

Unflattening the Muslim-Other in Social Studies:
Student Perspectives & Curricular Approaches

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Abstract

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Scholars of religion and education have claimed the U.S. suffers from religious illiteracy. This, combined with the rise of Islamophobia in the U.S. beckons a need for more research on religious education in Social Studies classrooms. Conceptually grounded in postcolonial theory and standpoint epistemology, this dissertation investigated the experiences of high school Social Studies teachers and Muslim girls from minority communities of interpretation as they encountered curriculum on Islam. This study resulted in the following findings: (1) seven out of eight teachers aimed to counter Islamophobia through their curriculum; (2) teachers primarily used a historical approach and multicultural approach in doing so; (3) the Muslim girls experienced a flattening of their identities in the classroom context; and (4) students perceived a multicultural approach to teaching about Islam as being the most effective way to counter Islamophobia.

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Dedication

To my darling parents, Nargis and Hakim.

CHAPTER 1: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

The children of Adam, created of the self-same clay, are members of one body. When one member suffers, all members suffer, likewise. O Thou, who art indifferent to the suffering of the fellow, thou art unworthy to be called a man.

~ Mosleh al-Din Saadi Shirazi

When I began my doctoral studies I was inspired by Muslim women studying the intersection of Muslim identity and education. I wrote to one of these scholars in hopes for support and mentorship. I wrote,

Particularly, I am interested in curriculum on Islam as it relates to coverage of the diversity within Muslim experiences. I also study the impact curriculum on Islam has on those students who are from minority communities within Islam. I am wondering if you know of similar work being done around the country. I would be so happy to connect with you when you have a chance. Thank you.

The response I got from this senior colleague was discouraging to say the least. She responded,

I am not sure I would focus on the aspect of its impact on minorities, but would look at how the content in, say, widely used textbooks (plus actual teaching) impacts students' attitudes. The reason is that there is a ton of polemical and outright false info out there on this subject, especially since 9/11, acting like students are being proselytized to convert to Islam if the info isn't negative enough (by this they mean "accurate"). Topics such as *jihad*, women and *shariah*, to say nothing of terrorism, are among the hot-button items of course. I am far less concerned about how the

coverage affects minority--Muslim students than I am over how it impacts attitudes in the US generation after generation.

After receiving this email I felt disheartened. As a member of a minority community of interpretation I have struggled in Sunni-dominated spaces in which I experienced silencing and marginality. I allowed myself the naïve hope that in academia, marginalized voices and experiences would be welcomed and encouraged. Although this scholar's unfavorable view on the value of my work was discouraging, it did illuminate the problem space, which I describe through the often-used analogy of being between a rock and a hard place. In other words, the senior scholars comments about my research revealed the tension of minority communities of interpretation who find themselves between *Islamophobia* (a rock), and intra-Muslim tensions (a hard place). In the following section, I will describe this tension.

Islamophobia and Muslim Identity

After the attacks of September 11th, 2001, Muslim communities across the U.S. learned about the importance of Muslim Patriotic P.R. (public relations) (Abu El Haj, 2006). Flags went up in homes and in front of Islamic Centers, as many Muslim communities and families grappled with presenting their Muslim identity to their friends, neighbors, and co-workers. The media coverage of Islam and Muslims continues to reinforce that Islam is a religion of extremism and violence (Friedlander, 2012). Mainstream news channels like CNN hold debates as to whether Islam promotes violence (Sandmeyer, 2014). Pundits use examples of oppressive laws in totalitarian regimes as evidence of Islam's inherent violence. Bolstered by a centuries old rhetoric demonizing

Islam and Muslims, Western policies have successfully framed Islam as antithetical to Western democracy (Said, 2003).

Before continuing to describe the contemporary context in which this study is embedded, it is important to acknowledge that Islamophobia, a term used regularly in this dissertation, is not a Post-9/11 phenomenon. According to the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project (IRDP, n.d.) at the University of California, Berkeley's Center For Race and Gender, Islamophobia, "was first introduced as a concept in a 1991 Runnymede Trust Report", and stemmed from the "context of Muslims in the UK". According to the IRDP, The Runnymede Trust Report outlined the following beliefs as part of an Islamophobia framework:

- Islam is monolith and cannot adapt to new realities
- Islam does not share common values with other major faiths
- Islam as a religion is inferior to the West. It is archaic, barbaric, and irrational
- Islam is a religion of violence and supports terrorism.
- Islam is a violent political ideology

Since this dissertation refers to Islamophobia in a curricular and cultural context, it is important to clarify its use. The aspect of Islamophobia which is most often addressed in this dissertation is the first precept that, "Islam is a monolith and cannot adapt to new realities". Heretofore, the use of the term Islamophobia is referring to the definition above.

Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations, arguably one of the most influential discourses promoting Islamophobia, was published in 1993, and has been incredibly effective in oversimplifying entire civilizations (Said, 2001). Despite Huntington's broad-

brush picture of Muslims, popular discourse has evolved, ever so slightly, to bi-furcating the category of Muslim into what Mahmood Mamdani called, “good Muslim” and “bad Muslim” (2002). This paradigm helps distinguish Boko Haram from the Islamic Community Center down the street. Yet, it remains the responsibility of Muslim individuals and communities to demonstrate whether they fit into the good Muslim or bad Muslim category. After what is often referred to as acts of Muslim terrorism, there is a public and media outcry for Muslims to denounce the acts of terror, thus aligning with good Muslim.

Given the narrow template of good Muslim or bad Muslim, Muslim communities are constricted in identifying themselves within an imposed paradigm. However, many in the Muslim community have welcomed the curiosity of non-Muslims as an opportunity to educate others about Islam and to build bridges across faiths. This platform for newfound curiosity has given every Muslim, desired or not, a platform for Muslim ambassadorship. The email response from my senior colleague reiterated this responsibility by emphasizing that correcting the misperceptions of non-Muslims about Islam ought to be the number one priority of scholars working in the area of curriculum on Islam. Although it is imperative to challenge stereotypes of Muslims and Islam, it is important to recognize that a single narrative used to define Muslims, will continue to contribute to narrow notions of who Muslims are.

Minorities within Minorities. The considerable pressure on Muslims to respond with a single narrative to the “what are you question” (Sarroub, 2005) often erases diversity within Muslim communities. As Sarroub (2005) explained, the “what are you question” is used by non-Muslim students to gauge the national loyalty of Muslim

students. Islamophobia, however, is not the only limiting force having a negative impact on Muslims from minority communities of interpretation. The dominant Sunni interpretations, which prevail inside the larger Muslim community, bolstered by histories of violence and cooperation, are taken for granted as the only interpretations of Islam. The painful histories of tension and periods of peace, still relevant today, complicate the singularity with which Muslims from minority communities of interpretation respond to the non-Muslim public. One of the few scholars studying the contemporary Shia in the U.S., Liyakatali Takim, explained a phenomenon, which is now circulating around social media as *Shiaphobia* (Hussain, 2015). Takim unpacked this phenomenon further when he explained; “Shi'is complain that their precepts and praxis are attacked more by Sunnis than by non-Muslims” (2000, p. 470). The marginality and persecution experienced in countries of origin remain relevant to the identities of transnational and immigrant communities (Abu El-Haj & Bonet, 2011), and sectarian-violence is no exception. It is important to note that the question ‘whose Islam’ is likely to arise more often for Muslims from minority communities of interpretation, rather than with dominant-identity Muslims. As a side note, the term minority communities of interpretation will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Dictated by the nature of privilege, those who are the ‘mythical norm’ don’t always recognize that their experiences are not universal (Lorde, 1995).

Cultural Politics and Curriculum

A bulk of this chapter has been dedicated to outlining the social constraints on Muslim identity in the U.S. vis-à-vis cultural politics. Why is it important then to ground the problem space of this research in cultural politics when this dissertation investigated

experiences of Social Studies curriculum? Henry Giroux (1979) responded directly to this question by explaining “curriculum itself is viewed as a selection from the larger culture” (p.251). Michael Apple (1996), along with Giroux and other critical curriculum scholars have been preoccupied with asking Herbert Spencer’s (1859) seminal question, “What knowledge is of most worth?” (Apple, 2000, p.44). This question calls for the necessity of a relational power analysis in curriculum studies. Apple (1996) expanded on the role of power in curriculum studies in the following,

Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing the texts and classrooms of a nation...it is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize people (p.22).

Apple reminded us that curriculum is not only influenced by popular culture, it is also shaped by politics, or in other words by contestations over power. School curriculum is responsible for teaching narratives of the national story and national values, and therefore becomes a proxy-site for “the culture wars”(Zimmerman, 2002), whereby there is a constant struggle around questions of inclusion and legitimacy in the curriculum.

Though several interests perennially contest curriculum, it is “predominantly constitutive of the knowledge and values of particular interests and power groups” (Kanu, 2006, p. 5). Those holding institutional power shape curriculum such that curriculum contributes to reinforcing existing power structures (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 1979). In order to understand curriculum on Islam then, it is essential to first analyze the ways in which discourse on Islam exists in contemporary U.S. cultural politics. Islam, as I argue in Chapter Two, is a highly contested religion and curricular topic, and as such, is mired in

political rhetoric. In order to avoid relying on popular conceptions of Islam, the next section highlights my perspectives on various terminologies used in this dissertation.

Grounding Terminology and Concepts

Before discussing the theoretical framework or data in this study, there are three key terms I use throughout the paper that require explanation: Muslim, Communities of Interpretation, and Flat Muslim. By moving beyond a definition and discussing the nuances inherent in each of these key terms, I hope to clarify my perspective as one interested in complexity.

Muslims. The purpose of this section is to highlight the precarious, fluid, and constructed nature of identity throughout time, in this case Muslim identity. By understanding the impact history has on the way we presently view the identities of people, questions of how to approach teaching ‘the other’ become more complex.

In March of 2008, Senator (and Presidential Nominee) John McCain, commented on the terrorist threat in Iraq by stating, “Al-Qaida is going back into Iran and is receiving training and are coming back into Iraq from Iran” (Herbert, 2008). Senator McCain repeated this view during several public appearances. He was finally corrected by Senator Lieberman at a press conference and quickly edited his statement by saying “Iran is training extremists, but not Al Qaida”. McCain’s comment was considered embarrassing because he demonstrated that he did not understand that Al-Qaida, a deeply anti-Shia organization, would not seek help from Iran, a Shia-state. McCain’s remarks reflected the majority of the American population, who say they know little or nothing at all about the religion of Islam (Pew Research Center, 2010).

On the surface, McCain's gaffe was concerning because of the ignorance it demonstrates on the part of our political leaders. More alarming is the simplicity with which the so-called Muslim World is seen-divided between Shia, Sunni and sometimes Kurd. Though these divisions are discussed, the complex and intersecting histories of each community are not discussed. Examining popular discourse reveals the consequence of a decontextualized understanding of the so-called 'Muslim-world'. A group of commentators sometimes called "evangelical atheists" (Gray, 2015), are especially guilty of using decontextualized understandings of religion. With guests, Dr. Cornel West and Mos Def, Bill Maher, on his show, *Real Time with Bill Maher*, typified the evangelical atheist agenda which touts the "liberal values to which western societies subscribe today – while looking with contempt upon "backward" cultures that have not abandoned religion" (Gray, 2015, para. 4). Maher argued that, " The reason nothing can ever move forward in Iraq, let's be real, is because of religion. Because there are two sects and something that happened 1400 years ago they are still beefing about...religion is the root of the problem" (September, 7, 2007). The absence of attention to cultural and historical development in discourses about Muslims, fuels an essentialized, seemingly objective, understanding of Muslims. This creates a situation in which Muslims are narrowly and definitively conceptualized by the non-Muslim gaze. The confining ways in which the Muslim-other is defined is discussed in Chapter 2 through a postcolonial lens.

Who Is A Muslim?: A Qurannic Perspective. When Islam was founded with the first revelation to Muhammed in 632 CE, the message was addressed to a variety of audiences. Some revelations were addressed to humanity, other messages were addressed to believers, and others to the people of the book. The word *Muslim* was used in the

revelation to refer to individuals such as Prophet Abraham and Prophet Moses, who were all spreading monotheism before the revelations of Islam. In fact, Islam literally means the one who submits to the divine, and is not in direct reference to any particular religion (Asani, 2011). The adherents of Islam are Muslims, and both the words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' have the same root. There is evidence suggesting that the religion we call Islam today was understood, during the time of revelation, as a continuation of monotheism rather than as a separate codified religion. Chief among this evidence is a verse from the Quran that states, "Say: we believe in God and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and in what was given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them and to Him [God] do we submit" (Quran, 3:84).

Although they may seem minor, the meanings assigned to these foundational terms (Islam, Muslim, etc.) are important to contextualize historically, and not to simply accept them without thinking about their origin and development over time. In contemporary times, Islam is conceptualized as a distinct established religion, which differs from so-called Western religions, such as Christianity. In fact, much of the Muslim PR project has been to draw commonalities between Christianity and Islam, by focusing on how many religious figures are shared between Christianity and Islam, all the while reifying the boundaries between distinct religions. Providing an understanding of Islam as a continuation of monotheism, rather than as a codified religion in itself, is not meant to discount the significance Islam holds in the lives of communities around the world. It is instead to highlight that even the most fundamental, or 'basic' knowledge we have is subject to historic and current epistemic struggles.

Communities of Interpretation. The term Communities of Interpretation (CoI) is a term used by Islamic scholar, Farhad Daftary (2004) to refer to the emergence of the Shia and Sunni communities in Islam. My use of this term refers to all communities of interpretation within Islam. This study is particularly interested in those Muslims who are from Minority Communities of Interpretation (MCoIs). I intentionally use CoI as an alternative to the label ‘sectarian’ which often carries the sentiment of a central and authentic interpretation, with several peripheral sectarian interpretations. In an effort not to center certain interpretations as dominant, I use the term CoI, which describes a more pluralistic range of communities constituting the larger Muslim community. The two major CoIs within Islam are Shia and Sunni, and within each larger category are several smaller communities of interpretation; each with their separate histories of fissures, and their own unique and overlapping traditions and rituals. For the purposes of this study there are three minority communities of interpretation represented in the student sample: Ithnaashari and Nizari Ismaili (both Shia) and Ahmadiyya (Sunni).

A Brief History of CoIs. Contrary to what the ahistorical coverage of contemporary Shia-Sunni violence might imply, the split between Shia and Sunni did not happen suddenly through a violent clash. Instead, the identity of the Shia was consolidated many decades after Prophet Muhammed’s death (Lalani, 2000). The split between the Shia and Sunni was not simply a political squabble over leadership. It was a foundational theological disagreement where the Shia claimed that leadership, both spiritual and political, had been divinely ordained to continue through the Prophet’s lineage, while the Sunni claimed that leadership after the death of the Prophet should be determined through election, and should be exclusively political (Lalani, 2000). The role

of *The Imam* is central in Shia Islam. Imam or guide, in Shia Islam, unlike in Sunni Islam, is a post of all-encompassing, divinely guided leadership (Nanji, 1996).

Ahmadiyya. The Ahmadiyya community, arguably the most persecuted minority community within Islam, officially began in 1889 in the Punjab region of India. The founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, Mirza Ghulan Ahmad (1835-1908) claimed that he was a prophet, which prompted many Muslim scholars to decree a fatwa¹ of heresy against Ahmad (Valentine, 2014). Ahmadiyya's are considered to be non-Muslims in Pakistan, and accurate numbers of Ahmadiyya around the world are unknown, but are estimated at 12 million (Valentine 2014). The Ahmadiyya, unlike other Muslims, recognize prophets after Prophet Muhammed, whom most Muslims believe is the last and final Prophet. They adhere to many of the beliefs and practices of other Sunni Muslims but have controversial interpretations around the meaning of *succession*, *jihad*, and Jesus (Valentine, 2014).

Ithnaasharis and Nizari Ismailis. Both Ithanaashari and Ismaili Shias are considered to be Imami Shias, since they followed the central doctrine of Imami thought which was codified during the time of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq in the 700s. After the death of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, there were several disputes concerning succession. A faction of al-Sadiq's followers acknowledged his son, Musa ibn Jafar al-Kazim. Though there were several more fractures concerning the issue of succession, the majority of the followers of Musa al-Kazim are known today as the Ithanaashari or the Twelvers because they believe in a line of twelve Imams. For the Ithnaashari, the twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn al-

¹ “A fatwa is an Islamic legal pronouncement, issued by an expert in religious law (mufti), pertaining to a specific issue, usually at the request of an individual or judge to resolve an issue where Islamic jurisprudence is unclear” (Kabbani, para. 2, n.d.).

Hasan, has been in occultation (hiding) since 873, and the Twelvers await his return, when he will serve as the final Imam. “Twelver Shiism has been the official religion of Iran since 1501” (Nanji, 1996). The Ismailis, after the death of al-Sadiq, followed his sons, Ismail ibn Jafar. The Ismailis experienced periods of great oppression where their Imams lived in hiding, and periods of great success, as exemplified by the Fatimid Caliphate centered in Cairo from 909-1171 (Nanji, 1996). The Ismailis were eventually fractured many times. “Currently, the bulk of the Ismailis of the world, who belong to the majority Nizari branch, recognize as their forty-ninth present and living imam, His Highness Karim Aga Khan” (Nanji, 1996).

Flat-Muslims. The term *flat-Muslim* is used to denote an over-simplistic, under-nuanced, dehumanizing conception of ‘Muslim’. Stemming from a deep-rooted colonial impulse, the representation of the ‘other’, in this case the Muslim-other, lies in the imagination of the colonizer (Tate, 2005). The de-humanization and flattening of Muslims and Islam was exemplified in a recent segment of *Real Time With Bill Maher*, which went viral. In this debate Sam Harris, noted atheist and author, made arguments claiming that the religion of Islam was inherently violent. The dialogue below (Maher, 2014) between Harris and actor, Ben Affleck captured the tenor of the debate.

Harris: “We have been sold this meem of Islamophobia, where every criticism of the Doctrine of Islam gets conflated with bigotry towards Muslims as people.”

Affleck: “Are you the person who understands the officially codified doctrine of Islam?”

Harris: “I’m actually well educated on this topic... We have to be able to criticize bad ideas... Islam at the moment is the mother load of bad ideas.”

Implicit in Harris' argument is the assumption that Islam lives as a doctrine independent of its practitioners. Affleck subtly challenged Harris on his assumption by sarcastically asking, "Are you the person who understands the officially codified doctrine of Islam?" Harris, claiming to be "well educated", reiterated his understanding of Islam as suspended in time and space when he said, "There are hundreds of millions of Muslims who are nominal Muslims, who don't take the faith seriously, who don't want to kill apostates, who are horrified by ISIS, and we need to defend these people and prop them up, and let them reform their faith." Here, Harris equated Islam with violence, reifying the assumption that there is in fact one authentic Islam, and people either practice it or they don't.

Soon after this segment aired, CNN invited prominent scholar of religion, Reza Aslan to respond to the question, 'Does Islam promote violence?' In response, Aslan said, "Islam doesn't promote violence or peace, Islam is just a religion, and like every religion in the world, it depends on what you bring to it." Harris and Aslan's conceptions of religion and adherents are starkly different. Harris, in his comments, reduced Muslims and Islam to a very narrow ideology, ignoring the rich and dynamic ways Muslims live Islam in everyday society. Divorcing people from their complexity, and in essence flattening them, is an act of violence against their humanity (Taylor, 1994).

Though it is critical to contextualize the collective religious histories of MCoI, as I have attempted to do in the last section, two important points must be made. Firstly, it is essential to note that within these CoIs, individuals, families, and small communities, have a range of beliefs and practices, and that membership to any CoI does not amount to unequivocal loyalty and agreement with a singular interpretation of faith. Secondly, in

this study I do not wish to simply draw attention to the minoritized status of many CoIs within the larger Muslim *Ummah*; instead, I aim to analyze the curricular experiences of girls from MCoIs within the larger context of Islamophobia. In other words, I am particularly interested in how girls from MCoI respond to curriculum on Islam while traversing between a rock and a hard-place.

Research Design

This qualitative study comprises of two sub-studies. One sub-study focused on the curricular experiences of Social Studies teachers and the other focused on the curricular experiences of Muslim girls from MCoIs. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to gain a better understanding of the ways in which Social Studies teachers and girls from MCoIs experienced the curriculum on Islam. The following research questions have guided this study:

1. What are teachers' reported experiences of curriculum on Islam?
 - a. What approaches did teachers report using in shaping curriculum on Islam?
 - b. What factors and considerations influence how they approach the curriculum?
2. What are students' reported experiences of curriculum on Islam?
 - a. How do students report positioning their 'minority within minority' status in relation to the curriculum on Islam?
 - b. What are student perspectives of the curriculum on Islam?

This six-chapter dissertation aims to respond thoughtfully to these research questions. Chapter One clarifies the contextual landscape grounding the study. Chapter

Two reviews relevant literature and provides a conceptual framework within which this study is situated. Chapter Three describes the dissertation study design and methodology. Chapter Four discusses the findings based on teacher data, and Chapter Five discusses the findings based on student data. The final chapter, Chapter Six, discusses the findings of this study, and explores its implications before positing questions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature and Conceptual Framework

All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation... for interpretations depend very much on who the interpreter is, who he or she is addressing, what his or her purpose is, at what historical moment the interpretation takes place.

~ Edward W. Said

This chapter has two main sections. The first section discusses literature on curriculum and Muslim youth, and the second section discusses the conceptual framework for this dissertation. The review of literature is divided into four subsections: (1) curriculum; (2) World History and the curriculum on Islam; (4) religious literacy; and, (3) literature on Muslim youth in the educational context. The conceptual framework section of this chapter is divided into two main subsections: (1) postcolonial theory, and (2) standpoint epistemology.

Curriculum

For decades now, curriculum scholars have struggled to agree on a concise definition of curriculum. Some have emphasized the central role of subject matter in defining curriculum, whereas others have contended that curriculum is a mechanism to inculcate and maintain societal status quo in students (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1996). I find a definition of curriculum, focusing on interactions and dialogism, most compelling. Influenced by Charles Schwab's (1969, 1971, 1973) framework of the four

commonplaces of curriculum: students, teachers, subject matter and milieu, He and colleagues (2008) defined curriculum as, “a dynamic interplay between experiences of students, teachers, parents, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders; content knowledge and pedagogical premises and practices; and cultural, linguistic, sociopolitical, and geographical contexts” (p.223). This definition suggests that curriculum is always fluid and can be experienced differently through diverse standpoints (Au, 2012).

As previously mentioned, curriculum is well documented and often critiqued for being an unwieldy field of study because it is comprised of infinite contents, and is thus ill defined (Eisner, 1965). Though numerous scholars have offered a plethora of frameworks with which to understand curriculum (He *et al.*, 2008), it continues to remain loosely bound and elusive. Curriculum, after all, does not only encompass what is manifest, but it also encompasses what is absent. This is illustrated through Eisner’s (1985) framework of the three levels of curriculum in schools: the explicit, implicit and null. The explicit curriculum is the curriculum communicated directly to the students, whereas the implicit curriculum describes the messages, which are indirectly communicated to students. Many critical curriculum scholars, drawing from feminist studies, cultural studies, poststructuralist, neo-Marxism, and post-colonial studies, are interested in investigating what gets taught in the curriculum, and who makes the decision (Luke & Gore, 1992; Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001; Pinar, 2006). These critical curriculum studies scholars have found particular resonance with Eisner’s third category of null curriculum, which describes that which is left outside the curriculum box (Apple, 2004; Crocco, 2001; Noddings, 1992; Schmeichel, 2011). For the purposes of

this study, I investigated student and teacher experiences with curriculum on Islam at all three levels, and aim to contribute to the field of critical curriculum studies.

The field of critical curriculum studies understands contestations of power as deeply embedded in curriculum. Wayne Au (2012) noted that critical curriculum scholars, influenced by the postmodern turn in curriculum studies, “express intent of explicitly examining the positionality and subjectivity of both knowledge and educational actors (Kafala & Cary, 2006; Slatter, 2006)” (p.2). The next section discusses the literature on teacher and student experiences of curriculum, which are the focus of this study.

Student Experiences of Curriculum. Despite the inclusion of student experiences in empirical research on curriculum studies, students are all too often seen as passive recipients of curriculum (He et. al, 2008). In the last three decades, scholarship on student experiences of curriculum has increased, yet more research is needed in order to shed light, not only on the experiences of students with curriculum, but also on the contributions of students to curriculum inquiry. Prominent scholars of the Social Studies urge a better understanding of the role students’ identities and affiliations play in the way they make sense of Social Studies curriculum (Barton & McCully, 2010; Epstein, 1998, 2001, 2009; Mosborg, 2002). These scholars have established that students’ identities mediate the ways in which they interpret the curriculum. Additionally, scholars of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995), including researchers of students’ Funds of Knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), have shown how students’ already-existing (pre-instructional) sets of knowledge might be mobilized to help them learn the curriculum.

Teacher Experiences of Curriculum. Despite all of the institutional constraints inherent in the educational system, teachers make decisions about content selection on a daily basis (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig, 2012). Teachers make curriculum decisions for a variety of reasons, including their familiarity with content knowledge, their social and political commitments, and a variety of structural constraints (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2008; Porter et al., 2011). Because curriculum involves fluid interaction between people, things, and processes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992), teachers' curricular choices should always be contextualized. Though teachers and students, both contributors to the curriculum, are the subjects of focus in this study, it is important to remember that both are operating within a sociocultural classroom context, which is bolstered by an official curriculum. The official curriculum is discussed in the next section.

Official Curriculum. Official Curriculum (Salinas & Castro, 2010) is an educational term derived from Michael Apple's concept of Official Knowledge (2000). Official Knowledge is the response to Herbert Spencer's (1911) question referred to in Chapter One, that is, "what knowledge is of most worth?" (Apple, 2000, p.44). Apple (2000) saw the question of 'what knowledge' directly linked with the question "*Whose* knowledge is of most worth?"(p.44). Preoccupied by questions of power and dominance, official knowledge provides an analysis over the politics of curriculum at various levels (Apple, 2000, p.10). Within the Social Studies literature, the official curriculum has included classroom narratives, themes, lessons, standards, and text, which privilege dominate perspectives and subject-positions while marginalizing dissent and difference (Apple, 2000; Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995; Salinas & Castro, 2010). Though the official curriculum has been interpreted as a tool of dominance, "we cannot assume that what is

‘in’ the text is actually taught” (Apple, 1992, p.10). The next section discusses World History curriculum, the subject where Islam is most often taught in high school Social Studies. As will be discussed in further detail, Western-centric models of World History permeate the official curriculum.

World History and Curriculum on Islam

World History courses vary greatly across U.S. public schools. While a neoliberal ethos dictates international economic mobility for a professional class, it also demands a focus on American supremacy (Giroux, 2002). The conversation of how World History should be taught in schools is not simply a deliberation involving educators who decide what our students ought to know to be considered educated. What gets taught in schools is informed by “the culture wars” (Zimmerman, 2002) determining the imaginary nature of “Americans” and “America”. The World History curriculum taught in K-12 curriculum therefore is generally what Dunn describes as an approach “particularly concerned about history and social science standards as expressions of national values and purpose” (2010, p. 185). Dunn in his study of approaches to World History curriculum found that there are four approaches used by teachers of World History (2000).

The first approach, referred to as the Western Heritage Model, strives to inculcate a sense of shared Western values, emphasizing individuality and freedom, and prioritizes the contributions and narratives stemming from the West, while excluding the influence and narratives of the non-West. This approach to the teaching of World History is championed by courses in Western Civilization. The second model is called the Different Cultures Model, which reinforces a sense of shared Western values, and adds to it by

representing various cultures and their inherent traits. Although this model populates World History courses with varied material, it reifies the assumption of distinct cultures with distinct and inherent values. The third model is called the Contemporary Studies model, which is committed to a non Western-centric worldview, and uses history as a reference in understanding contemporary world problems. The final model is called the Patterns of Change Model, which focuses on change throughout time and place without a singular focus on any one location. Instead of describing a culture or historic event, it seeks to investigate how and why certain changes occurred.

After a review of textbooks and World History standards, Dunn (2000) concluded that a mixture of the Western Heritage Model and the Different Cultures Model were the most predominant approaches used in World History courses. This mixture is reflective of the current neoliberal push toward nationalism tempered with mainstream multiculturalism, which does not adequately deconstruct notions of American supremacy and instead compounds the existing dominant narrative (Apple, 1999; Giroux, 2002). Dunn argued that although the study of Anthropology has contradicted this assumption, K-12 World History curriculum, largely operates on the premise that each “ ‘civilizations possesses distinctive, indeed inherent traditions that emerged largely out of the operation of mechanism internal to the particular unit” (p.187, 2010). In a curricular climate where cultures are viewed as primordially idiosyncratic, Islamophobia, with its presentation of Islam as a monolithic faith, thrives. The next section will discuss the literature on Islam in World History curriculum.

Islam in World History Curriculum. A position statement of the National Council of the Social Studies (1998) stated that, “knowledge about religions is not only a

characteristic of an educated person but is absolutely necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity” (para. 4), and that “knowledge of religious differences and the role of religion in the contemporary world can help promote understanding and alleviate prejudice” (para. 4). Given the understanding that curriculum is selected and not neutral, it is important to query the NCSS statement, and wonder: whose knowledge on religion? Susan Douglass and Ross Dunn (2003) in their article *Interpreting Islam in American Schools*, assisted in formulating a response to this question when they undertook a textual analysis of how Islam is presented in textbooks. They stated that “there is no doubt that since the 1960s American educators have made enormous progress in reintegrating education about religion into the schools” (p.57), while they also asserted the need for more robust and meaningful coverage of Islam as a curricular topic. In their textual analysis of World History textbooks, Douglass and Dunn found that: (1) students do not receive enough coverage on the topic of Islam, with the average student spending, “just a few weeks in twelve years of schooling” (p. 57) on Islam, and consistent with Dunn’s general findings on World History textbooks, (2) Islam was represented as distinct, homogeneous and static (p.58).

Douglass and Dunn’s findings were echoed in Liz Jackson’s (2014) book, *Muslims and Islam in U.S. Education*. After having a thoughtful discussion about the institutional constraints in Social Studies curriculum, Jackson observed that,

the potential for exploring any topic in history or geography is seemingly endless, but with a small amount of time allocated to these subjects, there is a risk of trying to teach too much content knowledge, which can result in a focus on facts over development of skills (p.77).

Jackson, much like Dunn and Douglass (2003) found that even the “fact” driven curriculum, which was all there was time for, was positioned from a Western-centric point of view.

In describing the official curriculum on Islam, Jackson explained that,

What goes on in the Texas textbook approval debates is less about what knowledge is correct or incorrect, than about whose views of orientation should be represented, as well as the ends of social studies education in terms of the development of attitudes about the world(p.84).

Though this example is specific to Texas, it is nationally significant given that “Texas, Florida, and California account for one-third of total textbook sales (Finn & Ravitch, 2004)” and therefore, “their approval processes are consequential for the whole country” (Jackson, 2014, p.84). Another driving force in the official curriculum on Islam, is the extent to which textbooks are relied upon in many secondary classrooms, particularly when teachers are unfamiliar with the topic at hand. Statistics suggest “on average 75% to 90% of class time is spent using textbooks in public secondary schools” (Jackson, 2014, p.100). Though scholars have identified several issues in World History curriculum, there remain scholars who offer suggestions for educators to help shape meaningful Social Studies curriculum on religion. The next section will explore various approaches to learning about Islam through the literature on religious literacy.

Religious Literacy

In the 1963 Supreme Court case, *Abington School District v. Schempp*, the Court ruled that teaching about religions in school was an essential component of basic education. With increasing religious diversity in U.S. classrooms (Nash & Bishop, 2009)

this mandate is more important than ever before, yet religious illiteracy continues to be a widespread problem among the U.S. population (Pew, 2009). Before preceding it is important to acknowledge that different scholars in the field use the term religious literacy differently. The following section explores three authors' conceptions of religious literacy.

Robert Nash and Penny Bishop (2009) in their book, *Teaching Adolescents Religious Literacy in a Post-9/11 World*, defined religious literacy as “bringing adolescent and their teachers into the 21st century of teeming religious diversity”, and continued to describe the skills and knowledge involved in religious literacy as “the whats and whys of differing religious and spiritual beliefs...transcending religious stereotyping” (p.9) and as a result, religious literacy will “bring peace to the individual, and to an embattled world as well” (p.9). In order to demonstrate religious literacy in practical terms, in their book, Nash and Bishop (2009) provided narratives of “those religious worldviews that are most visible to the world scene at this time in history” (p.14). After each narrative, the authors then explored different worldviews through components of Smart’s (2000) “six dimensions” of religion. Nash and Bishop focused on the following dimensions: narrative, doctrinal, ethical and ritual. Ultimately, Nash and Bishop called for an approach to teaching and learning about religion, which is comparative in nature.

Diane Moore (2007), in her book *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education*, provided her definition of religious literacy by explaining,

Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place (p. 56).

Moore's definition of literacy provided a nuanced and rigorous standard, which focused on multiple lenses of analysis, and presented religion as shifting over time. In contrast, Nash and Bishop's definition, which asked students to explore "the whats and whys" of each religion, inadvertently assumed that religions are static across time and place. Ali Asani (2011), echoed Moore, by viewing religious literacy as an understanding of "the dynamic nature of religion as it responds to the ever-changing cultural matrixes in which it is located" (p.26). Moore and Asani viewed religion as dynamic and believed it should be taught as such. In addition, Asani believed that a religiously literate person should be "asking crucial questions such as 'Which Islam? Whose Islam? In what context?'" (p.27). Though Islamophobia and religious illiteracy existed in the U.S. prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001, the distinctive anti-Islam and anti-Muslim response, has given a new meaning and urgency for addressing critical religious literacy (Asani, 2011; Moore, 2007).

Both Asani and Moore outlined ways in which religion can be taught in order to promote religious literacy. Moore (2007) presented seven common approaches to

teaching about religion in schools. Moore claimed that five were commonly practiced approaches used in classrooms today. It is important to note that these approaches overlap and multiple approaches might be used in any given curriculum. These approaches include *intentionally or unintentionally sectarian approaches* where certain sectarian perspectives are privileged over others, the *phenomenological approach* where religion is taught as a distinct phenomenon separate from history, sociology, etc. The last two of the common approaches were the *literacy approach*, which apply literary analysis to religious text and the *historical approach*, which takes a historic understanding to the development of religion. Moore provided an explanation of a *multicultural approach* to religion, which focuses on attending to the diversity of students in the classroom. Moore also pointed out that while a multicultural education approach to education has become increasingly popular, religion is often marginalized as a topic in multicultural education. The seventh approach that Moore offered, which she ultimately promoted, was a *cultural studies approach* to religion. A cultural studies approach would utilize multidisciplinary methods in studying religion and would view all knowledge as situated instead of objective.

Ali Asani, condensing Diana Moore's framework of seven approaches to teaching religion, presented what he saw as the two most common approaches to teaching about religion: the textual approach and the devotional approach. The textual approach to teaching about religion gives primacy to a religion's scripture/s as the source for an authentic understanding about religion. The most obvious pitfall of this approach is that any given scripture, as in any literature, can only be understood through an interpretive lens. Therefore, trying to find authentic meaning in scripture can be a dangerous

endeavor in building an academic understanding of a religion. The second approach, the devotional approach, Asani explained, is the most common approach used by teachers in classrooms. The devotional approach associates religion with the beliefs and practices of its practitioners. The pitfall of this approach is less obvious than with the textual approach. Associating a religion with beliefs and practices can lead students to understand religious expressions outside of a cultural context. Using a devotional approach often results in favoring a dominant expression of religion over marginalized expressions of religion. Furthermore, religious rituals can be seen less as expressions of faith, and more as the definition of faith itself.

At a recent workshop, I asked teachers, “What is Islam”? A teacher confidently answered, “The five pillars”. I wondered whether this teacher would have responded in the same way had she known that every Muslim community does not practice the five pillars in the same way, with some communities recognizing more than five. To avoid seeking an essentialist, “authentic” understanding of any religion, both Moore and Asani promoted a *cultural studies approach* to religion, which Asani referred to as a contextual approach (2011). According to Moore (2007), a cultural studies approach to religion includes the following six features: (1) the approach be multidisciplinary to reflect the various ways in which religion influences numerous spheres of life, (2) disciplinary lenses cannot be removed from one another when studying a phenomenon, so one cannot consider a political dimension of a certain event without considering the influence of a religious dimension, (3) all claims to knowledge are situated, and cannot be considered as objective, (4) acknowledging that, in addition to knowledge, the interpreter is also situated in their positionality, (5) a power analysis, exploring dominant and marginalized

perspectives, is necessary, and (6) that education is inherently political and that individuals and structures have motivations that need to be made transparent.

Asani and Moore's championing of the cultural studies approach responded to a need, which has been noted among Social Studies scholars. That is, Social Studies teachers "deal with societies and cultures in a monolithic, superficial, and consensual fashion, keeping issues of difference and perspective to a minimum (Crocco, 2005, p.564). Margret Crocco in her article, *Teaching Shabanu: the challenges of using world literature in the US social studies classroom* (2005), posited that Social Studies teachers "avoid multiple perspectives"(p. 564) because,

the pressure of high-stakes testing puts a premium on coverage of content in a unified, linear, narrative fashion; the complexities of dealing with issues from multiple perspectives extends the curriculum significantly; teachers may have a felt need to maintain an 'official' posture towards the national story that does not undermine what they consider the 'patriotic' demands of social studies curriculum (Crocco, 2005, p.564)

Crocco's (2005) critique of Social Studies teachers is mirrored in the "thin" curricular approach Nash and Bishop extend: of understanding the "whats and whys of religion". As Crocco explained, "they (teachers) consider religion and caste as singular features of South Asian cultures, but limit further complexity by avoiding coverage of the intersection of religion, race, gender, and region in shaping human experiences " (p.564). Asani (2011) warned that an under-nuanced approach to teaching religion would result in religions being "personified" (p.27) or "given agency by declaring, for instance, that "Islam says..." or "according to Islam..." (p.27). The cultural studies approach, which

understands religion through the experiences of people, adopts an academic perspective to the study of religion; rather than sanctifying religion and teaching it as sacred and self-sustaining.

Just as critical curriculum theorists are constantly asking the question of “Whose curriculum”, critical religious literacy theorists are asking the question, “Whose Islam”? Though much of what has been discussed is applicable to the curriculum on any religion, this study is specifically focused on curriculum on Islam. As discussed in Chapter One, the representations of Islam have been skewed and ill informed by various cultural sources. Since cultural politics directly impacts education, it is important to discuss the uniqueness of Islam in the curriculum, based on its controversial status.

Islam as a Curricular Controversy. Some scholars have suggested that although teaching about religion is sanctioned and encouraged in the U.S. educational system; the tense relationship between church and state minimizes the coverage of religion in classrooms (Kincheloe 2001; Noddings, 1993; Nord, 1995). In addition, teachers have anxieties around teaching about religion “in public schools for fear of being accused of proselytizing” (Jackson, 2014, p.81). Given the current political climate, in which widespread Islamophobia exists; Islam is particularly controversial as a curricular topic (Jackson, 2014). This is evidenced by several cases where parents around the nation have objected to the inclusion of Islam in World History textbooks (Radu, 2004; Sewall, 2003). Most of these objections are of Islam being portrayed as a peaceful religion, which does not promote terrorism (Jackson, 2014). The argument against Islam in these cases has been that students are misled into believing that Islam is peaceful and similar to Christianity. Though the cases of objection to how Islam is included in the curriculum

have been few; it is important not to dismiss them as culturally insignificant. These contestations are directly related to how Islam “is posited as most culturally “Other”, inimical to Western values and traditions in an essential clash of civilizations (see Lewis, 2002; Huntington, 1996; and for critique, Said, 2001; Mamdani, 2002, 2004)” (Abu El-Haj, 2006, p.20). The othering and ultimate dehumanization of Muslims has justified violence and hatred against Muslim-bodies and those perceived as Muslim-bodies (Abu El-Haj, 2006).

In her work on controversial issues in curriculum, Diana Hess (2009) distinguished between controversial topics, problems, and issues in order to clarify the scope of her work. Though Islam is a controversial topic, and is not an issue, I argue that there is a controversial issue behind what makes Islam a topic of controversy. The controversial issue involving Islam is the question, Should Muslims be considered as part of the “American” community? Within the confines of public school, this question would not likely be addressed directly. However, given that 25% of the U.S. population believes that Islam is a religion of hatred (CAIR, 2006), and that a majority of the U.S. population believes that Muslims are disproportionately prone to violence (Pew Research Center, 2006), this question looms in the background of classrooms as a taboo topic (Evans et al., 1999). The controversial nature of Islam as a curricular topic impacts the ways in which teachers approach the topic in the classroom.

Literature on religious literacy has addressed all religions similarly, not accounting for how controversy may impact the various approaches. Though a cultural studies approach is meant to address all faiths as dynamic, localized, and complex; it does not specifically address how controversy might impact the implementation of a cultural studies approach.

The controversial nature of Islam, as a topic, has received growing attention in curriculum studies. Following suite, the literature on Muslim youth in the educational context has also expanded. In the next section, this literature will be discussed.

Muslim Youth

In educational research over the last 10-years, there has been a growing literature-base on Muslim youth in the U.S. context. Though still burgeoning, most of the empirical research to date, with the exception of recent literature exploring citizenship and belonging of Muslim youth (Abu El-Haj & Bonet, 2011; Maira, 2009), has elaborated on topics of identity negotiation between ethnicity and religion, and on gender-based issues, particularly *hijab* (Abu El-Haj & Bonet, 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Studies focusing on Muslim, South Asian and Arab youth have solidly established frequent incidents of discrimination faced by Muslim youth in public schools (Ewing & Hoyler, 2008; Ghaffar-Kucher, 2009; Maira, 2004, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Empirical studies of Muslim youth have consistently acknowledged diversity, particularly ethnic and national diversity, within the Muslim community (Balsano & Sirin, 2007). Differences in communities of interpretation (CoIs) have been mentioned in passing as one of many significant identities Muslim youth hold (Leonard, 2005), but no study to date has analyzed how the "minority within a minority" status differentiates experiences of sectarian-minority Muslim youth from the experiences of dominant Sunni Muslims.

Though diverse communities of interpretation are mentioned in educational literature on Muslim youth, albeit in very cursory ways, the notion that U.S. Muslim youth “bridge these separate histories” (Leonard, 2005, p. 474), as has been suggested,

does not account for the possibility that common or dominant narratives may be publically appropriated for a variety of reasons, but are not necessarily privately accepted (Barton & McCully, 2010; Leonard, 2005). Research has uncovered the constant pressure facing Muslim youth in what Sarroub calls, the “what are you question”, compelling them to choose a solitary identity in order to respond to the demands of a public desire to gauge national loyalty (2005). The expression of a single identity, though limiting, has allowed Muslims to publically face Islamophobia in solidarity.

One of the primary reasons I included Muslim youth from three different minority CoIs is because I aim to complicate the Muslim subjectivity in the imagination of the dominant culture. Their experiences, which are often silenced or overlooked, provide texture to the ‘Muslim-American experience’. However, the inclusion of identity-based subjects runs the risk of reifying identities as “authentic” and fixed. I hope to reiterate that rather than simply call for recognition of differences, there is a deep need to acknowledge diversity, dynamism, and creativity as part of the discursive subject making process common across the human community.

Focus on Gender. Gender is an extremely salient subjectivity when considering the conception of Muslims in the American imagination. Women’s bodies have, in many ways, become a significant site where Muslims are determined as either ‘safe’ or a potential ‘threat’ to Western sensibilities. Similarly, gender performance and gendered behaviors have also been regulated by cultural gatekeepers from within the Muslim community, often landing Muslim women in the awkward position of being “safely suspended between mainstream normal” and “Muslim normal” (Mir, 2009, p. 250). Since Social Studies researchers have demonstrated that identities and student affiliations

greatly impact how students experience curriculum (Barton & McCully, 2010; Epstein, 1998, 2001, 2009); analyzing the narratives of Muslim who identify as girls distinctly from other genders, allows for a more nuanced understanding of how these highly scrutinized bodies experience the curriculum.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used to ground this study theorizes the concepts of identity and curriculum/knowledge using two related theories. First, postcolonial theory clarifies the ways in which identity, knowledge, and power shape the curriculum actors in this study and the curriculum itself. Second, standpoint epistemology, offers a frame with which to analyze the ways in which the curriculum actors (students and teachers) experience curriculum on Islam.

The Postcolonial Other. Postcolonial theory has been used in many academic disciplines and has had a wide range of meanings and applications. In order to understand postcolonial theory, it is important to first explore the way colonialism is conceptualized. According to Yatta Kanu (2006),

An overview of the field suggests that colonialism has been identified both as physical conquest and control of territories, as well as control of the mind and the conquered and subordinated in an imperative to ‘civilize’ the Other and keep the Other in a perpetual state of psychological subordination (p.9).

After broadly defining ‘colonialism’, Kanu goes on to explore the ‘post’ in postcolonial. She explained, “ Although the physical occupation and control of territories may end, the process of colonial cultural production and psychologization persist; a situation that provokes Stuart Hall’s (1996) oft-quoted concern: ‘When was the postcolonial?’” (p.9).

Kanu, echoing Hall's sentiments, claimed her understanding of postcolonial theory as the contemporary ways in which the "civilizing mission" (p.9) lives.

Building on Kanu's conception, Mohanty's definition of postcolonial focused on the structural ways in which the "civilizing mission" occurs. Mohanty defined her conception of postcolonial as "a relation of structural domination, and a discursive or political suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 61). In other words, a postcolonial lens analyzes a positioning of identities specifically, the centering of White middle-class, masculine identities, and the *otherizing* of all other identities (Asher, 2007; Ball, 2008). The representation and interpretation of the 'other' lies in the imagination of the colonizer, and 'difference' becomes ever more prominent and reductive (Tate, 2005). In this way, postcolonial theory is useful in theorizing curriculum on Islam given the orientalist principles by which the Muslim-body has been othered.

Post-Colonial Conceptions of Curriculum. Similar to the discussion on official knowledge, a post-colonial theory of education does not view curriculum, whether explicitly taught or implicitly existent (Eisner, 2004), as neutral. Post-colonial theorists argue that classrooms are "fundamentally political and cultural sites that represent accommodations and contestations over knowledge by differently empowered social constituencies" (Mohanty, 1997, p.16). By calling classrooms cultural sites, Mohanty reiterated what has been established in Chapter One; that is, classrooms are a proxy-site for the "culture wars". The accommodations and contestations Mohanty pointed to are systematic and are negotiated through constituencies who are not all afforded equal power. As a result of the power imbalance of various social constituencies, certain

knowledges are prioritized and featured in the curriculum, while other knowledges are marginalized. Joe Kincheloe (2001) reinforced this when he explained that, "any social studies knowledge presumes an epistemological stance" (p. 199). The question then remains: whose epistemological stance is embedded in social studies curriculum?

Utilizing a post-colonial lens on knowledge production reveals which episteme is featured in the classroom, as it interprets identities, behaviors, and thoughts. Although the globalized world is much too nuanced and interconnected in its functions to identify the imposing power as simply a Western episteme, the roots giving momentum to what is deemed official and worthy knowledge come from an imperialist legacy. In this legacy, (Western) education has been a primary means for "civilizing" the native (Asher, 2009; Spivak, 1999). It is not possible to separate the historic legacy of colonization from the contemporary ways in which it persists. Edward Said (2003) described the continuity of the imperialist legacy when he explained,

We have had the failure of the Oslo peace process, the outbreak of the second intifada, and the awful suffering of the Palestinians on the reinvaded West Bank and Gaza. The suicide-bombing phenomenon has appeared with all its hideous damage, none more lurid and apocalyptic of course than the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath in the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. As I write these lines, the illegal occupation of Iraq by Britain and the United State proceeds. Its aftermath is truly awful to contemplate. This is all part of what is supposed to be a clash of civilisations, unending, implacable, irremediable" (para. 3).

These events, which have been explained and justified through the clash of civilizations, pitting the West against the rest, reinforce Stuart Hall's (1996) rhetorical question,

“When was the postcolonial?”(p.9). Said (2003) contended that the ways in which the U.S. gazes upon the orient directly impacts the ways in which history is recorded and remembered. He explained that, “history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten, so that “our” east, “our” orient becomes “ours” to possess and direct” (para. 5). The Western gaze on the orient/east as “other” is embedded in school curriculum. John Willinsky (1998) reiterated the depth of Western tailored divisions in education when he explained,

In our own education and in history classes today, we can consider how historians have distributed people among premodern, modern and postmodern periods; we can ask how history works in conjunction with geography to create space-time continuums that, although they add fascination to study and travel, do so principally through the production of difference and the building of boundaries that seemingly to naturalize the distance between people (p.132).

Studying the other through a Western lens, which has deeply rooted preconceived notions of the other as backwards and uncivilized, directly impacts the ways Islam is taught in Social Studies classrooms. It is for this reason that postcolonial theory is used as a theoretic perspective with which to understand the curriculum on Islam. From a post-colonial perspective, as Willinsky (1999) explained, all of the knowledge we accept as factual and normalized is in fact greatly influenced by a Western episteme.

Given postcolonial theory’s focus on the ways in which power mediates subjectivity and knowledge, it is important to frame the ways in which curriculum actors position themselves in response to curriculum. In the following section, I present

standpoint epistemology as a theoretical frame, which addresses power, identity, and curricular experiences.

Standpoint Epistemology. Standpoint Epistemology, which finds roots in Marxism (Lukacs, 1971), has been adopted and popularized over the last five decades by feminist scholars (Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 1998; Collins, 1989). Standpoint theory's principle notion is one of situated knowledge; that is, our experiences and social location shape the ways in which we understand the world (Harding, 2004; Hartsock, 1998). In recognizing that one's social location impacts their epistemological stance; Harding and Hartsock also noted the significance of unequal power embedded in the infrastructure of everyday life. In other words, they believed that power differentials often create opposing epistemologies between the dominant and the oppressed. They also asserted, as postcolonial theory does, that, as a result of the privilege and access afforded to epistemologies of the dominant, all epistemologies are not equally prominent.

More than a framework of epistemological development, standpoint epistemology is an active space, which individuals occupy through reflection. In other words, one does not inherit a standpoint by virtue of their social location. Instead, a standpoint is something that is struggled for and through. The role of reflection, in standpoint epistemology is foundational. De Lissovoy (2008), one of the few educational scholars who have employed standpoint epistemology, explained standpoint as achieved through an active struggle by citing the example of feminist standpoint epistemology.

Thus, a feminist standpoint is an "interested position" (Hartsock, 1983, p.285) that grows from and reflects on the material activity and experiences of women (though it is not identical with those experiences). There is no simple equivalence

(in terms of value or objectivity) between a feminist standpoint and a masculinist worldview, because the former arises from the activity, reflection, and struggle of an oppressed group, and the latter represents the dominant view that abstracts from and obscures these realities (p.85).

Here, De Lissovoy made the point that occupying a social location as “woman”, did not simply result in standpoint feminism. Instead, through struggle and reflection on experiences, a standpoint of feminism was claimed. Simply put, everyone has social locations, but only with concerted critical reflection do they become standpoints.

Though standpoint epistemology has been seldom used in educational research, Wayne Au (2012) argued that, “it is crucial that standpoint theory be brought more substantively and consciously into the curriculum-on both political and epistemological grounds” (p.65). Au argued that since standpoint theory hinges on ideas of power, politics and agency, it could benefit several aspects of critical curriculum studies (p.58). For the purposes of this dissertation study, standpoint epistemology is used to conceptualize the ways in which curriculum actors, through a process of reflexivity, orient themselves to the curriculum.

The final and perhaps most often misunderstood aspect of standpoint epistemology is in the way objectivity and relativism is negotiated. Before elaborating on how standpoint epistemology conceptualizes objectivity, it is important to elucidate the origins and functions of “mainstream epistemology” (Lang, 2011, p.80). For this, I turn to Lang’s (2011) article, *Epistemologies of Situated Knowledges: “Troubling” Knowing in Philosophy of Education*, where he asserted that, “In large part, Western thought remains

predicated on the modernist formulation of truth and knowledge” (p. 79), which he claimed was largely derived from Kantian epistemology.

Kantian epistemology argues that “objects conform to our ways of knowing” (Lang, 2011, p. 77), and that a thorough application of each rational person’s intellect will result in attaining the truth. Simply put, Kantian epistemology asserts that, “all rational knowers must be able to arrive at the same judgment of truth, the conditions for which are *a priori* in everyone” (Lang, 2011, p.78). The epistemological stance, that all rational beings will reach the same conclusion of truth if they choose to engage in a rigorous intellectual exercise, “remains the largely uninterrogated invisible epistemic water in which most philosophers and philosophers of education swim, and its legitimacy as the gold standard against which knowledge claims are adjudicated is reinscribed” (Lang, 2011, p.80). This modernist epistemology does not acknowledge identity-based differences as fundamental enough to withstand a thorough intellectual search for the truth in which *a priori* intellectual tools guide each rational person to a singular objective truth. Therefore, this prevailing mainstream epistemology hinges on the conception of a single truth instead of multiple truths.

Standpoint feminist scholars, challenge mainstream epistemology as they reject the Truth of dominant groups as the only truth while contending for what they call “strong objectivity”. Au defined Harding’s (2004) notion of strong objectivity in the following way...

Strong objectivity means that we gain a better, clearer, and more truthful-more strongly objective-understanding of social and material realities from the achievement of a standpoint in our knowledge projects because we “can take the

subject as well as the object of knowledge to be a necessary object of critical, causal-scientific!-social explanations” (Harding, 2004b, p.137)” (Au, 2012, p.57)

In her own words, Harding explained strong objectivity through the artful illustration of a stick in the mud that appears bent. She asked her readers to “walk around to a different location and see that now it appears-straight-as it really is.” She connected this illustration to “the ‘naturally occurring’ relations of class, gender, race, or imperialism in the world around us. ... (which) provide illuminating possibilities for observing and explaining systemic relations between “what one does” and “what one can know” ”(Harding, p.384). To explain how standpoint epistemology leads to strong objectivity, Harding took the analogy of the bent stick further when she explained, “Like the stick-bent-in-water example, although all knowledge claims are determinately situated, not all such social situations are equally good ones from which to be able to see how the social order works” (Harding, 384). In other words, as Hartstock (1998) said, “The view from the margins (defined in more heterogeneous terms) is clearer and better” (p.80), because those in dominant positions would not have the appropriate perspective by which to understand and describe what they are impervious to. The perspectives and analyses of the subaltern provide insight to what might not otherwise be apparent.

Though standpoint epistemology hinges on the idea of multiple vantage points and situated knowledges, many critique standpoint theorists for narrowing the ways in which they theorize the subaltern and their interaction with the social world. The critique that standpoint theory universalizes identity-based categories originates from the feminist scholarship it stems from (O’Leary, 2008). In critiquing many of the pioneers of feminist standpoint epistemology, O’Leary (2008) explained that, “both Jaggar and Hartsock are

compelled to subsume and discount the differences and conflicts which mark relations between women in order to maintain a unitary feminist standpoint” (p. 54). O’Leary explained that the “urge to theorize a commonality among women” (p.55) inhibits experiences of intersectionality which ultimately shape the ways in which individuals interact with, and embody their multiple identities. Within Education, DeLissovoy (2008) elaborated on this critique by pointing out that if social location alone provides criteria for standpoint epistemology, then, “each standpoint ultimately appears inadequate for understanding social life outside of the characteristic experience of that group” (p.85). As a result of this, feminist standpoint epistemology, can reify the very thing it exists to critique: a singular and universal claim on knowledge and truth. Although the danger of over-simplifying identities is a potential reality in standpoint epistemology, feminist scholars have worked to address these concerns in various iterations of the theory.

Feminist scholars employing standpoint epistemology have demonstrated multiplicity within standpoint epistemology. For example, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) brought together theories of feminist standpoint epistemology and Black epistemology in order to use an intersectional Black feminist epistemological lens. While Collins found political strength in encouraging “collective identity by offering Black women a different view of themselves and their world than that offered by the established social order” (1989), she attempted to resist the trope “that Black women are more oppressed than everyone else and therefore have the best standpoint from which to understand the mechanisms, processes, and effects of oppression” (Collins, 1990, p.757). Instead of framing the focus on Black women as a sociological identity category, Collins focused her analysis on lived experiences, which implicates identity politics but does not negate

diversity within social locations. For this reason, Collins stressed the importance of Black feminists creating Black feminist thought. She plainly stated the importance of experience when she said, “living life as an African-American woman is a necessary prerequisite for producing Black Feminist thought” (Collins, 1989, p.77).

Though standpoint theory can be used to further essentialize identities, many feminist scholars have demonstrated a balance between the pluralism of experiences and the shared experiences specific to particular communities. It is important to remember that standpoint epistemology is not primarily concerned with sociological identity markers, and is instead focused on the experiences of those who share certain social locations. It is for this reason the experiences of Muslim girls from MCoIs have been included in the study. These students do not only reveal information about their own experiences, but they also allow the reader to become aware of silences and dominance in curriculums on Islam.

This chapter served to review the literature in which I situate this dissertation, and to discuss the theoretical perspectives that have shaped the ways I think about my dissertation study. A review of the literature revealed that my study contributes to a recognized need for research on student experiences of curriculum. By including a sub-study of Muslim girls from MCoI, this study provides a nuanced perspective on students’ curricular experiences with Islam, which has previously been unexplored. Though there have been studies, which have aimed to understand the curriculum on Islam, very few have done so through the narrative experiences of teachers and students, which this study does.

In addition to reviewing literature on curriculum, Islam in the curriculum, and Muslim youth, this chapter provided a discussion on the two theoretical perspectives shaping this study: postcolonial theory and standpoint epistemology. Postcolonial theory is used to discuss how identity and power shape the curriculum on Islam. Since Islam is a controversial topic surrounded by cultural politics of othering, a postcolonial perspective is particularly useful in conceptualizing curriculum on Islam. Standpoint epistemology situates both the curriculum actors involved in this dissertation (teachers and students) through an understanding that social location greatly impacts epistemological lenses. Standpoint epistemology frames the curricular experiences of students and teachers contextually.

CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology

Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge.

~ Audre Lorde

Chapter Three describes the research methods involved in this dissertation study. This dissertation compares the curricular experiences of Social Studies teachers and Muslim girls from MCoIs. The two curriculum actors' experiences explored in this dissertation were investigated through two sub-studies: one focusing on Social Studies teachers and the other on Muslim girls from minority communities of interpretation (MCoI). This chapter is divided into two sections: (1) the teacher sample; and (2) the student sample.

As a reminder, the purpose of this qualitative research project was to gain a better understanding of the ways in which Social Studies teachers and girls from MCoIs experienced curricula on Islam. It is important to note that although both the teachers and students were reflecting on curricular experiences with Islam, the two sample participants are not linked by the same context.

To conduct these sub-studies I adopted a phenomenological case study approach. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand a phenomenon by examining people's conscious experiences of their daily life (Merriam, 2009). Hermeneutic phenomenology, in particular, as elaborated by Heidegger (1962), studies the interpretation of experience and how we make sense of the world around us. Although, phenomenology strives to give voice and primacy to the experiences of individuals, hermeneutic phenomenology does so with an acknowledgement that interpretation is occurring at several levels in the research process. For example, in the student sub-study

it was important to interpret the experiences of the case-study students within their situated identities as Muslims in the U.S., and as minorities within Islam. The acknowledgement of relational dynamics as just described, along with the priority given to individual experiences and voices, render phenomenology an ideal approach for this dissertation research. In addition to a phenomenological approach to research, I used case study methodology to design both sub-studies. Case study design “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, p. 18, 2008).

Case studies emphasize the unique nature of each case and give a more nuanced understanding to any given phenomenon (Stake, 1981). Over a six-month period, interviews and questionnaires were conducted with each study participant and analyzed by isolating each individual case and conducting a single-case analysis through pattern matching. The patterns that emerged from the single-case were then compared across each case, determining commonalities and exploring conditions that may have caused differences (Yin, 1994).

Research Stance

The conceptual framework discussed in Chapter Two, described the theoretical grounding of this dissertation study. The two theories (postcolonial theory and standpoint epistemology) allowed me a particular lens with which to understand the curriculum actors, the curriculum on Islam itself, and the ways in which the curriculum actors experienced the curriculum. To be more specific, my use of postcolonial theory viewed the curriculum on Islam as shaped by a Western-episteme. After establishing that curriculum is culturally and politically laden; my use of standpoint epistemology helped

conceptualize the ways in which curriculum actors, through critical reflection, developed a stance with which to experience curriculum.

The conceptual framing of this dissertation hinged on the premise that identity and power is significant in the ways curriculum is shaped and the ways in which we experience curriculum. For this reason, I would be remiss if I did not address how my own identity has influenced this study. My experiences as a 1.5-generation immigrant, woman of color, Muslim from a minority community of interpretation, and educator have compelled me to better understand my social location in this world through the pursuit of a doctorate in education. My positionality helps me inform the critical question, “What is at stake for me in this research?” (Behar, 1997). Negotiating my identity as a Muslim from a minority community of interpretation in an Islamophobic environment has prompted me to search for narratives of Muslims and Islam, which complicate and unflatten the negative image of the Muslim-body.

The desire to see varied and complex narratives of Islam and Muslims directly shaped the way I designed this study to feature the experiences of teachers and Muslim girls from MCoI in their own voices. Since phenomenological research prioritizes capturing the essence of subjects’ experiences; participant’s words are heavily relied on and valued (Paton et. al, 2004). In the case of Muslim girls from MCoI, it is perhaps clear why phenomenology would be particularly beneficial in giving voice. However, against the ever-popular ‘bad teacher’ narrative (Kumashiro, 2012), giving voice and understanding the experiences of teachers in context is also crucial. The experiences of each of the curriculum actors are explored through the research questions of this study, which are reviewed in the next section.

Research Questions

Before delving into discussing the design of the study, it is important to provide a reminder of the research questions guiding this study.

3. What are teachers' reported experiences of curriculum on Islam?
 - a. What approaches did teachers report using in shaping curriculum on Islam?
 - b. What factors and considerations influence how they approach the curriculum?
4. What are students' reported experiences of curriculum on Islam?
 - a. How do students report positioning their 'minority within minority' status in relation to the curriculum on Islam?
 - b. What are student perspectives of the curriculum on Islam?

These questions were highly influential in the design of this dissertation. The next two sections discuss the participants/setting, data collection, and data analysis for each of the sub-studies. The two primary data gathering methods used in this study were individual interviews and questionnaires. After obtaining appropriate Human Subjects approval, I began conducting the study.

Teacher Sub-study: Setting and Participants

I recruited the teacher subjects through snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009). Through email communication and in person meetings, I contacted teachers and education scholars I had worked with in the past and asked them to disseminate information about my study to high-school Social Studies teachers. My contacts sent a

prepared email out to potential participants. In the email I introduced myself, and explained that my

dissertation research seeks to understand how teachers approach teaching about Islam in World History courses. I am interested in finding out more about the resources teachers find useful as well as gaining insight into how the instruction of World History, particularly Islam, can be better supported. I would like to interview you about your experiences in teaching about Islam (email recruitment).

In the email, I asked potential subjects to email or call me if they were interested in participating or in getting more information. As a result, eight interested teachers contacted me via email. In their emails to me, most of the teachers expressed their commitment to improving their teaching practice on Islam. In lieu of monetary compensation I offered participating teachers my assistance in helping with collecting curriculum resources, assisting students in the classroom, or performing any organizational tasks, which would be of use. Two of the teachers in the sample asked me to be a guest speaker for their students. Two of the teachers asked me to look over the curriculum they were using and provide additional resources, particularly on the topic of women in Islam. One of the teachers, asked me to act as a judge for an end of unit student assessment.

As was discussed in the literature review, teachers make curricular decisions on how to shape, or whether to adopt, certain curriculum (Apple, 1992). Although a teacher's knowledge and experience greatly impacts curriculum delivery (Leinhardt, 1988), this study is not meant to critique teaching pedagogy. The eight high school teacher cases in this study represent variation in terms of gender, teaching experience,

religious affiliation, and teaching contexts. Although they were all located within the Northwestern United States, they taught in varying socio-economic environments, and had varying degrees of experience with teaching. In Table 1, basic information about each teacher is presented.

Table 1

Teacher Cases

Name	Race	Years Teaching	Courses Taught	School Type
Mrs. McBride	White	22	World Hist., AP US Hist., Contemporary World	Private Christian school (Suburban)
Mr. Corder	White	4	Honors World Hist., Advanced Journalism	Comprehensive, Urban, Public School
Ms. Gaines	White	9	World Studies, Honors World Studies	Comprehensive, Suburban Public School
Ms. Travis	White	8	World Hist., AP World Hist.	Comprehensive, Suburban Public School
Mr. Ericks	White	7	World Hist., AP World Hist.	Comprehensive Suburban Public School
Ms. Maracuja	Black	24	World Hist., Contemporary World Problems, World Lit.	Alternative public high-school
Mr. Hall	White	10	AP World Hist., AP US Hist.	Comprehensive suburban public school
Mr. Caplan	White	5	World Hist., Contemporary World Problems	Comprehensive urban public school

Teacher Sub-study: Data Gathering

Based on their preference, I interviewed half the teachers in their classrooms, afterschool, and half at coffee shops. The interviews lasted one to one and a half hours. The teacher interview protocol (Appendix A) asked teachers about their affective experiences of teaching about religion broadly and Islam specifically; how teachers prepare for lessons on Islam; how Islam gets covered in their courses; and the typical

questions that their students raise in relation to lessons involving Islam. Though the interview was structured by the questions in the protocol, some teachers shared information about their teaching experiences, which went beyond the scope of the protocol.

The questionnaire (Appendix B) was created after all of the interviews were conducted. After two rounds of coding on all interviews, I wanted to get more clarity on which topics were being most often covered in lessons on Islam, and also teachers' opinions on topic selection. The teacher interviews revealed a strong sentiment of promoting curriculum as a tool for dismantling Islamophobia and prejudice, and the questionnaires served to more concretely hone in on the favored approaches in accomplishing this goal. Questionnaires were used as a secondary source of evidence, in order to triangulate and strengthen the study findings (Yin, 2006). Used to clarify and provide texture to data from the interviews, the questionnaires were administered through a confidential online survey program offered through the University of Washington. Questions included general demographic information, including a chosen pseudonym, age, etc. The questionnaire also asked about the subject's religious identification. Since the study was examining the experiences of teachers with a religious subject, their own personal approaches to religion are important to note. Their responses are discussed in Chapter Four. Most importantly, the questionnaire asked teacher to: (1) rate topics about Islam in order of importance; and (2) rate topics about Islam in order of coverage in the classroom.

I selected topics for the teachers to rate by scanning Strayer's *Ways of the World: A Brief Global History* (2012), the textbook, used by five teachers in the sample. Present

on the questionnaire was also an option for teachers to write-in topics they believed were most important, and which topics they felt were most often covered. The information from the questionnaires, helped show variation among teacher cases. Despite multiple failed attempts to contact Mr. Caplan about filling out the online questionnaire, he never responded.

Teacher Sub-study: Data Analysis

When coding the teacher transcripts I kept the research questions specific to teachers in mind: (What are teacher's experiences of curriculum on Islam? What approaches do teachers use in shaping curriculum on Islam? What factors and considerations influence how they approach the curriculum?) . In addition to paying attention to teachers' goals in teaching about Islam, and what shaped their curricular decisions, I used Asani (2011) and Moore's (2007) framework to categorize the curricular approaches teachers used in teaching about Islam. I coded by reading the transcripts carefully and noting themes related to the research questions in the margins of the transcript. After reading every transcript of the individual interviews, I went through the codes again, and refined them by giving each a definition informed by the research questions.

As I conducted the first round of open coding I extracted the following codes: Purpose of teaching World History, Purpose of teaching about Islam, Questions that Come Up, Approaches to Teaching About Religion, Features of Islam, Feelings about teaching Islam, and Identity Issues. Moore and Asani's approaches to curriculum on religion (2011) provided *a priori* labels, which were useful in axial coding. For example, Approaches to Teaching About Religion (ATR) broke down into: "ATR- textual", "ATR-

devotional”, and “ATR- cultural studies”. I then realized that this framework was not comprehensive enough to cover the approaches used by case teachers, so I added the code “ATR- philosophical” and “ATR-controversial” to the list.

Case-Study Reports. Throughout the process of interviewing, both rounds of coding, and during analysis of the questionnaire results, I kept a case study database in order to organize and reduce the data during and after the collection process. The database included field logs, interview memos, personal reflections, transcripts, coding schemes, and matrices separating and organizing coded data (Yin, 1994). Throughout each stage of analysis, I revisited the case study database and began crafting a case study report for each subject. For each case-study report I included a certain set of information for teachers (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Questions for Teacher Case Report

1. Interview Description (holistic, 3-5 sentences)
2. Teacher Description (all demographic information)
3. Goals for Teaching about Islam & World History
4. Affective Experiences Teaching About Islam
5. Incidents of note while teaching about Islam
6. Summary of school and classroom setting

Student Sub-study: Setting and Participants

The student sub-study was bounded in two ways. First, this study was bound by the focal religious identities: Ithanaashari, Ismaili, and Ahmadiyya. This means that the students within each of these focal identities comprised of a single case, making three

separate cases. Even though religious identity categories provided a boundary in which subjects were analyzed, there was another way that the student subjects were bounded. Each student within the sample was also considered a distinct case; resulting in six individual case subjects.

I utilized my personal networks in the Ithnaashri, Ismaili and Ahmadiyya communities to conduct a purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). Since Muslim female gender is an identity of extreme focus in the American imagination (Mir, 2009), this study concentrated particularly on Muslim girls. Women's bodies have, in many ways, become a significant site where Muslims are determined as either 'safe' or a potential 'threat' to Western sensibilities. Similarly, gender performance and gendered behaviors have also been regulated by cultural gatekeepers from within the Muslim community, often landing Muslim women in the awkward position of being "safely suspended between mainstream normal" and "Muslim normal" (Mir, 2009, p. 250). For this reason, the study focused particularly on how girls experienced the curriculum against the backdrop of extreme gendered expectations and stereotypes.

To a certain degree, all students in the study identified with the immigrant experience, although most students were born in the U.S. to at least one foreign-born parent. Most of the student participants, as is evidenced in Table 2, drew their origins back to India, Pakistan, and Iraq. Being familiar, in varying degrees, with several Islamic Centers in the Northwest, I used my personal networks to recruit students. I sent out recruitment emails, private Facebook messages, and relied on snowball sampling to recruit student subjects. I first recruited the students, explained the study, and then spoke to one parent of each student case. Parents and students had few questions, and

communicated their willingness to help. As a result of recruiting through Islamic Centers, all of the students in the sample identify themselves strongly with their religious identity and religious community. They regularly attend prayer services, and participated in community activities like religious education classes and/or service activities organized by their religious institution. Table 2 represents each focal students' pseudonym, country of origin, sectarian community, grade, and school type.

Table 2

Student Cases

Name	Community	Country of Origin	Grade	Description of School
Zehra	Ithnaashari	Iraq & the U.S.	12	Homeschool with co-op classes
Zaynab	Ithnaashari	India	7	Public Suburban Middle School
Laila	Ahmadiyya	Pakistan	10	Public Urban High School
Aiza	Ahmadiyya	Pakistan	9	Public Urban High School
Aaima	Ismaili	India	10	Public IB School
Tara	Ismaili	Pakistan	10	Public Suburban High School

Student Sub-study: Data Collection

Over the course of three months, I interviewed each of the six sample students. I interviewed Zaynab and Aaima at their home, and interviewed Zehra at her mosque. The home and mosque interviews involved some community/family interaction, including fielding questions about what I was doing. I responded generally by explaining that I was interviewing the student to find out more about their experiences in Social Studies class. The other three students were all interviewed at coffee shops of their choosing. The coffee shops used allowed for a semi-private space where other people were not seated in close proximity. After obtaining written permission through consent and assent forms,

and in addition to taking notes during the interview, I recorded all the interviews on an audio recorder.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours. The student interview protocol (Appendix C) asked students about their daily routines, their experiences with Islam in the classroom, and asked them to assess how Islam was approached in their Social Studies classrooms. As a researcher using a phenomenological approach, it was my responsibility to be aware of my own judgments and assumptions throughout the process of empirical work (Merriam, 2009). Throughout the data collection process, along with writing a memo of general summary after each interview, I tracked my own reflections in a journal that noted impressions, assumptions and judgments after each interview (Yin, 1994). This journal became particularly important during the analysis of data, as I made sure to check the patterns I saw in the data against my predisposed ideas about the phenomenon. After each interview audio recording was uploaded, I transcribed each recording. After reading through each transcription, I went through a process of two rounds of coding, which I explore in greater detail in the subsequent section.

Student Sub-study: Data Analysis

The initial open-coding process allowed me to read each transcript individually while keeping the research questions in mind. For the student transcripts, I kept the student specific research questions in mind: (How do the identities of sectarian-minority Muslim girls influence their experiences learning about Islam in the classroom, particularly around the question, “Who is a Muslim?”). Specifically, I listened for how students negotiated their knowledge and experience of Islam in the classroom setting, and how students articulated their identities and beliefs about Islam in the classroom.

My codes initially were: religious knowledge (knowledge they gained from family or community contexts about Islam), expectations of secular education, instances of discrimination or oppression, positive classroom experiences, negative classroom experiences, and positioning in the classroom (this usually pointed to the teacher giving them a leadership role during lessons on Islam, calling them out, or students choosing to self-silence).

During the second round of coding, I began to pay close attention to patterns that were emerging as complementary and distinct, and using axial coding, I further refined my codes to specify characteristics of each thematic category (Straus & Corbin, 1990). For example, instead of keeping the code of Expectation for Secular Education, I refined the code to three sub-categories of Expectations for Secular Education (ESE): “ESE-emphasize basics”, “ESE- emphasize commonalities among religions”, and “ESE-represent lived experience”.

The questionnaire (Appendix D), as in the case of the student interviews, was created after all of the interviews were conducted. After completing the first two rounds of coding on all interviews, I wanted to get more clarity on what topics were being most often covered in lessons on Islam, and student opinions on topic selection. The information from the questionnaires, helped show variation within the student cases, and sub-cases, as well as a cross-comparison between student and teacher cases.

Case-Study Reports. Throughout the process of interviewing, both rounds of coding, and during analysis of the questionnaire results, I kept a case study database in order to organize and reduce the data during and after the collection process. The database included field logs, interview memos, personal reflections, transcripts, coding

schemes, and matrices separating and organizing coded data (Yin, 1994). Throughout each stage of analysis, I revisited the case study database and began crafting a case study report for each student. For each case-study report I included a certain set of information for students (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Questions for Student Case Report

1. Interview Description (Holistic, 3-5 sentences)
2. Student Description (all demographic information)
3. Experiences Learning about Islam
4. Student Participation while Learning About Islam
5. Incidents of note while learning about Islam
6. Summary of school and classroom setting

Limitations

Since phenomenological research prioritizes capturing the essence of subjects' experiences, participant's words are heavily relied on and valued (Paton et. al, 2004). The primary limitation of this study was that it heavily relied on the accuracy and memory of individuals' reflections of their experiences. Although there were two data sources, interview and questionnaire, there was no direct researcher observation, and the data is exclusively from the point of view of the subjects.

The students in the sample offered their perspectives on the approaches to curriculum on Islam, but did so in a distinct context from the teachers. None of the students were from the school sites of the teachers. Had the students and teachers been referring to curriculum from the same learning contexts, adding a component of direct

classroom observation and field notes would have also been very beneficial. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I discuss this further.

CHAPTER 4: Teacher Findings

The educator has the duty of not being neutral.

~ Paulo Freire

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings from the teacher sub-study conducted as part of this dissertation. As a reminder, the research questions pertinent to the teacher sub-study asked about teachers' experiences of curriculum on Islam. The research questions explored experiences through inquiring about the approaches teachers used in shaping curriculum, and the considerations that influenced how the teachers approached the curriculum. This chapter is divided into two main sections; each representing a finding from the teacher sample. The findings discussed in this section were reached by analyzing teacher interviews and teacher questionnaires, which examined teachers self-reported experiences with curriculum on Islam. The two findings discussed in this chapter were that (1) seven of the eight teachers wanted to use classroom curriculum in order to interrupt Islamophobia, and (2) the teachers reported that they used various curricular approaches in teaching about Islam, but the approaches most often used were the multicultural/comparative approach and the historic approach. Before discussing the findings I present each teacher case through a brief case description.

Teacher Case Descriptions

The Social Studies teachers in this study were all high-school teachers who addressed Islam as a topic in at least one of their Social Studies classes. Most often the topic of Islam was present in World History/World Studies courses. However, the teachers who taught a course called Contemporary World Problems also discussed the

topic of Islam. Six of the eight teachers in the sample taught at traditional public schools in both urban and suburban environments. One of the teachers taught at a suburban, non-denominational Christian private school, which primarily served affluent White students. The other teacher who did not teach in a traditional public school was a teacher of a small, urban, alternative public school, which served a cohort of students who were largely students of color and immigrant students. The teachers varied in terms of gender and years of practice; however in terms of race, the teachers were overwhelming White, with one teacher of the eight identifying as Black.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the teachers included in this study expressed interest in improving their practice of teaching about Islam. During our interview, several of the teachers asked for resources, particularly on the topics of women in Islam, and religious diversity within Islam. Learning from the experiences of the sample teachers gave me an appreciation of the thoughtful ways in which most of the teachers were approaching the topic of Islam. The next section provides case descriptions for each of the sample teachers.

Mrs. McBride. Mrs. McBride taught at a private, non-denominational Christian school where she described the students as “White, affluent kids”. Mrs. McBride had 22 years of teaching experience in the Social Studies, and was greatly inspired by her Christian faith to teach students a sense of purpose, responsibility and global citizenship. She was deeply concerned with issues of inequity and social justice and did not consider all of the teachers in her department or her school as progressive. Mrs. McBride was the only non-public schoolteacher in the sample.

Mr. Corder. Mr. Corder had been teaching high-school Social Studies for all four years of his teaching career. He taught at an ethnically diverse, urban high school. Mr. Corder, although not identifying as religious himself, demonstrated tremendous respect for the religious students in his class. He approached the subject matter of religion mainly through a historic approach, wanting his students to identify patterns across religions, time periods, and geographies. Mr. Corder explained that for him teaching Islam, or any religion, was at times uncomfortable, mainly because he didn't identify as Muslim, and many of his students, by virtue of their religious affiliation, had "more insight" than him.

Ms. Gaines. Ms. Gaines had taught World History and Honors World History in her public suburban high school for nearly ten years. She was very focused on preparing her students for what she called global citizenship, and the most important skill she hoped to teach her students was critical questioning. Although she taught history, she was very focused on how her teaching about the past would impact her student's understanding of current global politics. Although, Ms. Gaines found teaching controversial issues an effective curricular strategy, she aimed to conceal her political opinions and leanings from her students.

Ms. Travis. Ms. Travis started out teaching in New York City eight years ago. Her decision to enter the teaching profession was spurred by her disillusionment at the second G.W. Bush presidential win. She felt that, as a teacher, she could work to educate the nation's youth on civic education, which she greatly valued. Ms. Travis had been teaching at a suburban high school for nearly four years and taught World History and AP World History exclusively. The AP World History course was designed as a Project Based Learning (PBL) course-involving simulations, where the focus of the AP course

was around what Ms. Travis called a civilizational approach to learning about Islam. The regular World History course Ms. Travis taught focused more on the beliefs and practices of Muslims.

Mr. Ericks. Mr. Ericks, a Social Studies teacher at a diverse suburban school, began his teaching journey with his interests in international affairs, which he majored in as an undergraduate student. Coming from a family of teachers, he channeled his interests in Political Science into K-12 education, and earned his teaching endorsement in Social Studies. Mr. Ericks had been teaching about Islam throughout his teaching career, but only recently did he start teaching Islam from a historic perspective rather than a beliefs and practices approach.

Ms. Maracuja. Ms. Maracuja, the most senior teacher in the sample, taught at a public alternative school which largely served students of color and immigrant students who were not socially or academically succeeding in traditional public schools. The school served one class of 20-25 students, and Ms. Maracuja taught Language Arts and Social Studies, while her co-teacher, Mr. Espiritu taught Math and Science. Ms. Maracuja's viewed her call to teaching as an act of social justice activism. Her teaching practice was focused around developing her students to see themselves as change agents in their communities and in the global context.

Mr. Hall. Mr. Hall came from a family of schoolteachers, though his first career was as an administrator at a non-profit. After ten years in his first profession, he decided that he wanted to make an impact on youth civic participation, and decided to become a teacher. Mr. Hall taught AP World History through a project-based curriculum. Mr. Hall

ultimately sought to teach his students skills to be able to contextualize information they learned so that they formed informed opinions about history and contemporary politics.

Mr. Caplan. Mr. Caplan's love for teaching grew out of his experiences volunteering as a teacher's assistant at a Synagogue School in his local community. After he graduated college, Mr. Caplan decided to travel, and took a job teaching in Japan for one year. After returning to the U.S. he settled on a career in banking. After working in the banking industry for a few years, Mr. Caplan remembered how much he enjoyed teaching and decided to get certified as a teacher. In both the courses Mr. Caplan taught, World History and Contemporary World Issues, he sought to help his students transform into global citizens.

Finding 1: A Jihad Against Islamophobia

After analyzing how case teachers were experiencing the curriculum on Islam, it became very clear that most of the teachers viewed their instruction of Islam as a topic within the larger cultural context of Islamophobia. For this reason, seven of the eight case teachers directly addressed Islamophobia, when discussing how they shaped their curriculum. The following findings section is divided into three sub-sections, addressing the following aspects of addressing Islamophobia in the classroom: (1) some methods teachers used to shape curriculum in order to counter Islamophobic notions; (2) the question of classroom dynamics,; and (3) the role of teacher bias.

Methods Used to Counter Islamophobia. Although the teachers in the sample reported using a variety of curricular approaches, seven out of eight teachers expressed an overarching goal of teaching to counter the dominant narratives of Islam as portrayed through popular media sources. This is a significant finding given the dearth of

educational research on Muslim-positive practices in the classroom (Abu El-Haj, 2006; Maira, 2004; Sarroub, 2005; Zine, 2006). The teachers reported manifesting their teaching goals in a variety of ways. Mr. Corder, for example, discussed rearranging the sequence in which he taught Islam in order to address misperceptions and stereotypes he knew many of his students had about Islam. He explained that in the textbook Christian Europe was sequentially before the chapter on Islam, but as he explained, the “Christian chapter talks about the Crusades and makes Islam seem very like *other* because you have the Europeans encountering Islam, and so I put Islam in front so that we can have a little bit of an understanding of what Islam is before we talk about Crusades.” Mr. Corder believed that by exposing his students to Islam, as a religion, on its own terms, would be an effective way to deconstruct many of the negative impressions students may have had about Islam. He expressed that by the end of his class he wanted them to know that Islam “is about love and compassion.”

Ms. Gaines also spoke about how the sequence of curriculum impacted the opportunities for dispelling stereotypes and misperceptions. Previously, she taught a World Studies course which was transitioning to a World History course. Although there was a lot of overlap in the topics covered, the primary difference was that her school was moving from organizing their global Social Studies from a regional sequence to a historically sequential sequence. She was worried about how effectively she would be able to challenge Islamophobic concepts and ideas with the new format. She explained, “in the geographically organized course, I can start off each unit by talking about stereotypes about that place and the people from that place. Now that we’re doing the history, organization is sort of harder to find where to do that, without either bunching it

all at the beginning of the year or bunching it all at the end of the year. It's nice in the previous organization to re-hit the stereotype thing every time you get to a new region, really helps kids internalize the idea of challenging stereotypes in reality.” Much like Ms. Gaines, many teachers discussed deciding to address misperceptions and stereotypes about Islam as an introductory exercise to their lessons about Islam.

Mr. Ericks talked about the risk and discomfort of addressing stereotypes upfront. However uncomfortable, he continued to find it an important curricular tool. He recounted,

We'll start with the question of what have you heard people or what do you know about Islam or what have you heard people say about Islam; things like that.

Immediately there's a student who will say, “Oh, yeah. Muslims are terrorists.”

That's the thing that always comes out, right? Then it's awkward and then you say, “Why is it that people say this?” Then people like to attribute 9/11 to the Muslim religion and then we have to address who is it that's responsible. How many Muslims are there in the world? We're attributing an event or some impactful event to a larger body of people. Is that a fair thing to do? That's where the awkwardness always comes. It's always centering on terrorism.

Even though Mr. Ericks was teaching history, it was important for him to address sociopolitical issues of today, particularly terrorism and public attributions of terrorism to Islam. Although all of the teachers shared anecdotes of students who asserted Islam's connection with terrorism or with the oppression of women; Mrs. McBride's experiences with Islamophobia in the classroom were the most severe.

The Difference of Dynamics: Mrs. McBride's Christian Private School. Mrs.

McBride reported that about one third of her students, in any given year, overtly demonstrated disrespect toward non-Christian belief systems. The two primary areas of contention around Islam that arose for Mrs. McBride were issues of Muslim practices of polygamy and the question, "why do they hate us?" The question of why *they* hate us took on distinct meaning given the Christian education context in which it is asked. Although Mrs. McBride's school was located in the a similar suburban area as Mr. Hall and Ms. Travis, the element of (assumed) shared Christian identity in a Christian school provided an environment where Islamophobic comments were more freely shared.

In contrast to Mrs. McBride, Mr. Ericks reflected on how diversity within the classroom may have constrained controversial opinions. He explained, "after we address misconceptions, they (the students) don't talk about it again. It might be something that they actually believe. I have a student I can think of this year who, maybe two students, who I would say talking about it really doesn't really change their perception. They certainly don't say anything afterwards. We try to really create an inclusive environment...we always talk about...how would we know if somebody was a Muslim? The answer would typically be we would not necessarily have any idea." Knowing that there are Muslims in the classroom, according to Mr. Ericks, helps create an environment where overtly Islamophobic comments are not tolerated. Unlike Mr. Ericks, Mrs. McBride did not work in an environment where students were compelled to regard a representation of religious diversity while discussing Islam.

Mrs. McBride explained that her students often conflated geographic regions and ethnicity with religion and her students are often critical of "Middle Easterners" who they

synonymize with Muslims. Mrs. McBride's reported approach to dealing with Islamophobic or any anti-religious sentiment in her classroom was through a framework of tolerance and respect, which also undergirded her primary purpose in teaching about Islam. In explaining how teaching Islam was actually a lesson in teaching tolerance, Mrs. McBride said, "It provokes some really interesting discussions because when 'Mr. I Have the Answers' (sarcastic tone) raises his hand (with an offensive comment), what I'm trying to teach them is respect. I also want to respect them and never put them down or humiliate them or anything like that because then that would be disrespectful to them." By expressing that she was trying to "teach them respect", Mrs. McBride pointed to her larger curricular goal in teaching about Islam. She indicated that she strove to teach respect, not only through the curriculum but also through her pedagogical interactions with students.

Mrs. McBride explained that because teachers in her school had a tremendous amount of freedom with what they taught, their ideas on respectful and accurate curricular resources weren't always aligned. In fact, Mrs. McBride's students all came to her classes having received what she considered an offensive and inaccurate text.

My seniors have all read a book about Saudi Arabia in their English class and they think all the (Muslim) world is Saudi Arabia and all the Middle East is Saudi Arabia and that's an issue, because it's not... It confirms every stereotype that they might have... if you do anything wrong in the Middle East they'll cut off your hands and they cut off your head and it's all like that and they're bad people.

Mrs. McBride explained her frustration at having to counter not only her students and their parents, but also certain colleagues who didn't view Muslims and Islam as complex.

Her task of fostering respect for all people and belief-systems was therefore made even more difficult.

Bias of the Unbiased: The case of Mr. Caplan. Mr. Caplan stood out as the one teacher in the sample who did not explicitly talk of confronting stereotypes about Islam as a goal of his teaching. Mr. Caplan's focus, during the time of the interview, was on a newly self-developed course on Contemporary World Problems, and terrorism and fundamentalism were topics that he was explicitly covering. Mr. Caplan's goals for teaching the topic of Islam centered on providing his students,

the understanding of who people are and their core values, because by having an understanding of people and who they are and their core-values, they (his students) are hopefully more prepared to interact with them. Because when you understand people, hopefully we can avoid conflict.

Mr. Caplan approached teaching in general with what he referred to as "facts". Mr. Caplan was a teacher who avoided controversy stating, "I am a pretty like middle of the road, fact-oriented person. I don't like shock value.... I like to be, I wouldn't say PC, but like I am very conscious and calculated with what I say as far as sensitive topics, especially with history and religion and culture." According to Mr. Caplan, being careful and fact-oriented in his teaching limited what he could discuss in his classroom.

For example, though many of Mr. Caplan's students reportedly asked about the conflict between Israel and Palestine, Mr. Caplan expressed not finding it appropriate to teach the conflict. When asked how he handled students asking him about the conflict, he explained, "I don't talk about it too much other than the facts and obviously going over the complexity of the situation and try and raise ...here is what they are saying, and here

is what they are saying... I am averse to the...because I am so biased in my opinions I kind of steer clear from it.” Mr. Caplan followed up by explaining that teaching about diverse people around the world was more of what he was interested in teaching because he believed doing so would foster “respect and understanding”. Mr. Caplan shared the goal of fostering understanding and respect with many other teachers in the sample. However, instead of addressing Islamophobia, or other controversial topics, Mr. Caplan deliberately avoided controversy altogether.

In his Contemporary World class, Mr. Caplan was planning a unit on global rights for women. He was going to approach it by presenting several global case studies for students to learn through and discuss. Many of the cases he had chosen were from Muslim populated countries. Even though Mr. Caplan had previously expressed wanting to avoid bias by what he referred to as teaching just ‘the facts’; his reflections on the role of women in Islam were aligned with Islamophobic notions of Islam as oppressive to women. The following dialogue from our interview demonstrated this.

Mr. Caplan: The women's rights (unit) may not end up painting a positive picture for Islam.

Me: So when you think about that, what are your considerations?

Mr. Caplan: It is sensitive because umm, because of I think there are students in my class, or the reality is that it is a sensitive topic. My thoughts on it are women are suffering, and I would say that is the number one example to me, of like civil rights issues today is the suffering of women in places around the world.

Mr. Caplan, after acknowledging the sensitivity of the topic, said, “So I think it is important to address (oppression against women), and I guess questions to raise are: is it

best for outside countries to sort of say this is how you should change, or does change need to come from within, how can change happen, what is the best way.... (Instead of constantly focusing on who is doing it.”

By stating that teaching about global women’s rights ‘may not end up painting a positive picture for Islam’, pointed to the way Mr. Caplan had accepted the trope of Islam as oppressive to women. By stating that the topic “may not end up” a certain way, Mr. Caplan framed the curriculum as independent, and “fact-based”, without acknowledging his role in the way Islam “ends up” looking. This is in sharp contrast to the examples of teachers who deliberately address stereotypes of Muslims and Islam with their students in order to actively challenge the stereotypes. Not only did Mr. Caplan indicate he had accepted the trope of Islam as oppressive to women, he did so without delineating Islam (religion) from Muslims (individuals). As I have argued in Chapters One and Two, when the actions of Muslims define Islam, the space for complexity within the human experience is limited. In this way, Mr. Caplan’s reported unbiased approach of fact-based instruction, proved to be pregnant with dominant, negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims.

Mr. Caplan’s case illuminated what is already well established in educational research; that is, teachers’ beliefs and prior knowledge significantly impact their curricular decisions. Mr. Caplan reflected on his biases and reported a concerted effort to avoid certain topics, and stick to what he considered as “facts”; without an expressed awareness of the ways in which so-called facts are shaped by discourses of dominance. Perhaps what is most significant in Mr. Caplan’s case was that even in his deliberate effort to be unbiased, which no other teacher spoke of, he passively adopted a biased

stance. The next findings section discusses the various curricular approaches used by the case teachers.

Finding 2: Predominant Approaches to Teaching about Islam

This section presents the approaches case study teachers described using in the classroom. Before delving into an analysis of the curricular approaches, it is important to clarify Asani (2011) and Moore's (2007) frameworks, which I use to categorize the approaches. As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Moore outlined seven approaches in teaching about religion, and Asani outlined three. For the purposes of this study I consolidated Moore and Asani's frameworks together into six categories: (1) the intentional or unintentional sectarian approach, (2) the phenomenological/devotional approach, (3) the literacy/textual approach, (4) the historical approach, (5) the multicultural approach and (6) the cultural studies approach. Though I did not observe classroom instruction, I have analyzed teacher accounts of how they have approached the topic of Islam, and have categorized their reported experiences into these six approaches. In what follows, I discuss each approach by providing examples of how case teachers discussed their curricular experiences of teaching about Islam.

Intentional or Unintentional Sectarian Approach. Although most of the case-study teachers discussed deliberately complicating stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, an unintentional sectarian approach was very common. The unintentional sectarian approach involved a prioritization of a dominant Sunni perspective of Islam. Whether addressing religion from a historical perspective or a devotional perspective, a dominant Sunni narrative was often presented as the singular Muslim viewpoint. Curricular resources like textbooks aided in the monolithic representation of Muslim interpretations

of Islam. Although most teachers explicitly discussed the existence of sectarian perspectives they did so almost exclusively within a historic context of the question of succession after Muhammed's death. There was no mention about interpretations, practices, beliefs, or the contemporary experiences of MCoIs.

Mr. Corder explained that although the textbook glossed over the Shia/Sunni split, he spent a little more time on it because "sectarian violence... is so present in the media today". This sentiment was echoed with several of the teacher case subjects. Although teachers were acknowledging sectarian difference within Islam, they were teaching it within a context of conflict, both in its origins and in contemporary times.

With the exception of Mr. Maracuja, there was no mention of Shi'ism or any non-dominant Sunni perspective within Islam outside of the construct of conflict and violence. Referencing time spent in Morocco, Ms. Maracuja discussed the lived diversity within Islam by recounting that, "Somebody might say, 'Oh, my gosh. In Morocco you guys have these tombs where people have celebrations. What the heck is that?' She then continued, 'Orthodox Islam doesn't have that, but we have that in Morocco...for the saints, it's a normal part of life.'" Ms. Maracuja's experience living and working in a Muslim society allowed her the insight to notice complexity within a communities' practice of religion.

The Devotional Approach & the Multicultural Approach. Although the devotional and multicultural approaches are distinct, both of these approaches proved to be the mechanism by which an unintentional sectarian approach was employed by the teachers. During the first round of coding, I kept coming across instances where the teachers would discuss teaching 'the basics'. The fundamentals or 'basics' typically

referred to the five-pillars of Islam, which most teachers used as a base line of knowledge that every student should acquire. The approach of the 'basics' aligned closely with Dunn's phenomenological approach and Asani's devotional approach, which focused on "a descriptive study of the beliefs, symbols, practices, and structures of religion and religious expression", and both assumed, "that religious experience is a unique category which cannot be accurately represented when analyzed through nonreligious frameworks" (Moore, 2007, p. 68). Although, this approach was not discussed as receiving significant coverage in the curriculum, it was deemed as essential learning. Rites and rituals, exemplified by the Five Pillars, presented practices and beliefs as definitional of religion without much context.

A devotional model was also used to compare Islam to other religions, particularly other monotheistic religions. In other words, when other religions were being compared with Islam, the basis of comparison was typically on the Five Pillars of Islam. The comparison across faiths, which is also called the multicultural approach, was reportedly used by teachers to demonstrate the commonalities between Islam and other religions. Mr. Corder, Mr. Ericks, and Ms. Travis all spoke about assigning their students comparison posters where their students divided a poster in two equal parts and on one side represented the Five Pillars of Islam and on the other represent tenants of another religion; most typically Judaism or Christianity. Comparisons across religions were almost always discussed across categories of beliefs and practices. As Mr. Ericks explained, "I'd say that primarily I want my students to be able to walk away with understanding basic tenants of beliefs. I want them to understand basic beliefs like Five Pillars. I think that they should understand that similar to the way that they should

understand Ten Commandments and various other principles of faith.” Mr. Ericks spoke about the importance of the “basic tenants and beliefs”, which he used in the poster comparison of Islam to other faiths. Ms. Gaines echoed Mr. Ericks desire to teach the basic tenants, and elaborated on how comparing commonalities across religions was a strategy to humanizing the other.

In terms of Islam and in terms of sort of everything that we teach about, I want to, I didn't say this before, humanize people around the world. I would say that's the top objective. And then I have content objectives that are basics about Islam like we do monotheism as a mini unit. We start by talking about Abraham and then sort of the commonalities between the three monotheistic religions.

Ms. Gaines, in the quote above, explained that the content objectives, including a comparison across monotheistic faiths, was in service of the “top objective” which she described as humanizing “people around the world”. Mr. Corder similarly drew parallels between Islam and other faiths, and explained, “so that is why I do the comparative religion poster thing, because I want them to see that there are linkages between their religions. While there are significant differences between the (religions of the) Middle East, they all share essentially the same God. So there are many commonalities among these monotheistic faiths.” Mr. Corder, along with many of the other teachers, felt strongly that if students learned about commonalities with other faiths, they would identify themselves in closer relation to others, in this case the Muslim other.

The Literacy/Textual Approach. The teachers made little to no mention about using scripture as part of the curriculum. Mr. Corder was the only teacher who spoke about using the Qur'an as an authoritative source. He used the Qur'an as a resource for

responding to stereotypes about Islam. He explained that when certain controversial questions arose, for example questions around virgins as a gift for martyrs, or questions of jihad, he would “go back to the Qur’an”. He explained, “I try to go to what the text says. So where does that come from, and why do some have more credibility than others?” He felt that “if it is in the Qur’an, it typically has more credibility because within the religion that is the word of God...*the* primary source within the religion... is the Qur’an.” Although giving due authority to the Qur’an seems appropriate given its status and centrality in Islam; the interpretations of text have historically varied and continue to vary on virtually every issue. Asserting the religious authenticity of a practice through its mention in the Qur’an is not something all Muslims agree on; with some Muslim individuals and communities situating the Qur’an in the historic context in which it was revealed.

The Historical Approach. The Historical Approach was the most commonly reported approach among all the teachers in the sample. All the teachers discussed focusing on the rise and spread of Islam, and most teachers also discussed Islam’s interaction with Europe during the Medieval Period. Mr. Hall outlined some of the questions he asked of his class as part of a historical approach to Islam. “Why does Islam spread? What would be motivations for people to convert? What accounts for this rapid, rapid growth?” The historical approach, as described by Mr. Hall, engaged students in investigating certain phenomenon.

Ms. Travis, who taught an AP World History course and a standard World History course, explained that her standard World History course focused primarily on beliefs and practices whereas the AP course focused on a historical approach to Islam. Her

standard World History course learned about beliefs and practices of Islam and then contrasted Islam to another religion. After understanding the beliefs and practices, students moved on to the Caliphate and Empire. The unit on Islam in the standard World History course culminated in an essay, which prompted students to posit an response to the question, “What should be the legacy of the Islamic Empire?” Exemplified by Ms. Travis’ question which conflated all Muslim Empires into one Islamic Empire; the spread of Islam for many teachers was spoken about in a singular narrative. Namely, when Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, it was very unpopular, but quickly grew in popularity till it eventually spread across much of Africa, Asia, and some parts of Europe. The single historical narrative of Islam is exemplified in Ms. Travis’ essay question, which conflated Islam with Empire, instead of acknowledging several Muslim Empires spanning across geography and time.

In discussing her AP World History course, Ms. Travis described the culminating activity, which divided students into regional teams all bidding for the Islamic House of Wisdom. She explained that the teams ultimately had to argue that “their (regional) culture represents Islamic culture”, which she described as exhibiting “cosmopolitanism, syncretism, devotion to Islam”, among other characteristics. Inherent in this task was the assumption that Islamic culture is a singular entity. Although, adaptable to various cultures, it potentially leads students to argue about what is and what isn’t “Islamic”.

The Cultural Studies Approach. The Cultural Studies Approach to teaching about religion, in this case Islam, is touted by Asani and Moore as the preferred method of teaching about religion in schools. As discussed in Chapter Two, the cultural studies approach encompasses various features, including: multidisciplinary, an

acknowledgement of one's positionality, and power analysis of content (Moore, 2007). Although the cultural-studies approach was not the primary approach to the teaching about Islam; there were specific assignments and instructional moments, which aligned with a cultural studies approach. The most substantial of these instances was when teachers would engage students in intra-religious comparisons, highlighting critical diversity with Muslim experience. Ms. Grimes, more than any other teacher in the sample, used a cultural-studies approach by being especially attuned to issues of power and diversity.

Ms. Grimes, wanting to address the stereotype of Islam as inherently oppressive to women, led her students in a comparative study of women in four distinct Muslim contexts, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The goal of this exercise was for students to understand that Islam is not a religion that is followed without a filter of interpretation, and that many factors contribute to the evolving filters of interpretation used. On the same issue of the oppression of women, Ms. Grimes explained that,

These stories that we see about violence and oppression in the media represent a tiny fraction of Muslims in the world... I have a pie chart that... says 'Islam' and it has a tiny dot that says 'Taliban' and another tiny dot that says 'Al Qaeda'. So really trying to drive home a point that extremism is like a tiny ... It's actually that extremism is a distortion of religion rather than any kind of practice of religion.

We talk about the Westborough Baptist church as an example in Christianity. Both of these examples fulfill Moore's criteria of a cultural studies approach to religion by highlighting importance of interpretation and positionality.

Another way that a cultural studies approach was utilized with some teacher cases was through lessons on media literacy. Ms. Grimes spoke about how she taught students to practice building critical skills through with paying close attention to relational power dynamics when analyzing media. She explained, “ (In) the first quarter of the year is those different lenses that I mentioned: sociological, geographic economic and geopolitical...we spend a lot of time talking about race and racism and unconscious cognitive bias around different identity groups. We talked about racial profiling quite a bit and also privilege.” After establishing this framework, Ms. Grimes attempted to weave in power analyses in every subsequent topic covered.

With most of the teachers actively working to counter Islamophobic narratives of Islam, there were many instances of critical analyses of power in relation to stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. However, missing from the cultural-studies approach was the multidisciplinary aspect which was seldom introduced by the teachers who more strictly focused on a historical approach to Islam. Certain teachers, like Ms. Maracuja, incorporated novels as a supplement to understanding Islam and Muslims through a cultural lens. However, there were no accounts of the use of music, dance, poetry, or art in discussion Islam. Although teachers covered Muslim contributions to science and innovation in the Medieval Period, lived contemporary Muslim cultures were seldom acknowledged.

Ms. Maracuja Philisophical Appraoch. The case of Ms. Maracuja was unique, not only because Ms. Maracuja taught at an alternative public school, but because her primary approach to teaching about Islam did not fit well within the Asani and Moore’s framework. Though Ms. Maracuja did adopted elements of a cultural studies and historic

approach; she primarily used a philosophical approach to teaching about religion. Ms. Maracuja, who taught a single cohort of high-school students in a social-justice oriented alternative high school, planned her lessons in Language Arts and Social Studies such that her students could connect with geographic and historic diversity, practice critical thinking, and work toward positive change. The interview with Ms. Maracuja proved to be difficult to map and structure, mainly because her approach to teaching World History and Social Studies was through a lens of complexity. In addition, Ms. Maracuja's teaching context, allowed her the freedom to explore topics that might not be accessible to the other public school teachers in the sample, due to curricular constraints and worries about parental, student and administrator complaints. For example, Ms. Maracuja, when teaching about Islam, approached it from a spiritual lens. She explained,

Before, I'd have to say that in terms of learning goals in terms of teaching Islam ...what I...ask about, well, why are we learning this, we as human beings, sometimes without our asking this, we are concerned about what is our connection to the source of life. Again, it goes back to what is our place in this world. We're learning about these things because we need to know about humanity and ways of explaining a human existence.

Understanding Islam from the perspective of an adherent, as an explanation of human existence, was a novel approach that was not present in any of the other teacher's approaches. Like most of the other teachers, Ms. Maracuja took on Islamophobia and the misperceptions about Islam, stating, " I always talk about Islamophobia, but I like to talk about the history behind it." What made Ms. Maracuja distinct from the other teachers in

her sample was her focus on direct action. She went beyond exposing the problem, or deconstructing personal biases.

In speaking about her goals for teaching World History she explained that, “in thinking about world history, when students would ask ‘Why are things the way they are?’ (She would respond) ‘Why do you accept the world as it is? If you believe...there’s a problem with ... the way it is, shouldn’t you understand as much of it as is possible? Shouldn’t you try to develop your own understanding of this? The bottom line for World History is really, so that you start to understand your place in this world and your obligations in this world. Those were my objectives.” Teaching religion as dynamic, and diversely lived, was something Ms. Maracuja felt very comfortable communicating. She explained, “Sometimes faiths are presented to students as if they’re cut and dry. This group of people, they believe this. This group of people, they believe that, but we’re human beings.” Ms. Maracuja was able to apply a power analysis to what the class was learning about religion and culture through the use of novels.

Teaching Language Arts in conjunction with Social Studies allowed Ms. Maracuja to bring the complexity of lived experience to a material level. Ms. Maracuja was able to connect discussion questions about assigned novels to the Social Studies context. Asking questions, ‘like who has the right to speak for people, and if you don’t belong to this particular group, do you have the right to talk about it’, are questions Ms. Maracuja asks of her students consistently. Although the other teachers in the sample were critical of popular media content on Islam they were more trusting of the content from their textbooks. Ms. Maracuja represented a teacher who questioned everything in

favor of complexity, whereas Mr. Caplan, as discussed in the previous section, accepted much of the dominant, disparaging narrative about Muslims and Islam.

This chapter presented the two findings from the teacher sub-study of this dissertation. The first finding demonstrated that seven out of eight of the teachers directly addressed trying to challenge Islamophobia through their curricular choices. This finding also highlighted that classroom dynamics impacted the ways in which Islamophobia came up in the classroom. The final discussion related to the first finding raised the question of teacher bias through the case of Mr. Caplan who strove to separate his bias from the curriculum. The second finding presented in this chapter discussed the case teachers' curricular approaches to the topic of Islam through Asani (2011) and Moore's (2007) framework. This finding revealed that a multicultural/comparative approach and a historic approach were most commonly used by the case teachers.

CHAPTER 5: Student Findings

Misrepresentation spoils narration.

~Imam Ali

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings from the student sub-study conducted as part of this dissertation study. As a reminder, the research question pertinent to the student sub-study investigated students' reported experiences of curriculum on Islam. The research question was explored through inquiring how the students' minority-within-minority status impacted their experiences with, and perspectives of, the curriculum. This chapter is divided into two main sections; each representing a finding from the student sample. The findings discussed in this section were reached by analyzing student interviews and student questionnaires, which examined students' self-reported experiences with curriculum on Islam. The two findings discussed in this chapter were that (1) students found their identities flattened in the classroom setting and; (2) students perceived a multicultural approach to teaching about Islam as the most effective approach in combating Islamophobia. Before discussing the findings, I present each student case through a brief case description.

Student Cases Descriptions

The students in this sub-study all identified as Muslim girls from minority communities of interpretation (MCoIs) within Islam. Five of the girls attended high school, while one attended middle school. One of the students was homeschooled and attended resource center classes where she learned about Islam as a Social Studies topic. All of the girls attended their places of worship at least once a week, and considered religion as a significant part of their life. Though students were enrolled in diverse

curricular programs (ie, AP, IB, homeschool, standard); all of the students experienced Islam in the context of a World History course. The following student profiles offer a glimpse into each student case.

Zehra, an Ithnaashari Case Student. Zehra, a twelfth grade student, was the eldest student in the sample. Her background was also unique from the other students, in that she was a bi-racial child of Iraqi and European-American parents who had been homeschooled most of her life. Although Zehra had been homeschooled, she had a very robust social life with students she met through the Resources Center available to local homeschool students. Zehra's family had been regular attendees of the local Ithnaashri Shia mosque for several years and she was a religious education teacher for younger students. Zehra wore hijab, but had not faced overt discrimination as a result. In addition to her involvement with her religious community, Zehra was a competitive debater, attending debate competitions on most weekends. Zehra had taken very seriously the responsibility of responding to her peer's questions about Islam. Zehra understood her experience of Islam was filtered through her identities as a more "Americanized" Arab, and as a Shia.

Zaynab, an Ithnaashari Case Student. As a seventh grade student, Zaynab was the youngest in the sample. She attended a suburban middle school. A second-generation immigrant of South-Asian origin, Zaynab's parents were both born in East Africa. Zaynab enjoyed playing soccer, and participating in her religious community. Much of what Zaynab shared during the interview was around her experiences with identity after wearing the hijab, which she had recently adopted. Zaynab's mother did not wear hijab, and Zaynab's decision to wear hijab was largely influenced by her religious education

centered at her Islamic Center. As a result of wearing the hijab she was in a position to field increasing inquiries from her peers on Islam and women's rights. Zaynab discussed not resonating with the curriculum on Islam in her classroom because the Sunni-perspective was provided as the singular understanding of Islam. She enthusiastically corrected inconsistencies about Islam, and her teacher was very supportive of her doing so.

Laila, an Ahmadiyya Case Student. Laila was a tenth grade student who lived in a lower-middle class urban neighborhood. Laila was a second-generation immigrant of Pakistani parents. She described herself as a good student and someone engaged in her religious community. Laila spent most of her free time watching TV, or interacting with friends over social media platforms. She had recently joined a Multicultural Club in her school that generally met once a week afterschool. Laila's primary experiences with her Muslim identity in school had to do with cultural differences, which often presented boundaries to her participation in school and social activities. Laila wasn't allowed to participate in school dances or to date, nor was she able to participate in sports, which required students to wear shorts. As a result she often kept distance from these activities.

Aiza, an Ahmadiyya Case Student. Aiza was a ninth grade student who lived in a lower-middle class urban neighborhood. Like Laila, and like many of her religious community members, Aiza's family emigrated from the Punjab province of Pakistan. Aiza's primary experiences with being Muslim in her school context were around negative incidents following peers learning that she was Muslim. Not wearing hijab, and not having a name recognizable as Muslim, often lead peers to assume that Aiza was Indian, which many peers conflated with a Hindu identity. Aiza spoke about the

classroom curriculum not resonating with what she knew of Islam from her own interpretive context.

Aaima, an Ismaili Case Student. Aaima was a tenth grader at a lower middle class, public, suburban school, which offered an International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Aaima was with a cohort of other students who throughout high-school received IB curriculum. Aaima, was the only student of the sample who was not born in the United States. Aaima's family moved from India when she was still very young, making Aaima a 1.5-generation immigrant. Aaima was also distinctive in that she considered herself to be a feminist and was particularly concerned with issues of sexuality, gender and culture. In many ways she saw her religious identity through these intersecting identities.

Tara, an Ismaili Case Student. Tara was a second-generation South Asian student who drew origins to both Pakistan and India. She attended a middle class suburban high school. Tara, who was squarely focused on the college track, participated in several afterschool activities and was enrolled in several AP courses. She did not disclose her particular CoI affiliation to peers in school, and generally felt anxiety around disclosing her religious beliefs. Although she did not resonate with much of what she learned about Islam in her classroom; she did not desire that her community's interpretation be covered by the curriculum.

Findings 1: Being Flattened

One of the foundational findings of this study was that the Muslim girls from MCoIs constantly found their own experiences of being Muslim or practicing Islam minimized and essentialized in the classroom context. Since this finding utilizes the

concept of *flatness*, it is important to address the term once again. As was described in Chapter One, the term flat-Muslim denotes an over-simplistic, under-nuanced conception of ‘Muslim’. Although this finding is not surprising or novel, it is essential to discuss in order to better understand how curriculum might serve as an intervention to Islamophobia.

Students discussed two ways in which their identities were flattened in the classroom context. First, students noted that many of their peers conflated their national identities with their religious identities. Second, students explained that their CoIs were often silenced, and monolithic representations of Muslims were commonly encountered. Before exploring the first finding in detail, it is also important to acknowledge that here, students’ curricular experience is discussed more broadly than in the teacher sample. In addition to speaking about their experiences with instruction on Islam; students also spoke about their interactions with peers inside the classroom context.

“What? No! Indians have to be Hindu and stuff.” Many of the girls noted that they were often correcting misperceptions of their non-Muslim peers. Although misperceptions related to Muslim stereotypes were present, there were also misperceptions regarding who constituted a Muslim, and who didn’t. For example, Zaynab, who wore hijab and was therefore easily identifiable as Muslim, was asked the infamous “what are you” question by a peer. The following recounts that event.

Sometimes they ask me where I'm from because there's a lot of Indian kids (in my school). I'm actually Indian, I'm pure Indian, I'm from Gujarat. They're just like ‘Oh, are you Arab, are you Pakistani? Are you like Iraqi or Iranian?’ I'm like, ‘no, I'm Indian.’ They're like, ‘What,? No! Indians have to be Hindu and stuff.’

Social research has documented many instances where brown communities are lumped together as ‘Muslim’. Perhaps most well known are the incidents of hate crimes against the Sikh community who are commonly mistaken as Muslims (Kaleem, 2013). In this case, we see that Zaynab’s peers had a strong sense of where Muslims came from and where they didn’t. Ironically, Zaynab had told her peers she was from India in order to minimize confusion about her families’ actual immigration story. Her family was part of the South Asian Diaspora population in East Africa. Knowing that her peers would take issue with her parents being from Africa, without her being Black, she thought she was making the safer choice by claiming to be “pure Indian”. Unfortunately, she had not flattened herself sufficiently to satisfy her questioning peers.

Aaima had a very similar experience to Zaynab. It is worth noting here, that Aaima is enrolled in an IB program, which prides itself on globally focused, high caliber education. Aaima recounted that she had been challenged before on being Muslim because of where she was born-India. She explained, “Because I think the assumption is that most Muslims are coming from Pakistan or coming from Iran and that area. When I say I’m from India, they’re like, ‘No, but only Hindus are in India’”. She talked about having an argument with a classmate who stated, “No. That’s not normal for Muslims to come from India.” She tried to explain that it was in fact normal. “I was like, it’s very normal. I’m pretty sure”. She continued on by explaining that although this conversation happened with a White friend, there were many instances in which her Hindu friends assumed she was Hindu because she was from India. Curious about why her Hindu friends would make this assumption, I asked Aaima whether her Hindu friends were Indian and, if so, I wondered if they had been to India. She told me that they were all of

Indian-origin, and though none of them had been born in India, as she had, they had all visited India at least once before. The fact that her Hindu friends were unaware that many Muslims live in India surprised me and piqued my interest to explore this in future work.

“So, if you find a Muslim that disagrees, like, that’s normal”. The experiences of being flattened were not contained to national, racial and ethnic categories; students’ Muslim identity and performance was also essentialized. Zaynab noted that in a classroom discussion of the Five pillars, she was very confused because she hadn’t learned about Islam within a Five-pillar framework, and that framework was being taught as fundamental and essential to Islam. Zaynab was enthusiastic to be positioned as the expert on Islam in her class, and her teacher had previously encouraged her to contribute to the curriculum on Islam. During this discussion on the Five Pillars, Zaynab took the opportunity to talk about what she had learned through her religious education, which was, she explained, five roots and ten branches. It is important to note that in Zaynab’s classroom context, she was the only Muslim, and therefore her perspectives on Islam were easily accepted as *the* Muslim perspective. According to Zaynab, her teacher was welcoming of her contributions even when they contradicted the curriculum.

Having dominant Sunni Muslims in the classroom, as Zehra learned, presented an added level of flattening which was difficult to counter. Zehra talked about being approached by non-Muslim classmates who had heard from another Muslim student that Muslims don’t celebrate Halloween. She explained, “They said, ‘no, Muslims don’t celebrate Halloween. It’s *Haraam*².’.... (they) assume that all Muslims are the same.” Zehra decided to speak up and offer her perspective to her classmates, even if her

² Islamic term in Arabic denoting something as unlawful or forbidden

perspective would not resonate with the other Muslim student's experience. Zehra decided that she would offer her perspective, while making it clear that her perspective was colored by her community's interpretation. She said,

Sometimes I'll say things, but then I'll have to right away sense myself. Not only am I trying to relate to them (non-Muslim peers) in a way that they'll understand, but I'm also trying to figure out a way to explain it with like, "Okay, it's coming from my Shia beliefs," but then I'm like, "Well, but the Sunnis...they might not agree with this, so if you find a Muslim that disagrees, like, that's normal."

Zehra demonstrated her awareness of the danger that non-Muslim peers, after hearing a statement about Muslims/Islam from a Muslim individual, might universalize the statement to all Muslims. This awareness prompted Zehra to tell her peers that, "if you find a Muslim that disagrees, like, that's normal". As a result of her minority-in-minority status, Zehra had the opportunity/burden to teach her non-Muslim peers that different Muslims practice and believe differently.

Not every student felt that they could share their dissenting experiences of Islam with their fellow students. In Laila's case, she noted that in Social Studies classes addressing Islam, "they (the teacher) taught stuff that I didn't know really about. They only teach about two sects...and that's all they teach from that view." While Laila acknowledged that her experiences and knowledge of Islam was not reflected in the curriculum, she did not feel compelled to express dissent, nor did she expect the curriculum to cover the beliefs/practices of her community. Laila explained, "There's so many sects that they can't teach all of them. That's why they only teach the main ones, the majority." Considering the limited amount of time a World History curriculum can spend

on teaching about Islam, Laila's argument is extremely logical. However, Asani and Moore's argument suggested that teaching religion through a set of beliefs and practices runs the danger of narrowing the definition of an adherent. Invariably, dominant notions of the rites and rituals of Islam are taught, and are assumed as universal.

Beyond a consideration of the limits of curricular coverage, some students did not share their experiences with religion because of their heightened anxiety around curriculum on Islam. When describing a classroom activity where the teacher asked students to brainstorm stereotypes about Islam; Tara noted that,

People would say that most people think that they're (Muslims) all terrorists, all of them. It's a violent religion, and stuff like that. It was kind of like...every time it comes up I feel like everyone's turning to look at me. It doesn't really happen, but it just feels like that.

Although Tara really appreciated the stereotype activity, she did feel nervous about people associating her with terrorism. The questionnaire data demonstrated that most of the case students had a sense of anxiety/nervousness when Islam was discussed in the classroom. In the questionnaire, students were prompted to choose from the following in response to how they felt when Islam was brought up in the classroom:

'nervous/anxious', 'excited', 'indifferent' or 'other' with a write-in option. All but one of the students chose nervous/anxious as their response. Aaima, who differed in her affective experience, chose 'excited' as her response. Interestingly, there was no pattern between students' affective experiences with curriculum on Islam, and how they described their participation in those classrooms.

Muslim subjectivity, as any other identity, is discursive; it is constructed through a constant dialogue between external forces and agentic decisions. It is important to note that in addition to being shaped and defined by the double stigma of Islamophobia and intra-Muslim discrimination, these students also exercised autonomy in how they performed their Muslim-ness. The next section describes a strategy that case students found effective in combating Islamophobia; the multicultural approach.

Finding 2: “It’s a person”: students’ perspectives on the multicultural approach

Students performed their Muslim identities in a variety of ways; some taking on classroom roles as ‘the expert’, and others not sharing their experiences of Islam with the class or teacher. Despite how students acted in the classroom, they all believed that focusing on religious commonalities with their peers and teachers was the most effective path to educating against Islamophobia. In each of the interviews, students spoke about seeking commonalities with Christianity and Judaism as a means to quelling stereotypes, resulting in increased religious literacy.

Aaima, for example, spoke about the fact that in the IB curriculum her peers are very well educated on many Muslim rituals, including Hajj and obligatory prayer. However, Aaima felt that more valuable than a focus on rituals would be a focus on humanistic ethics. She said, “ the people around me, I feel like they don’t need to ... when it comes to discussions about Islam, they don’t need to be told about religious practices. I just want to discuss ethics with them and things that we hold similar.” Aaima explained that connecting over shared ethics and principles allows for deeper connections and friendships. Zehra and Zaynab reiterated this in their interviews.

Zehra, for example spoke about how an acquaintance from the homeschool system became a close friend as a result of exchanging information about their religions. She recounted, “(she) had just finished her home school component of her history book she was reading, and they had touched on Islam but she was reading it independently and doing the work with her mom and was asking me, like, ‘So I was reading that Muslims, like, do this and they fast and they do this’, and asking me about Prophet Mohammed, and Allah and what that means...We had a really deep conversation about it, and after the conversation, just looked at each other and we felt even closer than we were before because we knew a little bit more about one another because I also was getting to ask her questions about Christianity and we were explaining the misconceptions and stuff about our religions.” Like Aaima, Zehra saw friendship as an effective method to deconstructing misperceptions about Muslims and Islam.

In addition to focusing on building personal relationships, as in Zehra or Aaima’s cases, students also sought to build connections across religions through the official classroom curriculum. Aaiza spoke about how using a guest speaker, rather than relying on a textbook would make Islam more relatable to non-Muslim students. She stated, “Maybe they should actually bring in real-life examples. When they have public speakers it makes a difference. It's a person. It's not just like you're learning...you can empathize, sympathize with them so you can understand it more.” Aaiza’s statement, “It’s a person” beautifully illustrates the power the students see in bridge building. Viewing the Muslim-other as a dynamic person with complexities allows for a deeper connection, which Zehra and Aaima both seek through their interactions with peers.

Zaynab, along with the other students, desired that her non-Muslim peers viewed Muslims as similar to themselves. Like Aaiza, Zaynab wanted her Christian counterparts to humanize Muslims, and therefore spoke about the importance of learning about the diversity within Muslim communities. In speaking about why she thought sectarian differences should be taught about in lessons on Islam, Zaynab explained, “because then they can relate to us, especially if they're a different religion... they can be like ‘oh yeah, they have different practices even within their one religion. Their main belief system is the same, but they do things a little differently, just like even though we are Catholics, the Christians that aren't, are still Christian, but they don't do all the same things that we do’.” Just as in Zaynab's case, all of the students, in varying ways, argued for building bridges as a method to humanize Muslims and Islam.

This chapter presented the two findings from the student sub-study of this dissertation. The first finding presented demonstrated that students experienced their Muslims identities flattened in the classroom context. This finding explored flattening in two different ways. One, students experienced their nationality as flattened, because some peers had narrow conceptions of where Muslims live around the world. The second part of this finding discussed the ways students' status as Muslim girls from MCoIs was often silenced. The second finding of this sub-study discussed student perspectives on the most effective way to quell stereotypes and combat Islamophobia. The strategy all of the students promoted could be called the bridge building strategy; where commonalities across differences were focused on. The next chapter, Chapter Six, buildings on both the findings chapters in order to discuss this study, its implications and questions for future research.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion And Conclusion

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.

~Karl Marx

The purpose of this chapter is to conclude this dissertation by discussing: (1) findings from the teacher sub-study; (2) findings from the student sub-study; (3) the teacher and student data as it relates to unflattening the Muslim-other; (4) discussing the implications and limitations of this research ;(5) areas of future research; and (5) the significnace of this dissertation.

Discussing the Teacher Sub-study Findings

This section discusses the two findings from the teacher sub-study. Namely, Chapter Four presented (1) that seven out of eight of the teachers reported using curriculum to challenge Islamophobic notions, and (2) a multicultural and historic approach was reported as the most predmominantly used among the teacher sample.

The Place for Islamophobia. When I've told people about my research on Islam in the classroom, I am almost always met by skeptical comments like, "I'm sure it is really negative or biased", or even "Is it even taught?" Although my study can't speak to how well Islam is taught, people are always surprised to find that most of the teachers in my study not only acknowledged that Islamophobia exists, they reported making attempts to address it in their classrooms. Teachers in the sample discussed using a variety of methods to address negative steterotypes prominent in popular culture. The teachers who addressed Islamophobia directly in the curriculum held commonsense notions that went against the precepts of Islamophobia discussed in Chapter One.

Many teachers described using the stereotype-listing activity at the beginning of lessons on Islam in order to unequivocally dispell stereotypes of Muslims/Islam. Mr. Corder, not only wanted to dispel myths about Islam; he wanted his students to learn that Islam “is about love and compassion”. Though this study was not able to uncover why seven of the teachers rejected Islamophobic notions, all of the teachers expressed goals of wanting their students to be well educated and able to function productively in a pluralistic society. However, Mr. Caplan, the only teacher who did not discuss an outright rejection of Islamophobia, also shared similar teaching goals to the other teachers. For example, Mr. Caplan explained that he wanted his students to understand “who people were and their core values “, because he believed that would make students “more prepared to interact with them. Because when you understand people, hopefully we can avoid conflict”. Since all of the teachers shared similar teaching goals; the question arises, what made Mr. Caplan different from the other seven teachers?

Mr. Caplan was the only teacher who addressed his own biases in the interview. He was aware of his biases and was cautious to not allow his own biases infiltrate the curriculum. This was demonstrated by Mr. Caplan’s avoidance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where he explained that, if asked, he tries to provide just “the facts” of both sides. He further elaborated that “because I am so biased in my opinions I kind of steer clear from it (controversy)”. Mr. Caplan’s contrasting example allowed me to reflect more deeply on the anti-Islamophobic stance of the other seven teachers. Islamophobia, particularly stereotypes of Islam and Muslims, came up in all seven interviews very quickly and most teachers addressed it in response to the first interview question asked; “Have you taught about Islam before in your classroom? If so, how have you approached

teaching this subject? What have been your learning goals around teaching about Islam?”

The seven teachers indicated the existence of Islamophobia through references to popular culture, primarily through media distortions of Islam. They did not spend time discussing whether or not Islamophobia impacted their curriculum; instead, this was a commonsense assumption which was communicated in the ways they described how they addressed Islamophobia through curriculum.

This finding, significant because there has been minimal research conducted on teachers’ experiences about teaching Islam, also raised questions about the role of teacher bias in Social Studies. Though teacher bias has been studied, and is accepted as a curriculum-shaping component, it has yet to be explored thoroughly in the literatures on World History and religious literacy. It is also important to note that the teachers in this sample represented a variety of self-defined religious perspectives, including: Jewish, spiritual but not religious, Protestant Christian, Buddhist, and Atheist. Though I briefly asked teachers about their relationship to religion, the data was not substantial enough to correlate to teacher statements. This is an area, which warrants in-depth inquiry and I hope to incorporate teacher beliefs more substantially in future work.

Curricular approaches to Islam. Analyzing the teacher cases through Asani (2011) and Moore’s (2007) framework raised three areas of discussion: (1) curriculum was unintentionally sectarian; (2) the multicultural approach relied on Islam as a monolith, and ; (3) the teachers revealed curricular approaches to Islam beyond Asani and Moore’s framework.

The Unintentional Sectarian Approach. The lack of varied interpretations of Islam and Islamic histories pointed to the unintentional sectarian nature of much of the

curriculum on Islam. In most cases, teachers discussed a single narrative of Islam and Islamic history. This unintentional sectarian approach was manifested through other curricular approaches. For example, the devotional approach which taught The Five Pillars was reportedly taught as universal and foundational to all Muslims. The most often employed, historic approach, was also subject to an unintentional sectarian perspective. Asking students to study *the* Islamic Empire, without much mention of the contributions of minority communities of interpretation, perpetuated an unintended sectarian narrative.

Another example of a singular, dominant narrative of Muslim history was within the context of Mr. Hall's AP World History course. He had planned a culminating project where students, in teams divided by region, advocated for their city/region to host the new House of Wisdom. One of the criteria that students were to use in their argument was their region's "devotion to Islam". Although this could have been a potentially powerful way of demonstrating how devotion to Islam diversely manifests depending on the context; the exercise was more about which region was most appropriately reflecting authentic Islam.

Determining the "Islamic-ness" of someone or something is not uncommon with respect to Muslim communities. Debates about the Islamic-ness of ISIS (Juergensmeyer, 2014) along with discussions about the Islamic-ness of tattoos, on-line dating, and wearing *niqab*, are vibrant across Muslim communities. Diverse Muslim communities continuously disagree about true and authentic Islam. When Muslim communities disagree about what is Islamic and what isn't, the debate within the Ummah is one framed by a sacred perspective on epistemology. This is a very different epistemological

context from public school, where religion is not taught from a sacred epistemological perspective. Since classroom curriculum is not bound by epistemological desires for the Truth, it is poised to explore a variety of truths as lived by diverse people across time and geography. The next section explores how diverse Communities of Interpretation (CoI) within Islam were discussed by the teachers.

Addressing Communities of Interpretation in the Classroom. The only teacher in the sample who discussed non-dominant Sunni perspectives outside the frame of sectarian conflict was Ms. Maracuja. In our interview, Ms. Maracuja was not discussing how she incorporated diverse CoIs into her curriculum; she discussed how her own experiences of living in Morocco gave her a sense of the interpretive diversity within Islam. For the rest of the teachers, the primary topic in which diverse communities of interpretation were acknowledged was within a historic approach to teaching about Islam; namely, as part of a historic account of succession after Muhammed's death. Mr. Corder explained his reason for not discussing MCoIs in detail when he said, "I don't focus on the religious division so much within Islam... they are so complex and (the textbook) kind of glosses over them". Although the reasons why teachers did not substantially cover MCoIs in their curriculum were unclear, it was interesting that three of the seven teachers who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they believed diverse Muslim perspectives should be more adequately covered in the curriculum. Only mentioning MCoIs in the context of a conflict which occurred in the early years of Islam, without mentioning MCoIs again, trivializes the role of minority communities within the histories of Muslims and Islam.

This trivialization is reflected in the comments of Bill Maher referenced in Chapter One. Dismissing the significance of the histories of MCoIs, Maher said, “The reason nothing can ever move forward in Iraq, let’s be real, is because of religion. Because there are two sects and something that happened 1400 years ago they are still beefing about...religion is the root of the problem” (September, 7, 2007). Utilizing Asani (2011) and Moore’s (2007) framework to analyze Maher’s statement reveals two problems: First, Maher equated the problems of sectarian violence in Iraq to religion. It is unclear how Maher conceived of religion, but his choice of words indicated that he viewed religion as distinct from historical, political, and sociocultural factors. Maher’s simplistic conceptions of diversity among Muslims was demonstrated by his attribution of conflict to one single historical event; namely, “something that happened 1400 years ago”. This statement dismissed the theological differences between the Shia and Sunni, and the separate and interwoven traditions and contributions both communities have made to the fabric of Islamic histories. The unintentional sectarian approach silences a specific kind of diversity within the Muslim experience. The next section discusses another curricular approach, which unintentionally over-simplified the Muslim experience.

The Unintended Consequence of the Multicultural Approach. Many of the case teachers reported using the strategy of comparing Islam with other religions. This strategy is what Moore (2007) called the Multicultural Approach, which can also be called the Comparative Approach. Teachers who reportedly used this strategy explained that being able to compare religions is an important demonstration of knowledge, and it may also allow students to gain an appreciation for how others are similar to themselves.

Although, the strategy has the capability of positively seeking commonalities in difference, it relies on the first premise of Islamophobia outlined in the previous paragraph. Specifically, it frames Islam, and other faiths, as monolithic. This reinforces Ross Dunn's (2010) research on two world histories, where, he argued that most world history curriculum relies on the assumption of distinct cultures and civilizations, despite Social Science scholarship suggesting that cultures are constantly shifting and varied.

On the surface, comparing Islam to other religions can be an exercise in dismantling Islamophobia, because the activity has the potential of un-othering Islam. However, the comparative activity was done based on beliefs and practices, which were not historically contextualized and were presented as universal and definitive. Just the mere exercise of finishing the sentence, Islam is _____, accepts the premise that Islam is something codified rather than a lived dynamic part of Muslim lives.

Critiques that curricula on Islam are overly simplistic must be tempered by the constraints of time in a shrinking discipline (Grant, 2008). Although this dissertation does not have the data to make claims about best practices, it does raise questions about the implications of various curricular approaches, which are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Although Asani (2011) and Moore's (2007) framework provided a useful analytic tool for curricular approaches of Islam, this study revealed two approaches which were not included in their framework. The first approach was demonstrated by Ms. Maracuja's philosophical approach to religion. This approach included a focus on large philosophical ideas about the meaning and function of religion in the lives of humans. By asking students to grapple with questions like, "Why are we learning this" and "What is our

place in this world”, Ms. Maracuja asked her students to consider the role of religion in the lives of adherents. As she explained, “We’re learning about these things because we need to know about humanity and ways of explaining a human existence”. Although Ms. Maracuja reportedly used several of the other curricular approaches in her teaching of Islam, she grounded the curriculum on Islam around a philosophical approach which was distinct from the other seven teachers and distinct from the approaches outlined in Asani and Moore’s framework.

The second approach that Asani and Moore did not consider was an anti-oppression approach to religion. Mr. Caplan’s discussion of bias allowed me to notice the anti-oppression lens that the other teachers were using in their curriculum on Islam. The emphasis that most of the teachers placed on teaching against Islamophobia pointed to the larger curricular goals those teachers had. At the heart of an anti-oppression approach to religion is curricular controversy. Most of the teachers reportedly hinged their anti-oppression curricular approaches on dispelling myths about Islam and Muslims. If a religion isn’t mired in controversy, and there aren’t many commonly known myths associated with a religion, an anti-oppression approach might be unnecessary. Asani and Moore’s frameworks discussed religious literacy more broadly across every faith tradition, however the element of controversy associated with Islam is a current reality, which must be accounted for in the framework.

Asani (2011) and Moore’s (2007) framework was useful in identifying the overlapping and multiple approaches teachers in the sub-study included in their curriculum on Islam. Also useful was a recognition of which curricular approaches

teachers were using that were not included within Asani and Moore's framework. The next section discusses the findings of the student sub-study.

Discussing the Student Sub-study Findings

This section discusses the two findings from the student sub-study. Namely, Chapter Five presented (1) that students experienced a flattening of their Muslim identity, and (2) students perceived a multicultural approach to learning about Islam as effective in combatting Islamophobia.

The Muslim girls from MCoIs in this study reported experiencing their Muslim identities flattened in the classroom context. Much of this flattening was experienced through the comments of their peers, and other flattening was experienced directly through explicit curriculum. Although I had expected that students would find their CoIs silenced, I did not expect that nationality would intersect with CoIs as prominently as it did. For example, peers challenged students with roots in India because their religion and nationality were seen as being incompatible. What was most striking was that even Aaima's Indian friends, who identified as Hindu, could not accept that she, a Muslim, could be both Indian and Muslim. This finding, which I did not expect, prompted me to ask questions about knowledge, which may be taken for granted. Do educators explicitly need to teach students that identities are complex, varied, and intersecting? Is this not a lesson, which people learn through experiences with others, and experiences with themselves?

I tried to make sense of these questions through a postcolonial lens, which enforces "a discursive or political suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 61). Finding that study students reported their non-Muslim

peers struggled with conceiving of them in complex ways made me wonder what other social locations would seem incompatible to the non-Muslim peers. I wondered, for example, whether being queer and Muslim were compatible, or whether being a feminist and a Muslim girl were compatible. These questions have implications for the curricular context, which can be leveraged to better equip students to recognize and accept complex, intersecting identities of all individuals.

Another area where intersecting identities prevailed was in the minority-in-minority status the students occupied. According to standpoint theory, one's social location tremendously impacts the way one sees the world. In this study, some of the students were empowered to share experiences of their interpretations of Islam, while others were not. Some students, like Zaynab, decided to directly address the dissonance she experienced in the classroom, while others like Laila, did not even expect to be acknowledged in the curriculum. As Laila, an Ahmadiyya student stated, "There's so many sects that they can't teach all of them. That's why they only teach the main ones-the majority". Ironically, when asked on the questionnaire about what topics are not covered, which should be covered, Laila wrote-in, "Ahmadiyya Muslim community".

In some instances the focal students were the only Muslims in their Social Studies classes and in other instances they were one among other dominant Muslims. Although this study did not explicitly investigate intra-Muslim dynamics in the classroom, questions about why certain students chose to participate and share their experiences of religion and others didn't, is an important consideration in understanding the minority-within-minority tension.

Although their social location did not impact all of the students in the same way, all of the students did demonstrate that they reflected on their minority-in-minority status in relationship to the curriculum. Their reflection was discussed primarily through instances where students' experiences and knowledge of religion did not resonate with what they were learning through the curriculum. Half the students in the sample did not expect the curriculum to include their communities within topics on Islam. At the same time, all of the students felt that personal connections with individuals was an effective strategy in interrupting Islamophobia both within the classroom curriculum, and interpersonally. I saw this as a paradox of sorts; while students didn't find their communities significant enough to study, they felt that learning about Islam through an individual's perspective would be significant enough to study. This begs the question: What value were students perceiving in focusing on individual accounts and experiences? The next section compares the reported experiences of teachers and students and thus helps address this question.

Unflattening the Muslim-Other

Though the students and teachers in this study occupied very different positions as curriculum actors in the classroom, they both discussed a desire for humanizing Muslim-others through curriculum. This section will first discuss how teachers and students advocated for the humanization of the Muslim-other, and will then discuss how current research on curriculum addresses this desire.

As discussed previously, seven out of eight of the sample teachers reported deliberately using curriculum to respond to Islamophobic conceptions of Islam and Muslims. Many of the teachers discussed accomplishing this by addressing popular

cultural myths and stereotypes about Islam and comparing Islam to other faith traditions. When discussing the purpose behind these activities, many teachers expressed a desire for these activities to make Muslims and Islam less strange, and more relatable. Ms. Gaines expressed the desire to humanize the Muslim-other through curriculum directly when she said, “In terms of Islam and in terms of sort of everything ...I want to... humanize people around the world. I would say that's the top objective”. Other teachers indirectly spoke of wanting their students to see “similarities” and “linkages” between their faith traditions and Islam. This sentiment was echoed by student contributions to and recommendations of curriculum on Islam.

Some of the students in the sample discussed how friendships and personal associations served as a strategy to countering Islamophobia. Zehra explained that her friendship with a Christian friend allowed for comparisons across faiths. She said,

After the conversation, (we) just looked at each other and we felt even closer than we were before because we knew a little bit more about one another because I also was getting to ask her questions about Christianity and we were explaining the misconceptions and stuff about our religions.

Similarly, Aaima asserted that she wanted classroom curriculum focused on similarities across ethics instead of across practices, because she felt deeper commonality would emerge from humanistic ethics instead of particularities of practices. Aaiza suggested that instead of relying on a textbook, curriculum should draw from lived experiences. She explained that, “When they have public speakers it makes a difference. It's a person. It's not just like you're learning...you can empathize, sympathize with them so you can understand it more”. Both teachers and students emphasized that by

humanizing student experiences with, and understanding of, Islam and Muslims, empathy and commonality could be forged. In this way, teachers and students were advocating for an unflattening of the Muslim-other. After all, divorcing people from their complexity, and in essence flattening them, is an act of violence against their humanity (Taylor, 1994).

Asani (2011) and Moore (2007) promote a cultural-studies approach to curriculum on religion in order to honor the complexities inherent in human communities. They assert that by learning about various lived experiences of religion and religious history, religion ceases to remain static, and is instead a fluid part of individual and communal history and experience. The impulse for teachers and students to compare religion was in service of humanizing or un-flattening the Muslim other. Asani and Moore, while agreeing with the intended outcome of the comparative approach, have argued that comparing religions can unintentionally reify simplistic conceptions of religions. Instead, Asani and Moore contend that varied contextualized experience works to humanize the religious-other by complicating human experience. Cultural studies,, which strives to be more inclusive and critical in its approach, raises important and challenging questions for Social Studies curricula. More specifically, a cultural studies approach with its emphasis on complexity of experience, raises the question: What does it mean to be educated about Islam in a K-12 context?

The question of what it means to be educated about Islam takes distinct shape when it is situated within the context of the K-12 system. This is true, particularly in a course such as World History, which often expects teachers to cover 1,000 or more years of global history in nine-months. Imagining what one needs to know about any given

religion will be greatly constrained by the time/coverage dilemma. In every teacher case, limited time was a factor mentioned and teachers expressed regret over not having more time to cover Islam.

One of the other constraints teachers faced was the limit of their own knowledge and capacity. None of the teachers in the sample were from Muslim backgrounds, although some, like Ms. Maracuja, had experience in Muslim contexts. A lack of familiarity with Islam may impact a teacher's willingness to engage in complexities beyond what many teachers noted as 'factual' dimensions of the religion, namely its beliefs, practices and dominant historical narrative. Compounding teachers' limited knowledge of Islam is anxiety, which teachers may face around teaching about Islam in an *Islamophobic* environment (Moore, 2010). The fear that teachers may offend students on topics requiring tremendous sensitivity is significant, and it beckons the need for strong scholarly academic resources that can be relied upon.

The stereotypical conceptions of Muslims in popular culture, call for a cultural studies approach to learning about Muslims, however imperfect it may be. Teachers in the sample were not impervious to these flat-conceptions and, in direct and indirect ways, many of them attempted to counter media images of Islam. Ms. Gaines did this by showing the Taliban as a dot in the very large circle of Islam. Mr. Erick's asked his students why people say Muslims are terrorists. He explained that when students connect the attacks of September 11, 2001, he challenges students by asking, "How many Muslims are there in the world?" and then by explaining, "We're attributing an event ... to a larger body of people. Is that a fair thing to do?" The fact that teachers were compelled to explain to their students that the actions of some do not define entire

communities, makes me question whether religious literacy is about knowing “facts” about a certain religion, or whether religious literacy requires students to practice critical thinking skills. If students were equipped with critical thinking skills within a religious literacy context, they would presumably be less likely to attribute terrorism to Islam. The following section explores some implications of this dissertation research.

Implications

This section will focus on implications for two distinct contexts: classroom curriculum and teacher education. Since this study focused heavily on curricular approaches to teaching about Islam, it follows that there are significant implications for curricula on Islam. Although this study referenced various course offerings-- Advanced Placement courses, IB courses, World History, Honors World History, and Contemporary World-- the promise of shifting to a cultural studies approach, as Asani and Moore suggest, is applicable in all curricular cases. Focusing on religion from a cultural studies lens, frames religion as simultaneously fluid and diverse.

The very nature of a cultural-studies approach provides a challenge for curriculum, which strives to teach something concrete to students. The curricular tensions of breadth vs. depth and constraints of time, provide challenges to shifting curriculum from a historic or devotional approach to a cultural-studies approach. For example, whereas a historic or devotional approach typically uses one dominant narrative of Islam, a cultural studies approach would involve several narratives and analyses of the differences among narratives. However, as Sam Wineburg argued, “the dimensions of breadth and depth view the problem of knowledge as one of amount rather than kind” (p.257, 1997). Luckily resources appropriate to a cultural studies approach to Islam are

increasingly accessible for teachers to utilize. For example, young Muslims living in the U.S. have documented their experiences of being Muslim in various aspects of life. Some of these resources include an anthology called *Love, Inshallah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women* (2012); *Salaam Love: American Muslim Men on Love, Sex, and Intimacy*; (2014), *I Speak For Myself: American Women on Being Muslim* (2011) and; the podcast #GoodMuslimBadMuslim, to name a few. Pulling curriculum materials from various sources to supplement the dominant narratives from the textbook would be an effective first step. Curricular materials alone, however, cannot be used as cultural-studies texts, without a cultural studies approach. The next paragraph discusses this further by elaborating on implications for the teacher education context.

Research has shown that a teacher's conception of the discipline they are teaching will greatly impact how they approach their instruction (Leinhardt, 1988). Additionally, Social Studies teachers' conceptions vary greatly depending on their individual backgrounds. "Most Social Studies teachers, who are likely to have had thin preservice training in non-American history, perhaps any history" (Dunn, p.188, 2010), will teach according to their preconceived understandings of history. Therefore, addressing conceptions of curricular content in pre-service programs is essential for a more complex understanding of the Muslim-other. Kaya Yilmaz, who conducted a study with practicing Social Studies teachers, (2008) found that Social Studies teachers commonly shared, "naive conceptions of history, which were partial, incomplete, and fragmentary. Not only novice teachers but also experienced teachers had difficulty looking at history as a discipline in terms of its underlying epistemological and conceptual underpinnings." In

consideration of these findings, a teacher education program would be a ripe space for teaching principles of a cultural-studies approach to the Social Studies more broadly.

Limitations

Although this study has illuminated an interesting problem space and has raised several significant questions for future research, there are limitations to this study that are important to acknowledge. The first limitation is in the study design. With the student and teacher case subjects, interviews were heavily relied upon. In both instances it would have been extremely useful to have classroom observation experience in order to triangulate observations with interview data. Had this data source been available, a more thorough understanding of the approaches used by teachers could have been done. It would have been even better if the students in the study had been enrolled in the teacher case subjects' classes. However, this was not something I could coordinate given time and resource constraints.

This study provided a critique of curricular approaches, but it did not give a material outline of what an effective curriculum on Islam would look like. I discuss some of the limitations of a cultural-studies approach in K-12 curricula, based on the work of Asani and Moore, but I am unable to provide a concrete description of what a cultural studies curriculum would look like in a classroom context. Having a clearer sense of what a cultural-studies curriculum on Islam would entail in a high-school context would contribute meaningfully to teacher practice. Recognizing this limitation has paved the way for my future research agenda, which is discussed in the next section.

Further Research

Conducting this study has raised several important questions for consideration in future research. Though this dissertation explored the possibilities of a cultural studies approach, as outlined by Asani and Moore, it also provided a discussion of the potential constraints of such an approach. Researching and developing a cultural studies curriculum on Islam for a high-school World History curriculum would allow me an opportunity to deeply explore the constraints and opportunities of such an approach. Asani and Moore have indicated that a cultural studies approach is the most effective approach in achieving religious literacy. Designing an empirical study to investigate this claim is part of my future research agenda.

The data from this study raised several curiosities, which revealed fertile areas of research beyond the scope of this study. For example, the role that a teacher's religious beliefs play in their approach to teaching about religion would be a fascinating area of study. Mr. Caplan spoke at length about how his identity as a religious person impacted his attitude toward religion within a context he experienced as vehemently secular. Teachers' religious beliefs and the connection to their curricular decisions was not explored within the confines of this project, but would be a significant contribution to the field of Social Studies education.

Including a Christian school in this sample was something I wasn't anticipating to do at first. However, after speaking with Mrs. McBride, I felt that her contributions would provide an important contrast to the other teacher cases. I was most struck by Mrs. McBride's accounts of how openly critical her students were about other religions. A comparative study, examining how religion is covered in a religious vs. a secular setting would be another area of study worthy of examination, as it is largely uncharted. This

area of study might also reveal more about how the social dynamics of the classroom impact student discussion and participation.

Finally, the research I am most compelled to undertake is catalyzed by the greatest limitation of this study: the lack of classroom observations. With more time, I would embark on a study which followed Muslim girls from MCoIs into their Social Studies classrooms. I would observe their classroom instruction, collect data on their perspectives, and the perspectives of their teachers as well.

Significance of the Study

This study, through its use of post-colonial theory, its study design, and inclusion of minority voices and perspectives, attempts to contribute to the fields of Social Studies education and religious literacy. As this study is situated within the problem space of Islamophobia, which flattens and dehumanizes Muslims, it ultimately asks the question: When it comes to the topic of Islam, what does it mean to be an educated person? This question must be considered within the context of Social Studies today. Many scholars have argued that the current educational era is defined by a high-stakes, standardized climate, which has been critiqued for limiting opportunities for students, particularly poor students and students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Interestingly enough, the skills needed for a successful future involve critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. Developing these skills, which require students to think in complex terms, won't be accomplished through a standardized focused educational system (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

In addition to exploring complexity in curriculum, this study attempts to prioritize the voices of teachers and students. By focusing on the experiences of Muslim girls from

MCoIs, the study aims to utilize the knowledge of often silenced, liminal voices.

Additionally, this study presents the perspectives of teachers, most of whom believe in shaping curriculum and instruction to address the ills of Islamophobia. Well-intentioned teachers, who utilize thoughtful processes in addressing Islam and Islamophobia, are often not represented in the limited literature on Islam in the classroom. My hope is that this dissertation contributes to scholarly conversations about pluralism and religious literacy within a democratic classroom environment.

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Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol

Have you taught about Islam before in your classroom? If so, how have you approached teaching this subject? What have been your learning goals around teaching about Islam?

2. How do you feel about teaching about Islam in the classroom to Muslim students versus non-Muslim students? What are your considerations?

3. How will Islam be covered this year in your curriculum?

4. What are your thoughts on what students should know about religions in general, and Islam specifically?

5. Can you remember any moments in your classroom where teaching or talking about Islam became uncomfortable or tense? Can you tell me about this time?

6. If you were to give a new teacher advise on teaching about Islam, what would you say?

Appendix B

Online Questionnaire for Teachers

This is only a preview of the survey. Responses will not be saved. [Close](#)

Teachers Survey: Dissertation Research

Page 1 of 1

Question 1.

Name (First, Last)

Required.

Question 2.

Chosen Pseudonym (First, Last)

Required.

Question 3.

Age

Required.

Question 4.

Gender

Required.

Question 5.

What courses are you teaching this year? (Include course title and grades targeted)

Required.

Question 6.

How many years have you been teaching for?

Required.

Question 7.

Describe the population at your school, and the population you teach (if not representative of the school).

Required.

Question 12.

Please order these topics in sequence of how much coverage each of these topics gets in your courses (1-least coverage and 11-most coverage). If the topic is not covered at all please select 'not covered'.

Required.

Historical Event of Shia-Sunni split at time of Prophet's death	Select one... ▾
5 Pillars of Islam	Select one... ▾
Muslim Empires	Select one... ▾
Doctrinal differences between Shia and Sunni	Select one... ▾
Basic information about the Quran	Select one... ▾
Islams connection to Christianity and Judaism	Select one... ▾
Life of Prophet Muhammed	Select one... ▾
Muslim Civilizations (culture, art, inventions, etc.)	Select one... ▾
The role of women in Islam	Select one... ▾
Islam and it's association with terrorism	Select one... ▾
Islamophobia	Select one... ▾

Question 13.

Which emotion best describes your feelings around teaching about religion in Social Studies courses?

Required.

- neutral
- nervous/anxious
- excited
- dread
- Other:

Question 14.

Which emotion best describes your feelings around teaching about Islam in Social Studies courses?

Required.

- neutral
- nervous/anxious
- excited
- dread
- Other:

Appendix C

Student Interview Protocol

1. Tell me what a typical day looks like for you. How might it look differently on a weekend?
2. On a piece of paper draw a diagram representing what is important to you in life. This could be people, activities or things. Each person, activity or thing should be draw within a circle. How are these circles connected?
3. Do people in your school ever ask you about your religious or cultural background? If so, how do you generally respond? What do you have to think about when making these decisions of what to say about who you are?
4. How would you describe your circle of friends? Who are they? What do you do together?
5. How is your life similar or different to your peers at school?
6. Can you remember a time when you've been in the class and Islam was talked about? This can either be by other students or the teacher or the textbook. If I were in class with you that day what would I have seen and heard?
7. Do you think your peers have an accurate impression of Islam and Muslims according to your understanding? Your teachers? What makes you think this?

Appendix D

Online Questionnaire for Students

This is only a preview of the survey. Responses will not be saved. [Close](#)

Student Survey: Dissertation

Page 1 of 1

Question 1.

Name (Last, First)

Required.

Question 2.

Chosen Pseudonym (Last, First)

Required.

Question 3.

Age

Required.

Question 4.

Current grade in school

Required.

Question 5.

Gender

Required.

Question 6.

What courses have you taken in school that address Islam? Please note the name of the course/s and what grade it was taught in.

Required.

Question 7.

Do you consider yourself to be religious?

Required.

Yes

- No
- Somewhat
- Other:

Question 8.

Explain your response to the previous question:

Question 9.

How would you describe who you are in terms of your religious identity?

Required.

Question 10.

If a peer in your school asked you what your religion was, how would you answer?

Question 11.

Please place the following curricular topics in order of 'most important for students to know' to 'least important for students to know'. Please order these topics from **most important (11)** to **least important (1)**.

Select a unique answer for each row.

Historical Event of Shia-Sunni split at time of Prophet's death	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
5 Pillars of Islam	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
Muslim Empires	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
Doctrinal differences between Shia and Sunni	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
Basic information about the Quran	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
Islam's connection to Christianity and Judaism	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
Life of Prophet Muhammed	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
Muslim Civilizations (culture, art, inventions, etc.)	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
The role of women in Islam	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>
Islam and it's association with terrorism	<input type="text" value="Select one..."/>	<i>Select a unique answer.</i>

Islamophobia

Select one... *Select a unique answer.*

Question 12.

Are there any other topics in Islam that you think are important for students to know?

Question 13.

Please order these topics in sequence of how much coverage (or how often) each of these topics gets discussed in your classes at school. **(1-least coverage and 11-most coverage)**. If the topic is not covered at all please select 'not covered'.

Required.

Historical Event of Shia-Sunni split at time of Prophet's death

Select one...

5 Pillars of Islam

Select one...

Muslim Empires

Select one...

Doctrinal differences between Shia and Sunni

Select one...

Basic information about the Quran

Select one...

Islams connection to Christianity and Judaism

Select one...

Life of Prophet Muhammed

Select one...

Muslim Civilizations (culture, art, inventions, etc.)

Select one...

The role of women in Islam

Select one...

Islam and its association with terrorism

Select one...

Islamophobia

Select one...

Question 14.

What emotion best describes how you feel when learning about Islam in your Social Studies classroom?

Required.

nervous/anxious

excited

dread

Other:

Question 15.

How well has Islam been covered in your school curriculum?

Required.

I think they have done a great job

- They are definitely trying but they need to do more
- The education on Islam is inadequate
- Other:

Question 16.

Check the top 5 topics in Islam you believe your non-Muslim peers have questions about

Required.

- Women and Hijab
- Gender Oppression
- Fasting
- Prayer
- Connection to Terrorism
- Violent Versus in the Quran
- Sectarian differences
- Plural Marriage
- Modern Conflicts
- Other:

Question 17.

How well does what you have learned in school about Islam reflect what you have learned about Islam at home or in religious education? Do you find contradictions? Please explain.

Required.

Question 18.

Watch this clip from 51 minutes to 53:20. What did you notice? Were you surprised by anything? Did you agree or disagree with anything? Any general comments?

Required.