

Muslim-American Scripts

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This paper argues that one of the most valuable insights that Muslim-Americans ought to bring into the political arena is our affective response to the government of the United States' internal and foreign policies regarding Muslims. I posit the concept of empathy as one such response that ought to inform our foreign policy in a manner inclusive of Muslim-Americans. The scope of our epistemic privilege encompasses the affective response that crosses borders of the nation-state in virtue of our propinquity to the narratives of Muslims globally. Such an affective response is crucial to our selves remaining multiplicitous and whole. Furthermore, I argue that we ought to access and assess those aspects of our identity that make us subject to suspicions of disloyalty, because it is precisely those aspects that can inform our social and political discourse in a more morally adequate and responsive way.

I. THE UNDYING PATRIOTISM SCRIPT

CNN-HLN talk-show host Glenn Beck posed the following challenge to Keith Ellison (Democrat-Minnesota), the first Muslim-American elected to the United States Congress:

OK. No offense, and I know Muslims. I like Muslims. I've been to mosques. I really don't believe that Islam is a religion of evil. I—you know, I think it's being hijacked, quite frankly. With that being said, you are a Democrat. You are saying, "Let's cut and run." And I have to tell you, I have been nervous about this interview with you, because what I feel like saying is, "Sir, prove to me that you are not working with our enemies." And I know you're not. I'm not accusing you of being an enemy, but that's the way I feel, and I think a lot of Americans will feel that way. (Beck 2006)

Glenn Beck's preface to the challenge was much like the common declarations we hear from racist or homophobic people: "I'm not anti-Semitic [or favorite flavor

of prejudice]. I once dated a Jewish girl in college [or, ‘my lab partner was gay’; ‘I knew the sweetest black guy at work’].” So when Beck preceded his concern with “I know Muslims, I have been to mosques,” one could easily guess what was coming next. Yet despite its trite form, Beck’s challenge resonated with many. Did Congressman Ellison have ulterior motives for wanting to pull US troops out of Iraq? Did his sympathy lie with a foreign “prince”—the age-old but still prevalent idea of an Islamic caliphate?

To be viewed by the American public as a legitimate participant within mainstream American politics, a figure like Ellison might be compelled to publicly declare his undying and undivided loyalty to the United States beyond that expected of other politicians—and yet remnants of distrust may still taint any statements he makes regarding Muslims domestically or abroad. In this age of transnational affinities, loyalty to one’s nation-state is more complicated than experiencing and asserting unflinching patriotism.

My paper focuses on a specific sort of Muslim-American experience, namely that of varying degrees of marginalization, distrust, and disenfranchisement within the social and political realm in virtue of our identity as Muslims. Although such experiences are far from universal, they resonate with many Muslim-Americans.¹ The paper addresses the specific effects of such experiences on the social and political scripts we enact. Ultimately, I explore alternative scripts molded by our affective response to the United States’ domestic policies regarding Muslims and our foreign policy toward Muslims in enemy states.

The paper’s title, “Muslim Scripts,” borrows language from Alison Bailey’s “Locating Traitorous Identities.” Bailey articulates the idea of performative scripts as “a person’s gestures, language, attitudes, concept of personal space, gut reactions to certain phenomena, and body awareness” (Bailey 2000, 289). Our scripts are mediated by our social location within systems of domination. In other words, our scripts as Muslim-Americans (our choice of words, how confident we appear, the content and force of our arguments) differ when we travel abroad, when we speak on terrorism in American public discourse, or when we see the coverage of American wars from within the comfort of our homes. Bailey’s language helps capture the idea that some of us, Muslim-Americans, experience the expectation to animate the patriotic American script in an environment of distrust and disenfranchisement. The aim here is to rearticulate Muslim-American scripts in light of our affective response, where *affective response* serves as a general term for an agent’s moral emotions or inclinations (outside of principled considerations), such as anger, disgust, heartbreak, and so on, whether at a particular incident or at another’s plight.

For the purpose of this paper, I refer to political participation as it stands in opposition to political exclusion based on the marginal status of the political agent. This idea of participation goes beyond voting or receiving the benefits of citizenship. It encompasses a consideration of marginal voices, such as those of Muslim-Americans, as legitimate American perspectives on relevant issues. Such scripts may not necessarily fit the mold expected of the “good” patriotic Muslim-American,² but they do offer Muslim-Americans avenues to remain whole, and they appeal to relevant aspects of

ourselves in our participation, without our having to constantly leave out controversial political stances in order to prove to others that we are indeed loyal to our country.³

I begin exploring our epistemic status as political contributors. I consider two causes of doubt about Muslim-American's epistemic status as a political contributor: the suspicion of Muslim-Americans at home and an absence of human connection with Muslims abroad. These two factors contribute to our epistemic *untrustworthiness* in issues of foreign policy and policies that concern Muslims domestically. However, these areas that cast doubt on our epistemic status are the very areas in which Muslim-Americans can contribute valuable insight. Ultimately, such contributions can address the distrust and disenfranchisement that some Muslim-Americans experience in the social and political realm. I posit the concept of empathy as one such kind of response that ought to inform our foreign policy in a manner inclusive of Muslim-Americans. The central claim in this paper is that our complex affective response can inform our social and political discourse in a more morally adequate and responsive way and offer us a possibility to retain the multiplicity of our identity.

II. EPISTEMIC TRUST—OR THE LACK THEREOF

Nancy Daukas highlights the connections between unjust power relations and our beliefs about ours and others' status as epistemic agents. She defines an agent's epistemic behavior as one's assertions in speech and the confidence or doubt with which one makes those assertions. Our trust in our own and others' epistemic status is directly affected by our beliefs and attitudes about the epistemic competencies of ourselves and others. Daukas argues that epistemic authority is often given to, or withheld from, individuals on the basis of the stereotypes attached to their perceived membership in a socially constructed group. She argues that dominant groups embody the paradigm of trustworthiness. "Typically, those stereotypes form an interlocking system in which dominant groups are defined to represent the human 'standard' or ideal, and others are defined in relation to, and to varying degrees, as inferior to, that standard" (Daukas 2006, 114). Such a measure of trustworthiness forms a cycle of epistemic untrustworthiness, where minorities affected by negative stereotypes begin to doubt their own competency in certain areas—such as women with regard to their math ability—by internalizing the stereotype, leading others to further distrust their epistemic competency in that area. Such perceptions contribute to who is granted epistemic competency and whose voices are excluded or marginalized.

In the case of Muslim-Americans, it is often our loyalty to the United States that is under constant scrutiny. Awareness of being perceived as disloyal leaves many Muslim-Americans in the awkward position of having to prove our commitment to our country. Many non-Muslim Americans view our political perspective as being tainted with a foreign agenda or outside influence. For example, "A 2006 USA Today/Gallup poll found that ... nearly one quarter of Americans, 22%, say they would not want a Muslim as a neighbor; less than half believe U.S. Muslims are loyal

to the United States” (Esposito and Mogahed 2008). Similarly, a 2011 Gallup Poll showed that only 59% of Catholics and 56% of Protestants in the US see Muslim-Americans as being loyal to their country (Abu Dhabi Gallup Center 2011). Such perceptions, and our awareness of them, cause some Muslim-Americans to shy away from engaging in political issues that might either risk a betrayal of the complexity of our identity as border dwellers, or simply in order to avoid becoming the subjects of suspicion. Furthermore, we become self-conscious, and at times distrustful, of our own ability to offer political perspectives untainted by “enemy” agendas. A national poll cited that a quarter of Muslim-Americans reported that other “people have acted as if they were suspicious” of them. This percentage was significantly higher (42%) in the under-30 age group. More than half of Muslim-Americans also believed they were singled out for surveillance and monitoring simply by virtue of being Muslim. Of those who believed the government gives extra scrutiny to Muslims said this attention bothers them some (34%) or a lot (40%).⁴ Such empirical evidence, although it does not establish in any way the prevalence of distrust of us or our distrust of our own government, is indicative of the specific kind of experiences of distrust and suspicions of disloyalty that I wish to examine in this paper.⁵ Such experiences may contribute to some being politically disenfranchised. In support of this, the 2011 Gallup poll also reported that only 51% of young Muslim-Americans are registered to vote, which is the lowest percentage among young Americans surveyed (Abu Dhabi Gallup Center 2011).

III. THE CAUSES OF MUSLIM-AMERICAN EPISTEMIC DOUBT

SUSPICION OF MUSLIM-AMERICANS AT HOME

Actions of the US government and/or its representatives, indicating condescension, antagonism, or distrust toward Muslims, have contributed to negative stereotypes about Muslim-Americans and have sustained the epistemic doubt in our ability to make legitimate (loyal) claims. Such postures are not confined only to Muslims abroad, but are also exhibited domestically toward Muslim-Americans. In 2011, *National Public Radio* reported on anti-Muslim bias in counterterrorism training given to local and federal law enforcement (Temple-Raston 2011). The training program incorrectly warned participants that a “true” Muslim is obligated to take up arms against non-Muslims, perpetuating the belief that all practicing Muslims must be subject to surveillance. Similarly, the *New York Times* published an article on undercover operations by New York Police Department officers that specifically spied on Muslim-Americans at local mosques, eateries, workplaces, and even their activities on their personal computers (Powell 2011). Such treatment has led some Muslim-Americans to become politically apathetic as well as unenthusiastic in aiding law enforcement in counter-terrorism, while simultaneously being suspect. It is precisely this sort of experience that is the focus of my paper.

The experience of political frustration and/or apathy is exacerbated by a subconscious desire to disconnect ourselves from complicity in the consequences of sanctions imposed by the United States against “our own.” By not being politically active, we distance ourselves from policy decisions that affect Muslims around the world, thus keeping in abeyance any feelings of responsibility.

Furthermore, many Muslim-Americans who do become politically active attempt to steer clear of issues perceived to involve conflicting values or loyalties. Even for the most affluent Muslim-Americans, lobbying politically for these “conflicting” issues has proven difficult, leading many to doubt their ability to participate in politics through conventional means—with our money. A *New York Times* article reported in 2000 that Hillary Clinton returned \$50,000 in campaign contributions “because of ‘offensive and outrageous’ statements attributed to members of the American Muslim Alliance, including support expressed by Mr. [Dr. Agha] Saeed for the right of Palestinians to use ‘armed resistance’ against the Israelis” (Murphy 2000a). The same article quoted Dr. Saeed as saying, “I am pro-Palestinian, but at the same time I am willing to have a reasonable settlement with the Israelis. I have also said that I support the peace process and that the conflict there was political, not theological. But none of those things are being mentioned” (Murphy 2000a). The fact that he expressed public support for Palestine was enough to label money coming from his organization as “blood money”⁶ unsuitable for an American candidate.

Such incidents reinforce the prevalent notion held by many Muslim-Americans that unless our views are in line with current US foreign policy—that is, performing the undying patriotic script—we cannot expect to have any political influence despite having the monetary means to do so. Kristie Dotson writes about the ways that members of oppressed groups often reframe or truncate what we say because we expect that our claims will not be heard, or will be heard in prejudicial and harmful ways (Dotson 2011).⁷ Muslim-Americans’ perception of ourselves, which we often derive and adopt from non-Muslim Americans’ perception of us, affects the kinds of political issues we partake in. The constant scrutiny resulting from such distrust makes us distrustful of our own epistemic status as legitimate commentators on matters of domestic and foreign policy regarding Muslims.

Daukas notes that “[A]n obvious epistemic consequence of unjust epistemic exclusion is that the community loses the potentially valuable contribution of each excluded or marginalized individual in its epistemic life, which may cause incalculable overall epistemic (and therefore other kinds of) losses to the community” (Daukas 2006, 116). Again, the political arena where Muslim-Americans may have the most valuable insight, because of our lived experience and possible affinities, is the very arena in which our participation is often limited by an obscured, hegemonic ideal of loyalty and American values—resulting in incalculable epistemic loss for US foreign policy. Only through confronting the complexity of our identity and its location within geopolitical dynamics can Muslim-Americans confirm our epistemic value and improve our status as legitimate participants.

HUMANITY OF MUSLIMS ABROAD

When most Americans were focused on the rising body count of American troops in Iraq last month, local Muslims were also reacting bitterly to the pictures of dead Iraqi babies in Fallujah—images beamed into their homes via the Arab news network al-Jazeera, images most Americans haven't seen. (King 2004)

In addition to being subject to suspicion at home, much of Muslim-Americans' frustration and apathy is rooted in the United States' nonempathetic posture toward Muslims around the world and the disregard displayed for Muslim civilian lives. There is a lack of human regard for actual Muslim lives in enemy nation-states, a void that hinders Muslim-Americans from displaying our own affective response for fear of betraying the complexity of our identity, and further marginalizing our voices as untrustworthy.

The idea of Muslims being one entity, one nation—an *ummah*—is a normatively prescribed notion within the Islamic faith.⁸ This concept may be rife with controversy regarding who counts within the *ummah*—Itna-Ashari Shias? Ismailis? Gays and lesbians? Nonobservant, self-identified secular Muslims?, and so on—but *ummah* is used politically and religiously among Muslims nonetheless. It encompasses the idea of imagined communities—our shared practices, values, our familiarity with each other's lifestyles—that connect Muslims beyond national borders in a way that is ambiguous and intangible yet appreciable. So when some of us witness the confrontational posture of the United States government or see the media rhetoric about Muslim civilians in enemy states, we may experience some level of frustration or the political apathy it breeds.

The formation of the Taliban during the Cold War; the deaths of thousands of Iraqi civilians due to economic sanctions in the George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton eras; even more Iraqi deaths during the George W. Bush years and the callousness of US soldiers regarding those deaths; Clinton's veto of lifting the arms embargo on Bosnian Muslims during their genocide; the coverage of Israeli civilian and military deaths with little or no mention of Israel's human-rights infractions upon Palestinians; the state and media rhetoric on Iran; and the lack of opposition to Saudi Arabian and Bahraini human-rights abuses are just some of the instances where the United States government has taken active roles that have adversely affected the lives of Muslims around the world. Not all Muslim-Americans have diasporic ties to these countries, but each instance serves as an example of why some Muslim-Americans experience frustration or apathy.

The issue is not so much the official policies of the United States regarding Muslims in enemy countries. Rather, what is striking is the absence of any sense of human connection, one that views Muslims in terms of their actual lived lives, within the discourse of policy-making, the background culture in which such policies are couched, military training, legal defense, and even in the American public

outrage surrounding morally abhorrent behavior by our government or army.⁹ Much of the outrage is grounded in the discourse of human rights and self-righteousness, and rarely in “seeing” the “insurgents” as humans, as civilians. This absence, although glaring to some Muslim-Americans, is the norm in our wider society. Consequently, Muslim-American political claims that are not aligned with existing foreign policy and that may speak the language of affective response are often disregarded as epistemically untrustworthy (that is, disloyal and suspect). Miranda Fricker calls this *testimonial injustice* when, on the basis of prejudice, one’s reliability or trustworthiness is significantly impugned by the hearer (Fricker 2007). Our testimony is distorted, both unreflectively and nondoxastically, through the lens of our perceived loyalties and values.

In light of pervasive structural hurdles to cultivating familiarity with our enemies, the following sections address empathy as one form of affective response that can inform and benefit our social and political discourse.

IV. EMPATHY IN A POLITICAL RESPONSE

For the purpose of this paper, I take empathy to be loosely understood as a viscerally felt comprehension of another’s emotional state (Piper 1991). However, it does not entail endorsing the other’s perception or yielding to their expectations; rather, empathy is “apprehending and sustaining felt connection with his or her [the other’s] state” (Carse 2005, 173). For Alisa Carse, empathy that strikes a balance between prejudice and wisdom demands an ongoing reflection on the “roles and relationships we inhabit” and the moral demands these have on us. I undertake just such an exploration, delving into the possibility of empathy as the sort of affective response that should inform our political discourse in light of the power dynamics of global conflicts, diasporas, loyalties, values, and the relationships these dynamics sustain.

My brief analysis here is not meant to be an exploration of empathy in politics; rather, it is meant to serve as an example of the ways that Muslim-Americans can and ought to contribute to our political discourse without fragmenting essential aspects of our identity. Drawing on feminist works on empathy, I wish to make two distinct points about empathy. First, empathy experienced by individuals affects our social and political discourse, and consequently the sort of solutions that are given uptake in a particular conflict. Second, individuals who utilize empathy to inform their political claims make better—more adequately informed and moral—claims.

First, empathy experienced by individual members in society molds the boundaries of public discourse and state policies. In this sense, there is a strong relationship between the sort of affective response that individual members of society have to certain narratives and the moral locus of the narratives that gain dominance in the social and political realm.

In the documentary *The Fog of War* (2003), former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara cites empathy as a political resource. He attributes avoiding nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis to the United States’ ability to see the conflict from

Russian Premier Khrushchev's perspective. Llewellyn (Tommy) Thompson, a former US Ambassador to Moscow, had lived with the Khrushchev family and was able to convince President Kennedy that Khrushchev would back away from a nuclear standoff if he was given the opportunity to save face with the Russian people by claiming he had saved Cuba from disaster. Seeing the world through Khrushchev's eyes led Kennedy to respond with negotiation rather than war. The point to note here is not how the state reacted, but that the individuals who informed and molded the political discourse during the crisis had access to the narratives that the enemy may have subscribed to.

In the case of Vietnam, on the other hand, McNamara believed the United States lacked communication with the enemy, and there were deep-seated misunderstandings about the very purpose of the war. According to McNamara, the United States' foreign policy incorporated little of the Vietnamese narrative of the conflict, thus prolonging the war without an understanding of what the other side fought for.

McNamara's examples are of how the United States as a state reacted (as opposed to how individual political agents reacted), and cast empathy as a shallow concept of simply familiarizing oneself with the other's narrative. Yet his examples are useful for the Muslim-American case. The manner in which individual, high-ranking officials in the United States government reacted affected the sort of political discussion that was conducted at the time. Since there was little familiarity with Vietnamese officials' and/or the people's narrative, the political discourse was debated in terms of the threat (of communism) to our way of life and American casualties—an echo of the current situation of Muslim-Americans.

Second, a common concern in the use of empathy is prejudice, as one is less likely to empathize in the presence of preexisting prejudice. I will address bias toward or having familiarity with people similar to ourselves in the next section. In favor of impartiality and dispassion, there are definite advantages to maintaining a detachment between "us" and the "enemy" during a conflict. A resolute, unsympathetic attitude toward the oppressive "evil" ways of the enemy helps maintain an unyielding principled posture in the face of hard choices. However, this does not mean empathy in a political scenario would entail ultimately compromising our national security, or even more absurdly, agreeing with the intentions or actions of our enemies. Guided political empathy presupposes the humanity of the other, which allows us to place ourselves imaginatively into not only the living conditions of the other, but also into the political narrative they exist in.

(A) grand counter-terrorism strategy would benefit from a comprehensive consideration of the stories terrorists tell. Understanding the narratives that influence the genesis, growth, maturation, and transformation of terrorist organizations will enable us to better fashion a strategy for undermining the efficacy of those narratives to deter, disrupt, and defeat terrorist groups. (Casebeer 2008, 653)

Although Lt. Col. Casebeer's technical language reduces the concept of empathy to a tool of national security, he addresses the significance of understanding and

engaging the rhetoric and narratives of our enemies in order to epistemically shift how we engage in conflict.

Affective response such as empathy informs our actions in a more just and morally adequate fashion. That is to say, a person who acknowledges her empathetic response can engage in social and political discourse better than one who wishes to remain resolutely impartial. Two political agents may arrive at the same conclusion (for example, to conduct drone attacks that knowingly kill Pakistani civilians), but the considerations and the language the two agents would employ are indicative of the moral adequacy of their decision. Bernard Williams, in his discussion of moral character in politics, states: “The point—and this is basic to my argument—is that only those who are reluctant or disinclined to do the morally disagreeable when it is really necessary have much chance of not doing it when it is not necessary” (Williams 1981, 62). For Williams, reluctance serves as an obstacle to unquestionably accepting the intolerable, and its presence is a testament to the person’s character of feeling a correct reaction (one of hesitancy) when faced with an intolerable but necessary task. Empathy serves as one such moral consideration (or obstacle) that molds our social and political discourse in a more complex manner than one that measures the intolerable according to principles of impartiality. Thus, a person who does take empathetic concerns into consideration may arrive at the same decisions as supposedly impartial individuals in cases where extreme harm to our enemies is unavoidable, but this person is less likely to use force in cases where it is not absolutely necessary (for example, the invasion of Iraq in 2003).

Margaret Urban Walker, voicing feminist concerns, argues that moral knowledge should be adequately informed by specific and concrete details of the narratives and stories of those toward whom we act (Walker 1989). Without such an understanding, there is a willful ignorance of other people’s specific needs, and we foreclose the possibility of arriving at (morally adequate) responsive solutions. Therefore, in practical terms, if an agent’s aim is to engage in a morally adequate social and political discourse, it would make sense to include empathetic considerations that make an effort toward understanding our own location within the narratives of others.¹⁰ Similarly, Sally Scholz suggests that epistemic empathy makes one more open to accommodating and negotiating a diversity of views in a loving way, as opposed to reinscribing oppressive social relations that one may already be a part of (Scholz 2010).

Thus, in the case of Iraq, in line with the view that the US military operation there aims to free the Iraqi people, it would inform our foreign policy better to realize our actions are viewed by many Iraqis as having reduced a developed, modern, historically rich land to mere rubble, or to realize that our presence there is suspect in the eyes of many Shia Iraqis, after the United States’ prior support of a brutal Sunni dictator (Saddam Hussein). Acknowledging such things would not necessarily require accepting those perceived roles, but rather would get the US a step closer to untangling itself from those roles in the Iraqi narrative. In this sense, our social and political discourse and our government’s policies can be informed in a way so that we arrive at more responsive solutions—as opposed to those that reinscribe our privileged status in the global order.

V. WHY "OUR" AFFECTIVE RESPONSE?

On May 26, 2009, President Barack Obama nominated Federal Appeals Court Judge Sonia Sotomayor to serve on the US Supreme Court. Within moments, news media became saturated with Sotomayor's comments from eight years earlier at a University of California Berkeley School of Law symposium addressing the issue of Latina presence in the judiciary. Her Senate confirmation hearings focused mainly on her supposed propensity toward "judicial activism" and her infamous "wise Latina" comment. Two themes came up repeatedly in criticisms of her: first, that she would be empathetic instead of adhering to the law; second, that she was biased toward minorities. It seems these criticisms arose at Sotomayor's hearing mainly because she was a woman (hence, "inherently" empathetic), and because she was of Latino heritage (hence, "naturally" inclined to side with her own).

For many feminist standpoint theorists, Sotomayor's comments merely stated the most basic assumption of standpoint theory: one's location within the social strata gives one a distinctive view of the world. Instead of elaborating on Latina feminist epistemology, Judge Sotomayor (for obvious reasons) called her comments "a rhetorical flourish that fell flat" and commented further, "I do not believe that any ethnic, racial or gender group has an advantage in sound judgment" (Quinn and Vicini 2009). Her confirmation hearing had her convincing the committee that she would indeed adhere to the law and, implicitly, that she would fight against her "natural" instinct to be empathetic toward people of color.

What is taken to be a natural propensity to side with our own kind is simply a manifestation of an understanding of familiar scripts (gestures, language, attitudes, reactions, and so on), and recognition of the systems of domination that those scripts exist in because we experience them more often.

My claim is that, as Muslim-Americans, we ought to cultivate our affective response as it allows us a more morally adequate and responsive picture of what is politically valuable. The factors that make us illegitimate political participants in the eyes of some—our similarity to/familiarity with the enemy—are the very factors that enable or facilitate morally informative affective responses, such as empathy.

Nancy Snow argues that at least some familiarity is needed with the person toward whom one feels empathetic. She states: "If we were not sufficiently similar to those with whom we empathize, imaginatively projecting ourselves into their circumstances would not be a reliable guide to how they feel, nor would attempts to simulate their thoughts and feelings be empathically accurate" (Snow 2000, 71). That is to say, if we misinterpret how Afghani women feel about the US invasion of their country, then as feminists living far removed from the effects of the Taliban and of our own war, we cannot accurately identify with them.¹¹ For Snow, actual similarity and one's belief about one's similarity to another is essential for empathetic identification with the other.

It is this, one's belief in one's similarity to another, that I would like to borrow from Snow. As a Muslim-American, I may react a certain way because of an imagined sense of community with Muslims globally. I argue that proximal location

within another's narrative helps tremendously in placing oneself within it, a precursor to affective response such as properly guided empathy. Empathy for Iraqi civilians' living conditions, for their cultural norms, for their lack of basics such as adequate housing, electricity, clean water, sanitation, general infrastructure, and so on, are all experienced more viscerally when one identifies with them in complex ways—such as in the idea of one *ummah*—or in experiencing familiarity with their way of life or their values. Being connected in this real but intangible manner allows one to do what Lugones terms “playful world traveling” (that is, traveling into the world of others without agendas of domination or arrogance) more effectively than, say, dominant members who may view Muslims in more essentialist terms.

Lugones explicates this concept by citing the example of her mother. It is only when Lugones gives up her arrogant viewpoint of her mother that she is able to truly experience her mother's world. She states: “Loving my mother also required that I see with her eyes, that I go into my mother's world, that I see both of us as we are constructed in her world, that I witness her own sense of herself from within her world” (Lugones 2003, 424). Expanding upon this, Lugones urges members of the mainstream to do playful world traveling. For such travels, one would have to know and be fluent in the norms of the other's world, to be humanly bonded with the inhabitants, and to give up one's own arrogance.

The concept of playful world traveling can serve as an insightful technique in constructing foreign policy, especially policy regarding developing nations. It enables policy makers to analyze the lopsidedness of conversations about reform and liberation—lopsided not because of a self-interested agenda, which is to be expected, but because of the arrogance within that agenda.¹²

However, here I depart from Lugones; it is implausible to use playful world traveling consistently as a methodology across significant differences of culture, religion, socioeconomic status, and, more important, across a divide not between two individuals, but between one collective nation and another, subordinately positioned collective. Lugones cites her mother's world as her expedition of “world travel.” In most cases we share deep-seated bonds with our mothers: similar cultures, language, and a strong sense of familiarity with their world. Yet even despite such bonds, we often view their world with condescension and a sense of superiority.

It becomes a fruitful but laborious exercise for Lugones to give up that arrogance, to see her own existence through her mother's eyes. However, this exercise in overcoming arrogance is necessary when one attempts to travel into the worlds of others, especially in situations where one is economically and militarily dominant. As Lugones illustrates in the case of her mother, it is hard work giving up that arrogant viewpoint.

Thus, in cases that involve policies toward nations that are foreign in terms of culture, language, values, and so on, and that are also subordinate within power hierarchies, it is far more cumbersome and unrealistic to occupy their narratives—to look at ourselves through their eyes, to explore their world as a comfortable inhabitant—than it is to simply form policies based on our own master narratives. I am not skeptical about the exercise or its purpose; in fact, I acknowledge that it is necessary for

meaningful political conversation. I am skeptical about the probability of it actually occurring as described among those not proximally located.

A similar concern comes across in Sotomayor's comments. When read in their entirety, they reveal a more complex sense of her identity than simply "siding with her own." Her upbringing in a South Bronx housing project as a daughter of Puerto Rican parents gives her insight into the lives of many who may have had similar experiences. It is not that the other eight Supreme Court Justices do not have the capacity to be empathetic to the economically disadvantaged or racially subordinated, but that they, too, view the world through their own life-experiences and from their own location within the social strata.

More important, as Sotomayor points out, it requires much effort to see the world from other people's perspectives. Most people do not care enough or are too far removed from another's social location to travel comfortably into "strange" worlds. It was in this spirit that she hoped a "wise Latina" would reach a better decision than a white man who had not lived the same life and who may be unable, unwilling, or uninterested in making the effort required to understand the values and experiences of others.

Similarly, the critical social location of Muslim-Americans allows access to a worldview that ought to be an essential part of the public discussion on issues of foreign policy. In devising policy, it is implausible to expect a viscerally felt, empathetic reaction to the plight of Muslims in enemy countries without a concerted effort to "world travel." Such traveling within the political sphere is more likely to be achieved by those proximally located with respect to the other. I concur with the implication of Sotomayor's comments, that Muslim-Americans should embrace their social location and the insights that we cultivate by virtue of it. We must confront our affinities, our loyalties, and our values as resources of knowledge to better inform our participation in American politics.

VI. MUSLIM EPISTEMOLOGY

The type of knowledge I argue for is similar to feminist standpoint theory in that there are uniquely valuable insights that Muslims can offer by virtue of their lived experience and social location. And although there is never any single experience that serves as a common denominator, we can still draw on the insights of a particular sort of experience (that of distrust and disloyalty) that some Muslim-American may have. The purpose, as it is in much of standpoint theory, is to generate knowledge that is useful to Muslim-Americans in addressing our problems in social-structural terms. Furthermore, this knowledge is available not merely by virtue of being Muslim-American, but by analyzing our social location within the power dynamics of American politics. I am hesitant to claim that this knowledge is inaccessible to those from different social locations, but rather that it is a cumbersome task to gain that vantage point if one lacks the lived experience that Muslim-Americans have.

I begin with the complexity of our social location, illuminating the type of epistemic superiority I claim—a type of knowledge that is tied to a cultivated, affective response. I use Linda Alcoff's concept of positionality to examine how our identity serves as a point of departure into politics (Alcoff 2006, 148).

Muslim-Americans are a diverse “group” not only in terms of culture, political affiliations, economic status, and lived experiences, but also in terms of varying religious beliefs, practices, loyalties, and prejudices. Therefore, to claim *all* Muslim-Americans possess some specific, inaccessible knowledge simply by virtue of our “Muslim” identity—or even by virtue of living true to our religious beliefs—would be a gross oversimplification. That is to say, as is the case for all standpoint theory, Muslim/Muslim-American epistemology cannot be dependent on a monolithic or homogeneous set of experiences.

I contend that our experiences within the social location we occupy—as Americans ingrained with pluralistic values, cultural affinities, and/or as religiously faithful Muslims, which together make us citizens with suspect loyalties and agendas—give us the opportunity to cultivate our affective response as a valuable resource of knowledge in our attempt to participate meaningfully in the political realm.

Locating knowledge within our social location is not the same as deriving knowledge from, as Rawlsian language would term it, our “comprehensive doctrine”: Islam. This is not to belittle the knowledge Islam can offer, but that is not the focus here. Knowledge from our lived experience may appear as if it originates solely from our comprehensive doctrine, but the two are distinct though often intertwined. The distinction is easily glossed over when one's political posture, motivation, and interests are widely shared (that is, one has “transparent” interests, to use Lugones's terminology). Even those of us who are located at the margins possess insight into the lived experience of dominant members merely through necessity (Lugones 2003, 65–75). However, the lived experience of minorities, or “thick” members, is not as readily relatable. Consequently, when it comes to Muslim-Americans, it is simpler to assume that our knowledge, which arises out of experiences of marginalization, originates solely from our comprehensive doctrine.

For example, our support for a Palestinian state may appear to be rooted in the theological concept of *ummah*. However, a more complex explanation—other than rooting all support in terms of human rights—should acknowledge the intricate ways the normative concept of *ummah* works. Theological concepts such as *ummah* become habituated into our life and work to create perceived bonds between us, shape how we relate to others within the *ummah*, and influence how viscous or diluted our understanding of their humanity becomes. In this sense, our affective response is *intertwined* with our comprehensive doctrine, much the same way it is for dominant members of society, but not *dictated* by it. Utilizing our affective response implies appealing to our lived lives situated within the social strata, but molded through our comprehensive doctrine.

Recognizing our affective response as a political resource makes sense of the ambiguity of our emotions, and also allows us to claim ownership of our citizenship as “Americans” within that ambiguity. Our affective response as a political resource

allows us to let ourselves be “whole” while participating, as opposed to constantly measuring the “American-ness” of our views.

In reference to ambiguity, an affective response can be packed with points of inquiry about the role and the place of Muslim-Americans in American politics as it affects the *ummah* globally, issues that become possible to explore only *within* a space that permits unpacking our affective response. This space has room for ambiguity, in the sense that it allows for reluctance to act on the intolerable to coexist with our fears for our own security and way of life. The ambiguity embraces both “our” and “their” humanity, and claims our whole self by bringing forth all relevant aspects of our identity. However, such a response is concealed if we fragment our affective response as an indicator of our illegitimate, disloyal, and deviant status as both the patriotic American and the faithful Muslim.

I contend that we must reveal the aspects of our identity that make us subject to suspicions of disloyalty, because it is precisely those aspects that can better inform social and political discourse. Such participation gives us breathing room to access and assess what we want to say about the role our country plays in the world. Muslim epistemology is critical of the political atmosphere, an insight apparent to Muslim-Americans through serious contemplation about our social location within the geopolitical hierarchy. The cultivation of our affective response allows us to make sense of our feelings of frustration and apathy, lifting the constant burden of censorship, the burden of betraying our character and possibly our faith. Making a conscious decision to speak from this location makes us confront the suspicions lodged against us, not merely by declaring ourselves either as patriotic Americans or as in solidarity with Muslims worldwide, but by deriving our political posture from an affective response that takes differing, and often conflicting, aspects of our self into account. In this sense, it is an attempt to resist the epistemic injustice that Fricker’s account refers to that denies us the chance to partake in trustful conversation and thereby steady our minds. It allows us to form who we are with acknowledgment of our commitments and perceptions.

This more complex affective response guards against those who would attempt to essentialize our *self* into a singular identity, to rally for particular political purposes. Amartya Sen writes of the way that identity can often constrain our political commitments, and that to “lead a life in which resentment against an imposed inferiority from past history comes to dominate one’s priorities today cannot but be unfair to oneself” (Sen 2006, 89). However, overcoming that feeling of resentment is not only unrealistic for most, but also sidesteps questions of systemic oppression against one’s people. Utilizing our social location to launch into politics allows Muslim-Americans not necessarily to abandon our justified resentment toward the US government’s foreign policy, but rather to embrace our affective response in order to recognize our role within, and to contribute to, the political hierarchy.

Such an affective response also draws the parameters of war strategies more conservatively because of our social proximity to Muslims around the world. Walker comments on how a feminist understanding of the demands of morality requires fighting off the norm of “de-personalizing the moral and de-moralizing of the personal”

(Walker 1989, 23). The Muslim-American grasp of the moral aspects of our wars is more “personal.” Here, I draw on Margaret Olivia Little, who argues for an intrinsic and independent (of reason) value of affect in moral epistemology (Little 1995). First, if one cares about someone, one is not only more likely to respond to circumstances that require a moral response, but also more likely to be attuned to opportunities of response. Second, Little argues that a person who possesses relevant affect evaluates and conceives a circumstance in a more complete and engaged manner, and is able to see truths unavailable to those with a dispassionate epistemic stance. She states:

It is, in short, to see the situation in a way that is essentially evaluative: one who becomes morally aware has come to acknowledge the salient features of a situation as constituting a reason or a justification for some response. Thus the difference, for instance, between someone who discerns the painfulness of torture and someone who sees the evil of it is that the latter person has come to see the painfulness as a reason not to torture, to understand torture as meriting revulsion. (Little 1995, 126)

For Little, then, affect is a precondition to seeing the moral landscape as it provides the necessary moral meanings to a given circumstance. In the Muslim-American case, a white, non-Muslim male and I could both be witness to an anti-Muslim comment toward a brown woman in hijab. Whereas both of us can be committed to fairness and justice, I may be able to see the circumstance in its entirety as an occasion for a moral response of outrage: outrage as a woman whose body is under scrutiny, as a person of color who visibly does not belong, and as a person who understands the complex dynamics between politics and religion in a woman’s decision to wear a hijab. And my affect of outrage allows me to see the ways of responding to the circumstance beyond terms of fairness and equality.

VII. AFFECT-GUIDED SCRIPTS

The expectation and experience of exclusion for some has served as an effective tool that limits our participation in American politics to spheres wherein we conform to stereotypes about us. The spheres we confine ourselves to are those in which we know our values and reason match up with the visions of a pluralist America. Yet we steer clear of, or are excluded from, the very spheres in which our insight is crucial. I have argued that among the most valuable insights Muslim-Americans ought to bring into the political arena is our knowledge cultivated from our affective response to the US government’s internal and foreign policy regarding Muslims. What such scripts could constitute in our daily activities needs developing and is very dependent on individuals’ reflection of their own experiences in light of the social and political relations in which they exist. I cannot claim that all Muslim-Americans experience distrust and disenfranchisement in our political processes; rather the point here is

that those who do ought to bring forth our affective response as a resource to inform our political response. This is crucial not only to retain the multiplicity of our identity, but also to provide a more morally adequate perspective on our country's domestic and foreign policy about Muslims.

NOTES

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1. I address the implications of a more varied array of (conflicting) experiences, ranging from religious freedom to better standards of living to political disenfranchisement, in a paper on political posture (Fatima 2012).

2. Mahmood Mamdani discusses "good"/"bad" Muslim caricatures and argues that if any Muslim can be perceived as a potential terrorist, "good" Muslims must prove their goodness and their modernity by displaying a secular identity (Mamdani 2004).

3. I draw on María Lugones's analysis of the fragmented self. Lugones describes thick members whose specific interests are not addressed as being "in fragments, ... parts taken for wholes, composites, ... composed of imagined parts, ..." (Lugones 2003, 127). In terms of political participation, it is debilitating when specific political concerns of the fragmented self go unaddressed because no political arena recognizes the full, unfragmented self. It is this sense of fragmentation, typified by experiences of distrust and disenfranchisement, that I am specifically concerned about.

4. Furthermore, Muslim-Americans reported prejudice, being viewed as terrorists, ignorance about Islam, and negative stereotyping on the list of our biggest problems. At the same time, other problems that typically rank among the public's top worries barely made the list of Muslim concerns. For example, just 2% volunteered economic and job worries. Roughly 4 in 10 (42%) Muslims under the age of 30 said that in the past year they had experienced verbal taunts, been treated with suspicion, been physically threatened or attacked, or been targeted by police because they are Muslims, compared with 29% of Muslims who are 30 years old or older. A majority of Muslims in America (55%) said they do not believe the war on terrorism is a sincere attempt to reduce international terrorism, while half as many (26%) said the US effort is genuine. Native-born Muslims are even more likely than foreign-born Muslims to express skepticism about US intentions in the war on terrorism (71% vs. 49%, respectively) (Pew Research Center 2007).

5. Falguni Sheth argues that the state creates a process of inclusion and exclusion to maintain order via social and political hierarchies, and through this, its own legitimacy as a sovereign (Sheth 2009). For Sheth, Muslim-Americans are racialized in order to legitimize the sovereign's rule through the use of law (threat of violence). Throughout her book, and especially in the fourth chapter, she documents numerous incidents of civil and political rights infractions of Muslim-Americans under the guise of laws and national security. These incidents, Sheth argues, are not infractions but part of what legitimizes the function of the state. For the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to note that distrust is indeed present.

6. Murphy reported: “Mrs. Clinton’s opponent, Representative Rick A. Lazio, called the donations ‘blood money’” (Murphy 2000b).

7. Dotson writes: “Three circumstances identify testimonial smothering in a testimonial exchange: 1) the content of the testimony must be unsafe and risky [e.g., support for Palestinians to defend themselves]; 2) the audience must demonstrate testimonial incompetence with respect to the content of the testimony to the speaker [any sympathy is misinterpreted as an extremist or hateful view]; and 3) that testimonial incompetence must follow from, or appear to follow from, pernicious ignorance” (Dotson 2011, 244).

8. For a discussion on *ummah* in politics, see Fatima 2011.

9. For an account of the Iraq War that confronts this issue, see Delgado 2007. In this memoir, Aidan Delgado recounts how not only soldiers were far removed from recognizing human bonds, but that policies and training actively sought to dehumanize Iraqis and normalize abuse. Citing detainee abuse during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Philip Zimbardo argues that normal, healthy, moral adults can commit horrific acts when given absolute authority and the legitimacy of structure and ideology (Zimbardo 2007). He claims that it was not simply that the soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison were immoral or that the conditions under which they served were bad, but that an environment had been created such that the disregard for human rights was deemed normal and even expected.

10. The aim here is not to find a social aspect of empathy in society. Carol Gould addresses how social empathy, which can be best summarized as the social counterpart of empathy that leads to transnational solidarity, goes beyond individual empathy in its readiness to take action, keeping in mind the perspective of others (Gould 2007). My project here is different from Gould’s in that it is not focused primarily on the institutional and collective plane. I do take into consideration how the individual affective response can draw the moral locus of the social and political discourse and can yield more informed political claims.

11. Of course, accurate identification (or even empathy) is not needed to take moral action, as Snow notes. However, as I claim in the section on Muslim Epistemology (section VI), affective response can help Muslim-Americans achieve more morally informed and responsive participation within American social and political discourse.

12. One such statement came amid air strikes on Lebanon, with heavy civilian casualties. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice rejected the call for an early ceasefire and likened the blood spilled to “birth pangs of a new Middle East” (Khouri 2006).

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