

# Flying while Muslim: An Exploratory Study of Muslim Communities in Northern New Jersey Post 9/11



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(Photographer: Tim Reinhart)

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This article introduces an overview of the changes in politics in the US (part 1) and the experiences of Muslims in daily life in Northern New Jersey in the years after 9/11 (part 2) based on a qualitative study.

## Muslim Communities in Northern New Jersey: Post 9-11 Realities

*In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)*

### 1 Immigration and Anti-Terrorism Policies in the US

Focussing immigration and anti-terrorism policies in the US Akram & Johnson (2004) do a comprehensive look at the targeting of Muslims through legislative acts prior to 9/11. A historical timeline from “Operation Boulder”, which was passed under Nixon in 1972, through the Carter years and the Iranian Hostage Crisis, to the many initiatives put in place by Reagan prevent ‘terrorists’ from entering and remaining in the United States. Mass detentions and arrests of immigrants of Arab and Iranian descent were instituted at this time. In the 1990s, President Bush turned his focus to Iraq, and Saddam Hussein. The “War on Terrorism” was instituted during his presidency, and the FBI interrogations began. Mandatory fingerprinting of all people of Arab descent was instituted by the Department of Justice, which led to the racial profiling of Arabs and Arab-Americans at airports. Using secret evidence in cases involving Arabs and Muslims was instituted long before 9-11 happened. In fact, by 1999, there were 25 secret evidence cases pending. (Akram & Johnson, 2004) As a reaction to the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, which was done by a white, US citizen, who is not Muslim, President Clinton passed two pieces of legislation that dramatically shifted immigration policy in our country. The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Individual Responsibility Act (IIRIA) were both passed in 1996. These laws allowed for detention and deportation based on secret evidence to continue. (Amnesty International, 1999; Welch, 2002) This history created exactly the type of environment needed to successfully pass the many immigration and anti-terrorism bills that went through the federal government in the years following 9-11. Dow (2002), Mathur (2006), Murray (2004), Nguyen (2005), Siskin (2006) all give break downs of the incredible amount of anti-immigration and anti-terrorism policies that were passed in the years following 9/11. For the purposes of this paper, we will limit our study of Post 9-11 policy to the first year following 9-11. While the rate of policy implementation continued at an extremely fast rate up to and including 2004, to look at all of the policies implemented at this time is beyond the scope of this paper.

*“Let the terrorists among us be warned: If you overstay your visa – even by one day – we will arrest you. If you violate a local law, you will be put in jail and kept in custody as long as possible. We will use every available statute. We will seek every prosecutorial advantage.*

*We will use all our weapons within the law and under the Constitution to protect life and enhance security for America.”*  
*Attorney John Ashcroft, US Mayors Conference, October 25, 2001*

### **Special Interest Cases.**

Right after 9-11, around 1,200 Muslim men of Arab and South Asian descent were rounded up, interrogated and detained through the FBI sponsored investigation entitled PENTTBOM (Pentagon/Twin Towers Bombings) (Murray, 2004; Nguyen 2005; US Department of Justice (USDOJ 2003; Mathur 2006). Out of these 1,200 “special interest arrests”, not one of these men was ever found to be associated with terror. It is important to realize that the number 1,200 exists only because after that number, DOJ stopped counting because, “the statistics became confusing.” (US DOJ, 2003) By September 18, 2001, 762 men had been picked up and detained through the PENTTBOM program.

On September 20, 2001, a ruling was signed by Congress extending the length of time that someone can be detained without a charge from 24 to 48 hours, with a stipulation for extension “in the event of emergency or other extraordinary circumstances.” (8 CFR 287 (INS no. 2171-01); Mathur 2006; Nguyen, 2005)

On September 21, 2001, the INS Chief Immigration Judge made the decision that all of these “special interest” case proceedings were to take place in private, without the public present, and with no release of information regarding the outcome of the hearing. In many of these situations, the defendants’ lawyers were not provided with the secret evidence on the case and were rarely allowed to meet with their client or to attend the hearing. Once the federal government decided to make it against the law to disclose any information about a detainee to the public, there was no way to find out who these 9-11 detainees were and what charges were placed against them. (Mathur 2006; Murray 2004; Nguyen 2005; Welch 2002)

### **Operation Green Quest**

October 2001 saw the institution of Operation Green Quest. This group’s goal was to find out the money sources linked to 9-11. Raids were periodically conducted in Arab American communities across the USA, and by 2003 more than 600 bank accounts had been frozen, which equaled \$124 million. Several Muslim charity organizations were shut down. People were arrested, and detained by the FBI and then turned over to the INS for deportation. (Mathur 2006, Murray, 2004)

USA PATRIOT Act: The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act (USA PATRIOT Act) was passed on October 26, 2001. The full extent of authorities appropriated under this law could be an entire research paper on its own. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on the section which relates to immigration detention. Under this act, terrorist activity is redefined to include a much wider scope of activity. It also allows for the deportation or the indefinite detention of any noncitizen who is deemed to be a “terrorist”. Anyone who does not have a country that will accept him, will be held in detention within the United States, indefinitely. (Murray, 2004; Nguyen, 2005)

It is interesting to note that the DOJ received 458 complaints concerning civil liberties and the USA PATRIOT Act between October 2001 and June 2002. These complaints included, “excessive force, illegal detention, detainee held without an attorney, detention under adverse conditions, ... verbal abuse by correctional officers, discrimination by the INS inspectors, inmate not permitted to practice Muslim religion, and detainee not permitted to observe Ramadan while in INS custody.” (USDOJ, 2003)

Another 1,073 complaints concerning civil liberties and the USA PATRIOT Act were filed

between December 2002 and June 2003. Of these, the DOJ found 34 to be credible Patriot Act violations. These ranged from “alleged beatings of immigrant detainees to Bureau of Prisons (BOP) officers allegedly verbally abusing inmates.” (USDOJ, 2003)

October 31, 2001, Ashcroft permits the monitoring of lawyer/detainee interviews, to ensure that no detainee is using his lawyer to perpetrate further acts of terrorism within the US. (Mathur, 2006; Murray 2004) On this same date, Ashcroft institutes “indefinite detention”, by allowing detention to continue even when an immigration judge has granted them the right to be released. (Nguyen 2005)

## **FBI Interviews**

November 9, 2001, the FBI creates Terrorism Task Forces designed to interview 5,000 non-immigrant men between the ages of 18 and 33, who entered the US after January 1, 2000. Several police chiefs around the country refused to participate, stating that it was against their local guidelines to racially profile people who are being targeted simply based on their national origin. On the list of over 7,000 names, only 42% were interviewed, fewer than 20 were brought up on immigration violations, 3 on criminal charges and none with links to terrorism. (Murray, 2004; Nguyen 2005)

November 13, 2001, President Bush institutes “military tribunals” to be used in the prosecution of suspected terrorists. (Nguyen 2005)

November 16, 2001, the Department of Justice announces that due to national security concerns, the names and identities of the close to 1,200 9-11 detainees would not be released. (Nguyen, 2005)

November 19, 2001, The Federal Aviation Administration announces that US citizenship is now required for security screening positions. (Nguyen, 2005)

November 29, 2001, ‘S’ visas are instituted by Ashcroft. These are “Snitch Visas” and are granted to anyone who comes forward with information regarding terrorist activities. (Nguyen 2005)

December 2001, raids are conducted in airports around the country leading to over 1,000 arrests and deportations of undocumented airport employees. Known as ‘Operation Tarmac’ in Southern California alone there were over 100 arrests and 85 convictions. (Nguyen 2005)

## **“No fly” lists and CAPPS II**

Large databases of people were placed on a “watch list”. Unfortunately, because of the nature of Middle Eastern names, and the similarities, many false positives set off the “no fly” list at the Transportation Security Administration. This led to the purchase of a Lockheed Martin data-mining system entitled “Computer Assisted Passenger Pre-Screening System II” (CAPPS II). But with so many databases being merged, there have been many errors through this system as well.

## **Operation TIPS**

This expanded the search for terrorists to the American people as well. Terrorism Information and Prevention System (TIPS) relies on US citizens to come forward with any information that they have on who they consider suspect. (Mathur 2006)

The US is still responding to these TIPS informants. For example, just last week, six Imams were detained for hours at an airport when they were en route to a Muslim convention in Phoenix. They were seen praying before boarding the plane, and this was viewed as “suspect”. The six Imams never made it to the conference, and were each sent home on different flights. ([http://articles.news.aol.com/news/\\_a/six-imams-removed-from-twin-](http://articles.news.aol.com/news/_a/six-imams-removed-from-twin-)

cities/20061121014409990004 accessed 21 November 2006)

December 4, 2001, Ashcroft issues a statement that anyone who disagrees and/or “questions his policies are ‘aiding and abetting’ terrorism. In this time period of fear in our nation’s history, this statement also went unchallenged. (Nguyen 2005)

### **The Judicial Branch**

The US federal government is set up as a system of checks and balances to ensure that no one branch of government gains overreaching powers. This is the wisdom of democracy.

Traditionally, this has been an important role of the Judicial System. The Legislative Branch makes the laws, the Executive enforces the laws, and the judicial system decides if the law is constitutional or not. Since 9-11, the courts have not been effective in serving this role. Even when there is a challenge or a dissent with the provisions set up by the Executive Branch, time and time again, the courts have stepped down, claimed secret evidence and secret detentions constitutional, and have signed many powers over to the Executive Branch. This has happened at both the state and federal level. (Murray, 2004)

Currently, even material witnesses to cases, who are known to be innocent, are being held in detention indefinitely. Except for sex offenders who are sometimes held after completing their sentence, this is the only time in our nation’s history that known innocent people are being held in detention. (Amnesty International, 1999; Murray, 2004)

### **Absconder Apprehension Initiative**

January 25, 2002 a memo is sent to the INS, the FBI, US Marshals and US Attorneys ordering them to go after 314,000 Arab and Middle Eastern “fugitives” who have overstayed their visas, or had never received their final removal order.” With the FBI working hand in hand with the INS, the absconders were interrogated regarding their knowledge of terrorist activities. This led to the detention of another 6,000 men who became “special interest cases”. (Mathur, 2006; Murray, 2004; Nguyen, 2005)

### **No Match Letters**

In February 2002, “No match letters” were sent to over 750,000 employers alerting them to the fact that social security numbers for their employees were not valid. (Nguyen 2005)

February 8, 2002, Department of Justice officials begin to take undocumented immigrants into custody. They are instructed “to find a way to detain some of these individuals for criminal charges.” (Nguyen 2005)

March 2002, states are asked to implement measures that will restrict immigrants from accessing driver licenses. (Nguyen 2005)

April 2002, the police are given the power to enforce immigration violations. (Mathur, 2006; Nguyen 2005), and a bill is passed in the House of Representatives which would in effect “dismantle” the INS. (Nguyen, 2005)

### **Expansion of FBI and Police Powers**

In May 2002, there was an increase in surveillance power that was given to both the FBI and the Police. These new guidelines allowed for the “FBI to freely infiltrate mosques, churches, and other meeting places; listen to online chat rooms, trawl for information on the Internet, and obtain information from data-mining companies; and conduct full investigations for one year with no evidence that a crime has been committed and no oversight from headquarters.” (Mathur, 2006; Murray, 2004) A very large database that connects the Police with the FBI has

been set up. Thus giving the 100,000 people hired by these two agencies across the country, access to “the database of 50 million overseas applications for US visas, including photographs – information that that State Department had previously only shared with the INS.” (Murray, 2004)

June 5, 2002 Bush proposes the creation of a Department of Homeland Security which would completely restructure the INS, FBI, CIA and law enforcement agencies. (Nguyen 2005)

Special Registration: This act was included in both immigration acts of 1996 and 2000, but not fully enforced until June 6, 2002. The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was implemented in November 2002. Men from certain countries, of a certain age were required to voluntarily register with the INS. There were 22 countries in all, in four groups, so that the registration was scattered between 2002 and 2003. By April 23, 2003, 133,000 men had registered. Of this number, 11 were classified “suspected terrorists”, 800 criminals, and 9,000 undocumented immigrants. When Congress began questioning the effectiveness of this program, the newly formed Department of Homeland Security promptly decided to discontinue it and that the men would not be required to register annually, as was originally planned. (Murray, 2004; Nguyen, 2005)

June 26, 2002, the first two “Enemy Combatants” are detained and to be held “until the end of the war on terrorism.” They do not have the right to a lawyer or to question the circumstances of their detention. (Nguyen 2005)

July 11, 2002, by this date, the DOJ has announced that they have released the majority of the 9-11 detainees, and ordered several to be deported. (Nguyen 2005)

July 22, 2002, the Department of Justice begins to enforce an old law that had long been forgotten which requires non-immigrants to report a change of address within 10 days or to pay a fine. Included in the mix were all non-immigrants, green card holders, asylum seekers and refugees (Murray, 2004; Nguyen 2004), which accounts for close to 11 million people around the US. It makes one wonder exactly who the DOJ was really targeting. Were they trying to close in on a particular group, or just blanket the entire immigrant community so that native-born Americans would feel safe, and feel that at least the DOJ was doing “something”?

## **Project Lookout**

The FBI began compiling a terrorist watch list in September 2001. In just one year’s time, that list had multiplied to such an extent that most of the names on it had no connection to terrorism at all. The list was circulated, “like bootleg music” (Murray, 2004). It was found that most of the names were placed on the list in error. Currently, the FBI is holding on to a list of over 100,000 names of “known and suspected terrorists”.

All in all, the years following 9-11 were full of rapid implementation of new immigration and terrorism policies that significantly impacted certain communities (primarily Arab and Muslim) around the country. The rest of this paper is dedicated to the particular experience of Muslim communities in New Jersey in the wake of 9/11. Our state was severely impacted by these new laws, and many communities and families continue to suffer. The specifics of these policies will be described within the findings section as evidence to the experiences of the respondents.

## **2 Experiences of Muslims in New Jersey after 9/11**

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question is to explore the experiences of prejudice and stigma in the Muslim communities in Northern New Jersey following 9-11 and the implementation of immigration and anti-terrorism policy in order to impart knowledge of their experience to

non-Muslims. This study is exploratory and the interview questions are focused on community-wide (rather than personal) experiences, and do not include questions or material that would put the respondents at risk.

## **Method**

In-depth interviews were conducted with members of the various Muslim communities in Northern New Jersey. The sample was chosen using purposeful sampling as well as snowball techniques to engage men from the Muslim communities in Northern New Jersey. The sample in this wave of interviews was limited to men because the immigration and anti-terrorism policies which were passed Post-9/11 were written specifically for men and the implementation of these policies directly affected them. The men were invited to participate in the study themselves, and to provide access to other respondents who could be interviewed. These techniques provided interviews with 10 Muslim leaders and community members, who then recommended other people for me to interview, which led to another 3 interviews, totaling 13.

The interviews were conducted in person by the author, with respondents agreeing to participate voluntarily through written informed consent. The respondents could choose not to answer any question and could end the interview at any time. All subjects were 18 years or older. The structured interview questions were typically completed within 45 to 90 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded into a digital voice recorder. A common occurrence was that the interviews led to much longer, more casual conversation on the same topic that sometimes lasted hours.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured and questions were used as an interview guide. The questions included both open and closed ended questions. Topics of importance included: description and definition of a 'Muslim community', the role of mosques, the relationship and feelings of safety and security both pre and post 9/11, the impact of both policy and the media post 9/11, and the methods of outreach to non-Muslim communities and to law enforcement (FBI, CIA, ICE and local Police).

## **Findings**

Because of the limited space within this paper, the findings will focus on only a few of the emerging themes found in the data. As September 11 was found to be a defining point in the respondents' lives, the analysis will be grouped by pre 9/11 experience and post 9/11 experience. The dominant emerging themes include: security and safety, the Muslim community (united by faith divided by culture), discrimination (on the job and at airports), the role of law enforcement, and the treatment of women.

## **Safety and Security**

The respondents describe a transformation which took place in their communities after 9/11. Almost all of the respondents describe a peaceful free society before 9/11. It is interesting to note that all the descriptions are put in terms of what was 'not' present. This is based on their current reality living in a Post 9/11 world.

*People were really free here. Nobody was scared. I was never scared of anything. I never had kind of fear of police, never had a fear of immigration. I never had a fear of being, those kind of things. I was never scared of traveling. I was never scared*

*on the airports or the buses. Wherever I was very safe. Even I'm coming at 3:00 at night, I used to feel safe.*

*Before 9/11 people didn't have the suspicion. There was never an issue. There was never a question of loyalty.*

*I mean, safety wasn't even a subject to talk about.*

*Our community before 9/11, they didn't have any fears. They didn't have anything to do with our law enforcement here in America. That's before 9/11.*

### **Muslim Community – United by Faith, Divided by Culture**

Almost half of the respondents spoke about a lack of relationship between the Muslim community and other communities. This in turn became, as one described, 'a weakness area' which they believe led to the many difficulties they suffered after 9/11, which will be discussed later in this paper.

*We never established ourselves as a Muslim community. We never tried to integrate fully within the society. That's why we were looked at probably as strangers or you know, closed community. So, in a way, I think we felt we were responsible for, for part of what's going on.*

*I mean, non-Muslims, unfortunately, to be honest with you, we didn't go, as a Muslim, I don't think they did good job to have like outreach with non-Muslims. And, this is the issue that we are facing it after September 11. That, if we express our religion to the other communities, or the American communities, I believe after September 11 would be much easier, because everybody knows about the rules and the situation about Islam, about Muslims.*

There is another issue regarding the Muslim community that was brought up in more than half of the interviews. This is the issue of diversity in the community. The Muslim world is vast and is comprised of countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The Muslim immigrants who come here speak a multitude of languages. Yet, the language of Islam is Arabic. The Qur'an is in Arabic. The prayers are said in Arabic. Almost all of the Arabic speaking respondents spoke of the need to get beyond cultures and religions and to live the true meaning of Muslim community.

*Yes, unfortunately, as I said, people follow their culture and their ethnicities. You'll find an Egyptian masjid, a Turkish masjid, a Pakistani masjid. So, you find masjids labeled by communities, by ethnicities, by ethnic communities and not by you know Islamic religion. Because, according to Islam, there, masjids should all be one masjid together, open to everyone, and unfortunately they are labeled by... Yes, so you see the masjids, the Islamic Centers labeled by ethnic background not by religion, which is one for all. But, culturally people start label themselves as Muslim communities, by their ethnic background, and that shows a big sign, a clear sign of culture being controlling people's lives, governing people's lives more than religion.*

Yet, both of the Pakistani respondents, whose first language is not Arabic, spoke to the importance of connecting within Islam through common language.

*Speaking Urdu, yes, It's more of a, the word is, ethnic, Pakistani ethnic community. So you will see an Islamic Muslim community, if you use this word, is totally different. They have different mosques. Sometimes I, being a Muslim, I feel very unfortunate because the language. For example, if I go to Jumaa, I will always go to a Pakistani mosque, because I can understand the khutbah by the Imam. I can read Arabic, but I cannot understand it 100%. So, if I am listening to something, I don't understand a single word, it doesn't make any sense. I will always go to a Pakistani mosque. Where I can, that kind of a thing. Even I go to Egyptian mosque, or any other kind of mosque, I don't mind it. I don't have a particular preference, but I'll go to a Pakistani mosque.*

Although a majority of the respondents spoke of religion and faith serving as the main unifying force within these very diverse communities, several respondents brought up the issue of diversity of practice. This story shared by one respondent says it all.

*At my last job, there was a Muslim sister that worked there, and she got me the job, she told me about it. So, I said, "Where do you pray around here?" She said, "it's very hard around here." And she's wearing hijab. I said, "OK, but you realize, when I go to the boss to tell him that I'm going to take Fridays and disappear for a couple of hours, and that Friday is a Sabbath for us, and you've been here for a year, and you haven't said anything once to them, they're gonna wonder what's wrong with this religion. His and her religion? It's different for men and for women? So just keep that in mind. That might be a backlash to you. Because I'm here a month, it's a month contract. You're the one who's going to have to carry on." And there was another sister that was Muslim, a Bengali sister who wasn't wearing hijab. So you had one who was wearing hijab, one that was not wearing hijab, and one guy who's coming to ask about prayers all the time. What are you people? That's why I don't judge people. When Muslims say it's a way of life, we pray 5 times a day, and you have this one lady wearing hijab, she never, no one ever sees her prayer, or even like that, that's one thing and then you have people saying women are supposed to be wearing this veil, and she's letting her hair flow and everything, with a name like hers, you know, Bengali and all, and I was just in the masjid last Sunday and the Sheikh was like, "OK, where's your hijab?" I didn't say that to her. OK, so but again, this is the United States. Freedom of religion, even if we're Muslim. I'm not going to come down on you because you're not practicing your Islam. That's between you and Allah.*

## **Discrimination**

**Job Discrimination:** Over half of the respondents brought up the issue of job loss and job discrimination. They reported repeatedly that prior to 9/11 it was easy to find work, yet following 9/11 it was next to impossible.

*I have seen some people losing jobs, and myself also, my own personal experience, losing a job and then having a hard time getting a job, like*



*you used to it. It used to be not that difficult. There is a demand and they need somebody with my skills and my experience. Especially, I have a lot of experience in the field now and, 'no thank you.' So you start to be suspicious but you cannot say 100% that it's the main reason but, it starts being a barrier and then that way of thinking there is nothing you can do about it. Just hope for the best, that you're gonna meet somebody and it doesn't make a difference to him and there is those people are there and then it comes.*

### **Flying While Muslim**

A very common theme which emerged with around three-quarters of the respondents was the treatment of Muslims at airports. They shared examples of questioning for several hours, detention, and being pulled out of the airplane.

*Yes, yes, for sure. I mean there's a new statement and there's a driving while Black, or flying while Muslim. You know, flying while Muslim you know it's not the most pleasant experience. Leaders of the community have been stopped, women of the community with four children were stopped at the airport for six hours, or in my experience it was an hour, can't use the phone you know, or cannot feed the children, with an infant, that's just a very silly experience, and one could not say you know everybody is subject to the same thing, no, it's not. It's more specifically targeted to the Muslims like and unfortunately these are the Muslims that they know from the community that they are fully aware of their activities, they are fully aware of their whereabouts, about what they do, how they do it, people who were stopped at the airport*

Almost all of the community leaders I spoke to, described how known community leaders, who are actively engaging with law enforcement to build bridges within their community, who are known by the authorities, are the people most likely to be pulled over, stopped and questioned. None of them could explain why they thought this was happening, except that through their outreach efforts to law enforcement, their names have been added into the law enforcement databases. One respondent specifically described how his reaction to questions has changed since 9/11.

*Well, now, whenever I am asked too many questions, I get upset because of these things, because you're getting asked so many questions, all the time, See, sometimes, you're just talking somebody, it would be much easier, at least in my case. When you make it in question form, sometime it's very difficult for me, but, and that's one of the effects, always thinking, what are you going to ask me about? See, because you ask a question and sometime, what I feel, what I ask, what does that mean? Why are you asking me that? What do you mean by that question? And also because well, I don't want to say the wrong answer, or lead you to illusion, or mirage, or to step in a hole. And this is also what is being created by 9/11, to be very conscious about what you say and about what you do. I feel like I've been watched out, watched, somebody's following you, somebody watching, or listening your phone call, oh, you shouldn't record that.*

This sentiment he described was reflected in several other respondents' answers as well. They spoke of "freedom of speech" as a thing of the past.

## **Law Enforcement**

*"Let the terrorists among us be warned: If you overstay your visa – even by one day – we will arrest you. If you violate a local law, you will be put in jail and kept in custody as long as possible. We will use every available statute. We will seek every prosecutorial advantage. We will use all our weapons within the law and under the Constitution to protect life and enhance security for America."*

*Attorney John Ashcroft, US Mayors Conference, October 25, 2001*

Right after 9-11, around 1,200 Muslim men of Arab and South Asian descent were rounded up, interrogated and detained through the FBI sponsored investigation entitled PENTTBOM (Pentagon/Twin Towers Bombings) (Murray, 2004; Nguyen 2005; US Department of Justice (USDOJ) 2003; Mathur 2006). By September 18, 2001, 762 men had been picked up and detained through the PENTTBOM program. Almost all of the participants could relate a story they had heard in the community.

*One of my friends, he has one surgical business. He was sitting in front of his house, in the car with another friend, and it was 14th of September. The police car came and they asked him, "what are you doing here?" He said, "I live here." "Show me your ID." He showed him his ID. This is happening in this country. They are sitting. They are not drinking. They are not shooting any drug, maybe smoking, yes, cigarettes. Yes, cigarettes, of course. So, you see, everything now, and another guy, "Where's ID?" "Here's my ID." "Do you know what time it is? He says, "Why?" Because he's also American citizen. He knows about his rights and all that stuff. "Come out of the car." They were both searched. Opened up the trunk of the car, in front of his house, and after that, it took many months, he never dared to go outside. Because he is scared. He's scared his wife, his business. The police came. "Show me your ID." The local police, not FBI. So these experiences have given them so much, you know, they have big. We have lost our confidence, believe me.*

On November 9, 2001, the FBI created Terrorism Task Forces designed to interview 5,000 non-immigrant men between the ages of 18 and 33, who entered the US after January 1, 2000. On the list of over 7,000 names, about 42% were interviewed, fewer than 20 were brought up on immigration violations, 3 on criminal charges and none with links to terrorism. (Murray, 2004; Nguyen 2005) The following quotes exhibit the experience in the community and the impact of this policy among this sample.

*After September 11 they did too many interviews. Well we hear from the law authority people they did thousands of the interview for the Muslim community. After September 11, they need to find out who get involved, who was who, or who knows what, and stuff like that. Did you see? Did you hear? You know what I'm saying, anyone from who did September 11. That's why. They were not. We hear that they did almost 30,000 interviews approximately, that's what I remember now, 30,000 interviews, they find almost like 7 or 8 one, that they have something wrong with them*

*A lot of people they got visit their home from FBI. Some people, when a police stop you for traffic violation, stick people in a special for checking their records, as if you're a criminal, which, they didn't do this to any other community, stop you for cutting a red light, or whatever, or using a phone, you didn't, and they take you to the station, and be there for 3-4 hours, to check me to make sure I'm not a criminal all because my name is Mohamed, or whatever to do this. The police did this to the people. I was one of them. I think I have, other people I know by name, they face this problem, you know, they're stopping you for traffic violation and they pull you to the side, and give me a ticket, but my insurance is good, my license is good, and my registration is good. But you don't hold me for a couple hours to check me out.*

Another policy that was passed at this time was Operation TIPS. This expanded the search for terrorists to the American people as well. Terrorism Information and Prevention System (TIPS) relies on US citizens to come forward with any information that they have on who they consider suspect. (Mathur 2006)

The US is still responding to these TIPS informants. For example, last November, six Imams were detained for hours at an airport when they were en route to a Muslim convention in Phoenix. They were seen praying before boarding the plane, and this was viewed as "suspect". The six Imams never made it to the conference, and were each sent home on different flights. ([http://articles.news.aol.com/news/\\_a/six-imams-removed-from-twin-cities/20061121014409990004](http://articles.news.aol.com/news/_a/six-imams-removed-from-twin-cities/20061121014409990004) accessed 21 November 2006)

What is interesting is one respondent brought up this incident.

*What happened to the Muslims in the airports, when they are coming or leaving. I have heard a lot of people complain about this especially the religious people, especially the Imams. Just two weeks ago, I saw on the news, I can't remember the state, I think Minnesota or something like that, these six Imams at the airport, just because they were you know practicing prayer at the airport before they get to the plane, and one of the passenger, called the airline, which is US Airways, and these, you got the six Imams, at the airports. They took them to the station downtown, police station or FBI station or something, to question them. They handcuffed them for about 9 hours.*

Another respondent had his own Operation TIPS story to tell. As a chauffeur, he meets a lot of passengers. One day, a friendly lady entered his car and began a conversation with him, asking him a lot of questions about himself. Because she seemed so interested and friendly, he shared with her his name, a common Arabic name, and his national origin, and the fact that he has dual citizenship.

*after that, I found out that the FBI came to my house and asked me how come you have two passports, and this and that, so I feel like people you know, maybe they smile your face, try to take information from you, but there's still inside them, even the way she was talking to me so nice, it didn't give me any impression that she's against you, but she is. You know, I think she left the car and she called and she giving all my information, so you know, I don't feel, after this, I don't feel so comfortable you know to talk really about my feeling because I don't think it comes from somebody ask me, because I don't know what they think. We may be*

*talking freely and you know, or whatever, and that caused me problems for a couple of days.*

For several days after this incident with the FBI, the respondent said he experienced a sense of being watched, as if someone were outside his house.

October 2001 saw the institution of Operation Green Quest. The goal was to find out the money sources linked to 9/11. Raids were periodically conducted in Arab American communities across the USA, and by 2003 more than 600 bank accounts had been frozen, which equaled \$124 million. Several Muslim charity organizations were shut down. People were arrested, and detained by the FBI and then turned over to the INS for deportation. (Mathur 2006, Murray, 2004)

More than half of the respondents brought up the issue of donations. Islamic humanitarian relief organizations were devastated by the implementation of Operation Green Quest. The third pillar of Islam is Zakat (almsgiving) and it is every Muslim's responsibility to donate 2.5% of their assets to the needy and the poor on an annual basis. Over the years, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have filled this role as a donation site for Muslims. With the crackdown on Muslim organizations which began in October 2001, the relief and social service providers are finding themselves in a huge crunch. People were terrified to donate. One of the effects on the Muslim community was... they were afraid

*to donate money to any cause, you know, even the masjid, and specially the relief work. They used to be very generous with the relief work. They were afraid after September 11 to give, and I think they were out of fear*

*I can tell you about donation. This is as something you can measure there how much that the people have the fear of that. Many kind of authorities like FBI or this. Donation after September 11... and we had at this time a real frighten and for to how we can have pay the expenses for the Islamic Centers? Because the people, they're afraid to donate even donate.*

*Well, a lot of, I mean even a lot of the relief organizations have been stopped post September 11, under the pretext that they are affiliated with 'terrorist organizations', so people cannot even give to charity, to brothers and sisters all over the globe that are you know, widowed, maimed and their parents are killed, just I mean if we were to do such, all of sudden we are supporting terrorism and at the same time you find occupying organizations that are selling unlawful pieces of land in occupied and it's doing rather well here in the US. Did you hear about it?*

The leaders took it upon themselves to educate the community, "cool them down", but this was a very difficult task.

*we had a hard time to be educate our people there is no any no one's following you if you donate an organization for really this organization is registered in the US. And if the public wants to ask them why you donate, tell them why you open it? If you close it, I don't donate to any closed organization.*

This quote speaks to the fact that the organizations that the US was freezing, were certified 501(c)3 organizations. They had gone through the proper channels of application. People were donating to organizations that the US had provided non-profit status to. There were too many stories of law enforcement, too many nightmarish experiences, and people chose not to donate.

*because they think that they follow up and why did you donate maybe you donate to the organization under the suspicion and they're all of this and in our mentality before, if you do with any security or something like that they will follow up me and they're going to follow me and come to do something, " why you donate?" I want to stop any donation I do.*

## **Women**

What is interesting is that I specifically chose to focus on how Muslim men were impacted by 9/11 in Northern New Jersey, yet all but one of the respondents spoke at length at how women were directly impacted. The level of harassment the women who choose to cover, or wear the veil was very high at this time. The men feel much more strongly about what the women went through rather than what they went through with law enforcement. The emerging themes within the women's experience include harassment and physical assault, job discrimination, and choosing not to cover. It's ironic. The usual impression in the U.S. is that Muslim women who choose not to cover are brave and liberated. Yet, listening to the respondents I got the sense that their descriptions conveyed that true courage came in the form of continuing to cover. Even the Imams had a difficult time advising the women at this time. It is interesting to see who was oppressing the covered women at this time. It appeared that it was not Muslim men, but rather, mainstream Americans.

Harassment and Physical Assault: women's scarves have been pulled from their head by force

*Well, one woman was dragged in Long Island. Some areas, she was wearing a burqa and she was hit by a car. People will use words if you are wearing a burqa. Even see, I personally don't believe in burqa, the cover. My thing is, if somebody wants to wear something, thing is, that's his or her right.*

*And this is one of the other incidents that I heard from other people, you know, everybody, my wife and her friends, because she is covered, she's in the mall, and people look at her, some people, some kids, especially you know, talk to her in a bad way, and so on, and this is didn't stop. This didn't stop with me, you know for a couple of years, till now, but this is still happen with covered ladies when they go out. I think last summer, it might after last summer, a friend of mine's wife, with another two girls, teenagers girls, who walking in Macy's or Sears or some one of the department stores, and a kid, stopped them and start cursing them out, and I think he touched one of the girls. And it's not, this is not the problem. Some kids, you know, crazy, but the problem is the parents were with the kids, and they didn't say anything, and I think they had the opinion, were pushing the kids to do more, and the problem didn't stop there, they called the security, and the security didn't do anything, and they called the cops, and waited until the cops come, like 45 minutes, I'm not sure,*

*and you know, when I heard this story, that that was five years after, when I heard this story, I got so upset. These people still thinking.*

*they do it, to take her hijab off, where is the freedom?*

These experiences led to the common reaction of both men and women, of intense fear. Women were afraid to go out; their husbands were afraid for them to go out. There were several calls to the mosque saying that they had heard that women were afraid to go out to shop

### **Job Discrimination**

The respondents indicated that women who wear hijab found it very difficult to locate employment at this time, and in some cases lost their jobs because of their choice to cover.

*ladies who cannot be hired in jobs, because they wear hijab  
some woman has been fired from their job, unless they took off their hijab, and some of them goes to interviews and they don't accept them because they are Muslim and if she cover her hair*

### **Choosing Not to Cover**

One result of the intense harassment and discrimination was that women began to question whether they should cover or not, and some chose not to.

*some women took their hijab off,  
there was a lot of sisters who were taking off their veils, their hijabs.  
They just didn't want the backlash in their offices or whatever, and they want to fit in*

*I found a lot of people took their hijab off, we had a lot of people complain  
of people throwing rocks, cursing in the street*

The one Imam I interviewed, brought up the theological dilemma that he and his colleagues faced, when for the first time in his life, women were seeking out religious guidance on whether or not to cover. Not for lack of belief, but lack of security.

*You know the sisters and Muslim women, they should to cover their hair, and this is, it was a very horrible time for them. Any sister in the street in the store, they stopped wearing it in the store and one of them was in the store, somebody come and take off their scarf — yea, it's a something outside at this time and someone asked me if they can, with this environment allowed to take off their scarf as Islamic law. So, in this environment, and this problem only with the streets, can we take off...and this is something, this is not easy for Muslim women to do it. I have sisters, they don't have their head scarves on. But for the sister who choose to wear it, it's like you take out her religion. And this is the first time, in my life time, to hear from sister this kind of question. And at this time, I can't give an answer right away. How I can say, I hear them and they're dangerous, to face the discrimination or I can give them the easy way, I was very, I met in this time at an Egyptian*

*meeting with all the Imams, to discuss this issue. What we can? What we can say? For our sisters? We will let them to allow them to take off their head scarf, or what will we do? And in the end we told them, if you have that big one, you can have small one. You can have something in your head, as you can, and to be close to a regular woman in the street, and we told them this is only short time, and we will inshallah go through this time, go back to the regular.*

### **Knowing Your Rights**

The last aspect I would like to highlight is the fact that as US citizens, fluent English speakers, and community leaders, the respondents have a profound understanding of US rights and freedoms. My respondents were not afraid to speak, or to be recorded. Yet, several times over several interviews, the leaders commented that

*if this is happening to 'leaders' of the community, I just wonder what happens to the common folk. I mean, I know my rights, and I know what's expected of me, and I know how to talk to people, but what if people you know just somebody else were to walk in*

### **Discussion**

This data suggests that in terms of community building, while the majority of the respondents agree that faith and religion unite the Muslim community, as the transnational literature states that is not quite the whole picture. Because of the incredible diversity of cultures, traditions and languages found within Muslim communities, there is also a sense of cultural pride and importance co-existing within the Muslim communities. The Arabic speakers in the community tend to view this as a sign of culture being seen as more important than religion, and in most of their minds, it is imperative that the community come back to Islam, so there can truly be one faith, one practice, one tradition. Yet, because of language barriers, this may not be a feasible solution. The data shows that people are drawn together not only through religion but also through language. While the transnational model fits on some level, we need to take a wider view of all that being transnational means to a person, both religiously and culturally.

This leads us another very important finding, the fact that before 9/11, in general, the Muslim community was not united. They did not see a reason to identify themselves as such, and were living their lives normally, like every other American community at this time. 9/11 was their wake up call. They learned very quickly that they are not quite considered American, and may never be. The community has pulled itself together even more closely after 9/11. While many of the respondents spoke at length about outreach to non-Muslims after 9/11, only two spoke to the need for 'in-reach'. An idea generated from this data for Muslim communities to consider is that in order for unity to exist, in an American context, they may need to find a way to bridge the gap between all the languages and traditions. Mosques and Islamic Centers that respect everyone's language and culture could greatly help in this arena. The data also suggest that even in times of peace and tranquility, minority groups such as Muslims and the various ethnicities, need to stay pro-active in terms of outreach. One masjid in New York was already working on this type of outreach before 9/11 happened. They had a contingent of supporters outside of the community who worked towards the security of their members. In the future, the data suggests that Muslim communities would do better to continue the open houses, to continue to reach out, educate, and inform the general population. Building allies in

other communities can do wonders in times of strife and unrest.

The data suggests that there was a large amount of discrimination at this time in the sample community. One important feature of the Muslim reaction to this treatment is also important to realize. There was an incessant sentiment of grace with which the men shared their experiences. Almost all of them shared that they understand why the public and the law enforcement reacted the way they did. They also mentioned feeling safer because of it; but always, within limits. The word I give this reaction is grace. Instead of fighting against it, they rolled with the punches. They had to, and they accepted their fate with a grace of understanding that I have not witnessed before. Three respondents went to great length to make sure to say that what the Muslim community faced was nothing compared to other ethnic groups. Comparisons were made between the enslavement of African people and the continued discrimination against African American, as well the internment of Japanese and Germans in the wake of World War II. In this sample, there was a feeling of being lucky.

### **Limitations**

This study has a small purposeful sample, and the information is not generalizable to the Muslim population of Northern New Jersey. I was limited by access and therefore used purposeful sampling with a snowball technique. By calling on Muslim leaders and friends that I have known over the years, I was able to build my sample. The snowball technique was not successful because people were afraid to speak to a stranger. In two instances, the people were too scared to speak, and strongly advised my respondents not to talk about this. The following quotes clearly speak to this.

*“Are you crazy? Just tell them everything’s OK.”*  
*In the community as a whole, paranoia, fear, big brother’s watching.*  
*I remember right after 9/11, this hit home real close, and I was discussing this with someone who was doing some sort of similar research, where my dad would say, “don’t talk about this issue or whatever, even at home, in our own apartment, behind closed doors.”*  
*And the first generation people that were here, were in fear. You don’t know if they had flashbacks, of what happened in their countries, or what the government was capable of doing, but there were even three of us even discussing it at home, you know, or griping, it’s like, oh the government had all these big scanners and they’re listening through people’s windows. You know, and this was literally, something my dad, my mom. And they said, “don’t kid about this.” And they were very serious. And I know a few other friends who said the same thing. You know, across the Pakistani community, across the Egyptian community, across a lot of communities, parents had the same notion.*

This study focuses on the experiences of Muslim men after September 11th, therefore, all of the respondents are male. This was a choice that I made since some of the anti-terror and immigration reform policies, like NSEERS, that were being implemented at this time on the Muslim community were only directly affecting the men. Future research could be done to include Muslim women’s experience. Since the treatment of women turned out to be an emerging theme within this sample, hearing the women’s perspective could better inform the literature about this experience.

All of the respondents in this sample have US citizenship. Therefore, they were not affected by the anti-terror/immigration reform legislations that were passed at that time, and were not subject to either prolonged detention or deportation.



Another aspect that is important to remember is all the interviews all took place In English. My knowledge of Arabic and Urdu is very limited. Thus, all of the respondents are fluent in English, which leads towards easier integration into US society, and can bias the results. In fact, several of the respondents spoke to this. All but three of the respondents are considered leaders in their communities and hold positions at their mosques. Therefore, this sample is skewed towards Muslims who feel a strong connection to their mosque. This is not universal, as was pointed out in at least four of the interviews.

### **Implications for Social Work**

The findings in this study are extremely valuable to social workers who find themselves working in the Muslim community in two ways. First, the data clarifies how extremely diverse the Muslim community is in New Jersey, and secondly, the data describes in detail the prejudice, stigma and discrimination experienced by the Muslim community in the wake of September 11th.

Social workers have a great understanding of the importance of the engagement process in community building as well as the importance of developing trust. This data demonstrates the profound impact that prejudice, stigma and discrimination have had on the Muslim community in New Jersey in the after math of September 11th. It is important to have an understanding of the experience from the community's perspective if one is to create a rapport with them. It is also important to understand a bit of the culture also, and it is imperative that non-Muslims don't lump all Muslims into one box. The community is as diverse as any of the US communities around the country.

The findings of this preliminary research suggest areas for future study. One is to interview the non-citizen Muslim community. They were impacted by the changing waves of post /11 immigration policy in a way that these respondents weren't. As US citizens, the respondents did not face the same fear of deportation. This research will be difficult. As was shown in the findings, there is still a very high level of fear in the community. Finding "the common folk" who are not too afraid to speak will take time and persistence and great deal of community and trust building.

Surprisingly, according to the men, the women had it much tougher. Our understanding of discrimination would be enhanced by interviewing Muslim women and analyzing their responses as compared with the men.

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