S. climate becoming increasingly hostile. A report in the student newspaper noted that "many Muslim hijabi women have feared traveling alone and have been advised to not wear their hijab in the time following the election." This fear stems from the high visibility of Muslim hijabi women who can be "easily categorized as Muslim" and face higher levels of harassment. At the institution, the campus climate reportedly shifted in a negative direction for many Muslim students. Seven university students reported verbal harassment incidents to the student run newspaper during and after the election.

While these incidents were undeniably negative, some Muslim students continue to feel supported at the institution. One article reported:

[The] president of the Muslim Student Association [at institution], reported to [student newspaper] in a November in-

terview none of his members had been physically harmed or verbally targeted during or after the election. [Muslim Student Association President], a junior international affairs and economics major said he had never experienced discrimination while living in the city.

In another article, a student noted that she has perceived people becoming more aware of women choosing to wear the hijab, and they are more willing to respectfully ask questions about it and her faith. This provides some indication that within an increasingly hostile climate, there still is some degree of perceived support.

Support and Lack of Support From Local Communities and Institutional Agents

Muslim students at the institution expressed feeling welcomed, supported, and grateful at the institution and within the local community, while simultaneously feeling judged, uncomfortable, and angry. To feel supported, Muslim students created their own spaces and met their own communities' needs. In describing the activities of the Muslim Student Association (MSA), its president indicated "We most often have more religious events, and create a place for Muslims to feel safe practicing their faith and not to feel bashed." Aside from creating supportive spaces for themselves, students in the MSA also organized inclusive events for students from various religious backgrounds as "a way to foster relationships between more religions and bring people with different beliefs closer together." The MSA president described organizing such activities as "very important," indicating the high value the group placed on building supportive relationships with non-Muslim peers.

Local community members expressed verbal support and displayed kind gestures, contributing to Muslim students feeling supported by others. In December 2016, the student newspaper reported the following:

In the spirit of the holidays, an anonymous person donated four prayer rugs to the Muslim Student Association at

[the institution] on Dec. 7. The donor also included a letter that detailed the story behind the rugs, and explained the decision to donate them. According to the letter, all but one of the rugs were originally purchased by the donor's father while on a business trip in Kuwait. However, upon realizing their intended use, he and his wife chose to put them away in storage. "They did not wish to be disrespectful to Muslims, even though they knew very little about Islam at the time," the letter read. After the election, the donor's mother reportedly thought donating the rugs would be a kind gesture to the Muslim community. "It makes so many of us sad and angry at the Islamophobia the worst of the worst have expressed," the letter read. "Please know that most of us, even those like my elderly Southern Baptist mother, feel differently."

The student president of the campus's MSA indicated that this gesture by an anonymous stranger contributed to helping students in the group feel welcomed at the institution.

However, several conditions served to undermine or contradict these feelings of support, such as feeling judged by non-Muslim peers. As one Muslim woman student reported:

I know people who glare at me or are uncomfortable around me, but more than that I get friends that respect me or are intrigued by me or they don't judge me the same way they would judge any other college girl. Of course, they judge me in a different way but I'm grateful for that. I'm grateful for them.

This student's expressions of discomfort is consistent with findings from previous studies, in which Muslim students have reported feeling vulnerable and highly visible (Ali, 2014). However, the student also minimized the discomfort she experienced and framed her peers' intrigue as benign. For this student, having peers who respected her served as a bulwark against the actions of those she perceived to be judging her.

Institutional silence can also serve to undermine support for Muslim students. The day after the executive order's implementation, the university president sent an official statement via email in which he communicated details regarding its travel restrictions, concerns about the safety and well-being of the campus community, instructions for potential international travelers to contact the international education office, and assurances that the institution will continue to "assess the impact" of the executive order on members of the campus community. This email did not explicitly mention Muslim students or communicate support for students impacted by the executive order. While a subsequent email from the president expressed "strong and unwavering support" for international students, some students expressed dissatisfaction with the president's failure to denounce the executive order. As one February 2017 article reported, an MSA member stated that "the president should not wait until [The University] students are directly affected to condemn the order" and described the response as "detached and unaffected." For this student, support meant denouncing the executive order: "So many other top notch universities have publicly denounced the ban. That's how you show you care about your students." Other members of the campus community also shared these sentiments. A few days later, the newspaper reported on a student protest targeting "the statements made by [the university president] regarding international students at [institution]."

Additionally, aspects of the constructed environment (Strange & Banning, 2015) also served to undermine support for Muslim students. A February 2017 article about hijabi women students at the institution reported that "cultural and historical aspects of the campus, like the Greek life, sometimes makes [one of the Muslim students] feel excluded." The judgmental actions of peers, the institution's responses (and lack thereof) to actions affecting Muslim students, and aspects of the institutional environment all

served to undermine the support that Muslim students otherwise experienced at the institution.

Counterstories and Acts of Resistance and Solidarity

Despite the implementation of the executive order; others' misinformation and stereotypes about their religion, identities, and cultures; and a gap in resources for meeting the needs of local Muslim communities, Muslim students utilized counterstories, forms of self-expression, and community solidarity as forms of resistance.

Counterstories. Delgado and Stefanic (2012) define counterstories as stories that replace dominant, majoritarian interpretations of United States history with interpretations that capture the experiences of People of Color. Muslim students' counterstories served to reframe Western dominant narratives about their cultures, identities, and presence in the U.S. During a campus panel convened in response to the implementation of the executive order, the student president of the MSA said: "Muslims have been here since the founding of this country. Whether it's African slaves or troves of immigrants later on, we've been here a long time and are woven into the fabric of this country as much as anyone else." This account suggests that Muslim students may have interpreted the executive order as fomenting nativist and nationalist ideologies that position Muslims as outsiders who do not belong in the U.S. However, the speaker counters these nativist characterizations of Muslims as interlopers by positioning Muslims as a legitimate part of the U.S. populace.

Hijabi women students used counterstories to reframe dominant narratives that portrayed Muslim women as an oppressed group. In a February 2017 article featuring narratives from Muslim hijabi women students at the institution, one student was:

exasperated when people insist that hijabs are an oppressive item. She [went] on to say that it is the direct antithe-

sis of oppression when she is constantly inspired by her sister, her mother and other women in her life who wear the scarf.

This positioning of her decision to wear a hijab as "the antithesis of oppression" framed Muslim women as a source of power and inspiration.

Another student remarked: "[I] want people to know that [I] can do things not in spite of [my] hijab, but regardless of it. I let people know that it is a choice that I am happy to make all the time." By sharing that her wearing a hijab is a choice, this student emphasizes her own empowerment and disrupts narratives that portray Muslim women as submissive and oppressed.

Forms of expression. Forms of self-expression also served as a form of resistance to dominant narratives about Muslim identity, specifically among Muslim women students, in which they expressed pride, power, and individualism. In the same February 2017 article featuring narratives from Muslim hijabi women, one student stressed:

growing up in a patriarchal society that wielded sexual power against us, not for us, is the reason various forms of dressing haven't been equally accepted into Western society. I personally feel that I am able to control a part of how society perceives me by wearing a hijab. And that is what empowers me.

Here, the student points to Western patriarchal oppression as the reason for the stigma against hijabs and names her decision to wear one as a method to control the perception of her.

Acts of solidarity. In addition to utilizing counternarratives and forms of expression to resist ideologies, students resisted the dominant Christian-centric culture in their local community in which the free health clinic was Christian-affiliated. This form of resistance came in the form of solidarity and service to local Muslim communities. As a July 2017 article in the student newspaper reports:

[Student] is one of five [university] se-

niors involved in the creation of a new free health clinic in the [local] community...a branch of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), a national community of Muslims in America, and is one of many clinics around the nation open to under-privileged and under-insured members of the community. The clinic is open every Saturday, and offers a variety of health care options aside from primary care, such as psychiatry and neurology.

The article reported that the conception of the clinic relieves pressure from the only other local free clinic, which was Christian-affiliated. While the religious identities of the students involved with organizing the clinic was unclear and the clinic was unaffiliated with the MSA, this finding suggests that student solidarity with local Muslim communities may serve as a form of Muslim resistance to a local Christo-centric environment and a valuable source of tangible support for Muslim communities.

Other acts of solidarity included the protest march organized by the MSA in response to the implementation of the executive order and the university president's response to it. At the march, a February 2017 article reported that students asked the university president to "defend the rights of immigrant students." The article describes a speech that one student, described as a dual Libyan American citizen, gave about his grandfather, who came to the U.S. from Libya under political asylum in the 1990s:

[The student's] grandfather later returned to Libya in 2011 to become the country's first democratically elected president. "My grandfather fought for women's rights, he fought for human rights and he fought for democratic rights," [the student] said. "He did it because his Islamic values were American values. This ban isn't just un-Islamic and doesn't just hurt Americans, it is un-American."

Although there is no mention of the religious identity of the student in the article,

his words serve to link the interests of Muslims with those of all Americans, thereby encouraging solidarity between Muslims and American non-Muslims.

Impact of and reactions to Executive Order No. 13769

The implementation of the executive order has had significant implications, directly and indirectly, on many people, including those living in and outside of the United States. These implications include: the government actively preventing certain nationalities from entering the country, people showing resistance to the executive order through forms of activism, such as protests, and people promoting contributions made to U.S. society by Muslims. Following the announcement of the executive order, university community members participated in panel discussions, rallies, and marches to protest. As one student commented in the student newspaper, "everyone must hold the idea of "consistent resistance" in which they will continue to have open discussions, host rallies and marches and refuse to normalize Trump's presidency." Arab Muslims specifically showed resistance by declaring their intentions to remain in the U.S. Specific statements included: "We are not going to go anywhere...We are going to defend the constitution that we respect. We belong here." Another person expressed: "Muslims have been here since the founding of this country. Whether it's African slaves or troves of immigrants later on...[we] are woven into the fabric of this country as much as anyone else."

Students were also quick to criticize institutional leaders in their lack of support for Muslim students. One student newspaper article covered campus response of the university president's email. Many were critical, and one student offered an explanation: "He is the president of the school and if he wants to keep his job. He can only say so much," student said. "He is in a really tough position. This is a public school, we need the funding so we can't

outright denounce something the government is doing when the government gives us money.”

Despite much expression in opposition to the executive order and efforts to continue to build community, some individuals support the implementation of the executive order and the student newspaper has reported on this perspective. It is important to note that the newspaper only covered external supporters of the executive order. Most notably, as reported in the student newspaper, leaders in the Middle East have supported Trump in his decision.

Discussion

While student reports captured in the study data suggest positive experiences for Muslim students at the institution, Orientalism and nativism shaped some of their experiences. Orientalist rhetoric emphasizes differences between Western peoples and cultures and Middle Eastern peoples and cultures, and characterizes the latter as deprived, exotic, and/or degenerate (Said, 1978). This study confirms findings from previous studies indicating the hostile campus climates faced by Muslim students (Ali, 2014; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Muslim college women whose experiences were documented in the articles collected for this study reported “feeling judged,” being “glared at,” stereotyped, and feeling “exasperated” in response to Western depictions of Muslim hijabi women as oppressed.

Findings from this study also reveal nativist and Islamophobic themes, which were found in aspects of the constructed environment on campus, the local environment surrounding the institution, and the larger sociopolitical climate. Within the campus environment, one of the collected documents for this study included an opinion article explicitly supporting the executive order and framed it as a measure protecting security. Here, nativism framed immigrants as outsiders and potential national threats. Data collected for this study also included

a report from a Muslim student who spoke about feeling excluded due to nationalist aspects within the cultural and historical aspects of the campus environment. Another account supported this finding in which an employee of the institution publicly posted comments infused with nativist and Islamophobic rhetoric directed at Muslims characterizing this group as a national threat. The institution’s failure to address this incident reflects the normalization of Islamophobia, and it is unclear as to what effect this normalization had on Muslim students. The local environment surrounding the campus also held nativist themes. In the articles we collected, students reported being harassed by expressions of white nationalism, nativism, trans- and homoantagonism, and misogyny—especially since the election. Interestingly, none of the articles collected included reports about incidents targeting Muslims in the local community. To the contrary, the accounts indicated expressions of support and solidarity.

Findings from this study extend the literature about campus climates for Muslim students; specifically our findings suggest that institutional responses to events in the national climate may shape how Muslim students experience the campus environment. Although the President did not name Muslims as the intended target of the executive order, findings suggested that both Muslims and non-Muslims experience it to be otherwise. Reporting about the executive order, the student newspaper described the march organized by the campus MSA protesting the executive order and the university president’s tepid response to it. Students from the MSA also reported that the executive order affected their lives.

Despite the presence of Islamophobia, orientalism, nativism, and nationalism in the campus and sociopolitical environments—both before and after the implementation of the executive order—findings from this study extend the literature about how Muslim students utilize strategies for resisting these ideologies. These strategies included

organizing protests against policies affecting Muslim students, creating safe spaces for worship, building connections with other religious groups on campus, and partnering and serving with local Muslim communities. Although findings from this study confirm prior literature suggesting that Muslim students feel pressured to rebut stereotypes about their religion, findings from this study indicate that some Muslim college women respond to these stereotypes by controlling their own image and engaging in empowering modes of self-expression.

As a result of the signing and implementation of Executive Order No. 13769, evidence points to some degree of negative change in the college experience for undergraduate Muslim students from the seven countries listed in the travel ban. This has included increased hostility on and off campus. We found many negative incidents in our document analysis, but there were some positive findings. The president of the MSA noted that they had not received a single report of their members being harassed or harmed as a result of the election. The donation of four prayer rugs by an anonymous donor to the MSA in December 2016 served as another example of solidarity and support.

Perceptions of campus support differ across Muslim students. In the aftermath of the announcement of the travel ban, an email sent by the university president spoke of how the ban impacted travel and policy, but lacked any mention of support for those directly impacted by the order. Shortly after this, campus members protested the executive order and the university president's response. Among the protesters, at least one student openly criticized the university president for not denouncing the executive order. The institution's response to the travel ban's announcement served to erode any perception of support that the institution had for its Muslim students—at least in the view of some students.

Study Bounds

The bounds of this study also include considerations for the fact that we examined a small set of articles discussing Muslims within a specific university context. We resist the notion that this, among the other study constructs subsequently named, are limitations, delimitations, and any other language with etymology in limits because this suggests a degree of deficit and we wish to operate from an anti-deficit framework (Lacy, 2017). Instead, we accept the fact that our study exists in a specific time, context, and allowance for information sharing. This means we know student newspapers are often spaces where exertion of control can take place. We accept that what and how much was printed about Muslim students in the university newspaper and within this timeframe is tied to campus politics, power, control, location, and even a willingness to acknowledge Muslim students and Islam as a religion. Accordingly, campus norms, perceptions, and politics dictate the amount of information we could examine and thus further confined and otherwise minimized the potential findings and data this study produced. Moreover, as a qualitative research study, we do not expect to draw broad inferences from this data, instead we seek to highlight a specific experience within a specific context that can help us to more holistically understand Muslim student experiences. Ultimately, we insist upon using this work as a springboard and conversation starter from which researchers can work on larger and more national research data.

Implications and Conclusion

Findings from this study support broad literature indicating Muslim people, and thus students, experience issues with a sense of belonging in the U.S. (and at U.S. universities). Within the context of the Trump presidential administration, Islamophobia and xenophobia are on clear display in media outlets and across college and university campuses leading many student organizations to engage in additional work to

contribute to a more positive and nuanced understanding of students practicing the Islamic faith. Commitment to *doing good* was particularly salient on the university campus we examined. As illuminated by these findings, hostile climates for people with minoritized identities coexist in spaces where support from local communities and institutional agents are also prevalent. It is evident that Muslim student counterstories, acts of resistance, and solidarity have helped students to work through the impact of and reactions to Executive Order No. 13769 of the current White House Administration.

The heightened Islamophobia and lack of support currently available for Muslim students at the institution seems to contribute to a decreased sense of belonging for Muslim students when one examines the articles and reports made in the student newspaper of this institution. This is critical given that a lacking a sense of belonging can negatively impact a student's academic performance (Turner & Thompson, 2014), while an increased sense of belonging has shown to increase retention (O'Keefe, 2013) and positively impacting academic performance (Turner & Thompson, 2014). We can only assume through our document analysis that some Muslim students may be experiencing a decreased sense of belonging due to the campus climate, which may be affecting their academic performance.

There was little discussion about efforts made by community members to better understand Muslim experiences despite much of the literature and articles suggesting a need to improve the perception of Muslim students. Furthermore, the documents analyzed suggest the institution has not taken action toward facilitating these much-needed conversations. This seeming lack of urgent concern and compassion for Muslim students could contribute to decreased enrollment, student engagement, as well as increased negative student perceptions and experiences. This could disrupt student activities and engagements leading to not only issues with student extracurricu-

lars and involvement but also retention and recruitment of Muslim students. Moreover, researchers may find that campus cultures are hostile or otherwise negative and opt out of research for students within these populations.

The implications of this document analysis as well as the inability to connect with and contact Muslim students on a University level for fear of legal and political reprimand are significant for students, scholars, and practitioners. They suggest that Muslim student experiences are either unimportant or too risky to discuss and research, thus implying institutional priorities more likely align with political and social neutrality rather than the centering of student experiences, needs, and support structures. Future researchers examining this topic may wish to 1) conduct research directly with Muslim students to understand their experiences more directly, 2) engage Muslim students in reviewing findings/themes from research about their experiences, and 3) examine the role of institutional and community gatekeepers in blocking research on this population. Practitioners serving Muslim student needs and interests may endeavor to 1) better support the counterstories and other forms of resistance that Muslim students on their campuses are already practicing; 2) understand their own positionality in working with this community and engaging in reflective practice (for non-Muslim practitioners); and 3) unearth how Islamophobia and anti-Muslim stereotypes, policies, and practices manifest in their own campus contexts. The need for extensive research examining Muslim student experiences has never been more critical.

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