1. Introduction

The election of 2016 may prove to be a turning point in Muslim American participation in the public sphere and also for institution building among the Muslim American communities. While the election campaign that brought Donald J. Trump to power was marked by extreme levels of xeno-phobia and Islamophobia, that trend has not died down with him in power as the President of the United States. Although there are indications that Muslim communities are coming together with each other, and with other faith-based groups and secular ones as well, the challenges of addressing xenophobia are still big. In the realm of education and particularly faith-based education, the discourse of Islam plays out in ways that are not always positive. However, looking at the landscape of Islamic education in the US, one cannot miss the dynamism and dedication of those who work in the sector.

Islamic education in the US is coming into its own. As the number of mosques (also called Islamic centers) in the US continues to grow, there is a concomitant rise in the number of Islamic schools that offer K-12 level education. Although previous studies such as *Educating the Muslims of America* by Yvonne Haddad, Farid Senzai and Jane Smith (Haddad et al., 2009) have shown us the various dimensions of curricula and the cultural landscape of these schools, much remains to be said. At the same time, there is also a growing suspicion of these schools, which is an indication of the prevalent xenophobia in our society. Haddad et al. argue for the role of Islamic schools to be one of centers of culture preservation and transfer of knowledge – both traditional and modern. This is the starting point of our thesis; we then build on this insight to offer a perspective on how the role of Islamic schools has evolved over the decades.

An article in *The Atlantic* gives voice to these concerns. The fear of “indoctrination” of children in public schools is supposed to be one of the concerns among many who are opposed to the presence of curricula or assignments that deal with Islam. Related to that is the fear of Islamic schools and Muslim communities in the US. This fear has become real, especially since 9/11, and it has manifested in many ugly ways, from protests by parents to school boards to demonstrations in front of mosques and other religious institutions, as *The Atlantic* article points out. While
the fear complex generated about Islamic schools is real, so is their presence. The Islamic schools are in the business of preserving religious knowledge, traditions and culture, in a safe environment.

While the political atmosphere may not be entirely conducive for those who are involved in teaching Islam, there seems to be a growing interest in the teaching of Islam in the realms of higher education. The events of 9/11 marked a watershed moment for this, with enrollment of students reaching record levels, especially for those wanting to study Islam or the Middle East.

The Muslim American civil society seems vibrant too, with a growing number of Islamic centers, Sunday schools and informal learning groups, or *halaqas*, that come together to learn and teach about Islam. There are also full-time K-12 schools – the very focus of this book – in addition to *Hifz* schools, where children are taught the nuances of the Qur’an through interpretation and also learn to memorize it. As Haddad et al. point out, the appeal of Islamic schools arises for various reasons: they help preserve and promote Islamic values, they protect children from the bullying and taunting that can occur in public schools, and they also protect the children from the effects of drugs and alcohol, as well as from premarital sex.

On the other hand, the debate about school vouchers, government support of private schools, is also impacting this sector. While most of the schools cater to middle-class, suburban and educated Muslims and a few non-Muslims, the factors impinging on these schools are the same as those that affect other faith-based schools. The question of religion in the public sphere in the US is a tricky one, and if that religion happens to be Islam, then, given the particular challenges that Muslim communities are facing, this question becomes even more acute.

This book attempts to contextualize the Muslim American nonprofit sector, in addition to offering a detailed view of the Islamic schools’ landscape. We aim to achieve this through a historical analysis of the factors that were responsible for the success of Muslim American institution building and also for their propagation. We contend that the earlier waves of Muslim migration to America did not result in the preservation of Muslim cultures or Islamic traditions, and it is only more recently that Muslims have been able to preserve and propagate their Islamic values and norms. While the earliest expressions of Islam in the US, through the founding of the Nation of Islam (NOI), were particularistic and unique to the US, these expressions have often existed in tandem and at times in opposition to global discourses of orthodox Islam. The history of Islamic education in the US is as complex as the history of Islam there. Our attempt involves unpacking this history through looking at the evolution of Islamic schools and the leadership challenges, the policy
environment and the philanthropic contributions that were made towards them.

The nonprofit model, as it exists, has been indispensable for this process. As Siddiqui points out, “ISNA’s quest for legitimacy was aided by its adherence to its core value of being an American religious nonprofit organization rather than an international Islamic movement. This embrace of volunteeristic, pluralistic, and democratic values helped the organization sustain its identity and develop internal and external legitimacy” (2014, p. 3). If one sees the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) as a paradigmatic case of a Muslim American nonprofit, one can see how it has evolved as an American institution with its own unique Islamic identity. This story is being repeated throughout the country, with small variations. As Muqtedar Khan, a scholar of Islam in America, points out, earlier Muslims were fighting to preserve their Muslimness, but now they are fighting to preserve their Americanness (Khan, 2002). The Muslim American nonprofit sector, and in particular the Islamic education space, allows us to understand the evolution of Muslim American practices in the American context.

Further, we contend that the process of evolution of Muslim American institutions has occurred despite the various constraints that were placed on the communities – initially legal, as immigration was restricted from Asia until the opening of doors in 1965 with the Hart–Cellar Act. More recent developments have helped, and in some cases forced, the Muslim American communities to be active participants in American civil society.

GLOBAL DISCOURSES, LOCAL CHALLENGES: THE GROWTH AND EVOLUTION OF MUSLIM AMERICAN NONPROFITS

The literature around Islam in America, Muslim civil society and philanthropy is vast. This covers the gamut of diaspora studies, American studies, philanthropic studies and Middle Eastern studies. The seminal works in this area are focused on showing how Islam is compatible with American values. In doing so, they examine Muslims in America as external entities. These studies seek to examine how Muslim Americans fare in America, rather than how they actually participate in America (GhaneaBassiri, 2010, p. 4). The focus of these studies is to see how Muslim Americans are able to mediate “foreign” values within an American context. They either look at the ability of Muslim Americans to take distinct Islamic values and translate them into a distinct American practice or they examine whether
American society is open to these values. These studies focus on convincing their audience that Islam is compatible with American society.

The second set of important works focuses on specific ethnic groups of Muslims in America (Curtis, 2006; Leonard, 1997, 2007; Abraham and Shyrock, 2000; Naff, 1985; Elkholy, 1966). With the exception of Edward Curtis, each of these describes each ethnic group as though they stand in isolation in American society. Curtis examines how Black Muslims in the NOI sought to define themselves not only by how they saw themselves within their movement but also in conjunction with the larger Muslim community.

The third set of scholarship includes collections of works of Muslim Americans’ essays that aid in illustrating a range of issues related to Muslims in America. These collections are invaluable for the study of Islam in America, yet do not provide a comprehensive analysis or connect the dots for the reader (Haddad, 2002; Haddad and Esposito, 1998; Haddad and Smith, 1994; Curtis, 2008, 2010). Furthermore, this self-articulation by Muslim Americans, while vital, does not provide a global historical context.

These major works tend to examine Muslim Americans within the context of separate ethnic groups: African Americans and immigrants. Those seeking to expand upon these groups see Islam in America through singular lenses of African Americans, Arabs, Asians and others.

We suggest that looking at the case of ISNA, as a paradigmatic case study, can tell us a lot about the dynamics within the Muslim American non-governmental organization (NGO) sector.

ISNA has also been the focus of four important scholars. Steve Johnson examines ISNA in Yvonne Haddad and Jane Smith’s important book Muslim Communities in North America (Johnson, 1994). Johnson’s work is based on available research and personal interviews of Muslims in Indianapolis prior to 1994. His work looks at ISNA from its inception to 1990. He finds that in 1990 “Islam at an institutional level in Indianapolis is in flux.” (Johnson, 1994). His study shows that during the period around the First Gulf War the alliances and relationships had changed in nature, and the work also confirms our assertion that the initial founders of ISNA included Historically Sunni African American Muslims (HSAAMs) such as Dr. Ihsan Bagby and Umar Khattab.

He also confirms the division between HSAAMs and African American Muslims such as the community of Imam Warith Deen Muhammad. In addition, his chapter shows the constant struggles among activist, indigenous and cultural pluralist Muslim Americans. However, in his chapter he fails to comprehend the divisions between the two immigrant groups that were a part of ISNA. He understands the divisions to be either ethnic or religious and argues that the divisions are generally along
“conservative-liberal, socioeconomic, and immigrant-indigenous lines.” We show that divisions exist among immigrants and within the indigenous Muslim American communities that cannot be placed simply within a socioeconomic or conservative-liberal framework. Muslim Americans who were similarly situated economically, religiously and ethnically had different visions for Islam in America. Steve Johnson’s chapter is important in confirming the tensions between the groups that existed, but it fails to explain the nature of the disagreement.

Gutbi Mahdi Ahmed attempts to study Muslim organizations in the US around the same period as Johnson (Ahmed, 1991). Ahmed helps confirm the initial development of ISNA as a continuation of the work by the Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada (FIA) and the Muslim Student Association of the US & Canada (MSA). He also shows how ISNA adopted the conference and publication format of the FIA. However, he fails to understand the important role that the FIA has played in the development of ISNA. He also fails to demonstrate that ISNA, like the FIA, was meeting the needs of its constituent Muslim Americans at the time. The FIA was formed by Muslim American World War II veterans who were focusing on the needs of a population that was largely born in the US. ISNA was formed after the massive influx of immigrants from all over the Muslim world. He confirms Siddiqui’s dissertation’s assertion that in the early part of ISNA’s history, its conventions generally featured international Muslim speakers.

Ahmed sees ISNA as a branch of the larger transnational, international and diasporic Muslim movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. He fails to understand that these internationalist activists represent only one of the founding groups of ISNA. He argues that ISNA is considered to be “the national Muslim organization and generally represents the Islamic mainstream.” However, he fails to define “mainstream,” and by virtue of his description of ISNA, he assumes that it excludes indigenous, non-activist and American-born Muslims. His chapter also fails to illustrate the rich interaction between ISNA and Imam Warith Deen Muhammad and other groups that existed in the US. While his work provides a good overview of the organization, it does not probe the deeper interactions of its founders, the role of American history in ISNA’s development, or how ISNA is placed within the development of Muslim American institution building. He views ISNA as an organization that came to America, reformed Islamic work, embedded it in a “firm ideological structure” and then incorporated enough American-born Muslims to become a national organization. This analysis fails to show that, in fact, ISNA was the result of Muslim American participation in institution building that was shaped by the changing landscape in the US and American religious history.
Karen Leonard helps us understand the important role of ISNA within the broader context of Muslim American institution building (Leonard, 2003). Leonard also outlines the important role that the changing Muslim American population played in the establishment of ISNA. However, her analysis of ISNA supposes that a largely Arabic-speaking immigrant community established ISNA. The role of HSAAMs and non-Arabs in ISNA is missing from her analysis. Leonard also marks important changes in ISNA’s positions but does not identify the tensions and transitions between the three founding groups within ISNA as a source of these changes.

Leonard tends to examine Muslim Americans within the context of separate ethnic groups: African Americans and immigrants. She further separates immigrants based on their national or regional identities. Leonard specifically argues that in this post-1990 environment, South Asians had control of major Muslim American organizations (2003, p. 12). In this analysis, we seek to show that, although this may seem true on the surface, an analysis based on ethnic or national identity does injustice to the deeper ideological tensions within those groups. Some of the ideological tensions were common across those national and ethnic identities. South Asians had become major funders of ISNA but still continued to elect a diverse group of Muslim American leaders who reflected the South Asians’ ideology, not their ethnic identity. Had ethnic identity been the most important aspect in the calculus of these South Asian Muslims, the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) would have served as a better host as it was primarily established to serve the Indian and Pakistani Muslim American identity. However, what we will see is that, although ISNA thrived on diversity, ICNA and MAS (Muslim American Society, an Arab organization) were on a course of either decline or stagnant growth until they adopted similar approaches to diversity. However, Leonard’s analysis provides us with insight on how different the leadership of Muslim American organizations appeared.

Finally, GhaneaBassiri provides us with the most important framework of Muslim American history within which to place ISNA. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri’s work helps us move away from the historical perception of Islam as foreign to America. He argues that Muslim American history should be seen as a relational history of a distinct people of faith over a period of time (GhaneaBassiri, 2010). GhaneaBassiri suggests that rather than studying Muslim Americans as being distinct from America and its history, they should be studied through their participation in American society. Muslim Americans stand at the intersection of American religious history and modern Islamic history.

GhaneaBassiri provides us with the most comprehensive analysis of the history of Islam in America. His book shows how Muslim Americans have
“defined themselves in relation to the changing conceptions of race, religious pluralism, and national identity in the United States.” GhaneaBassiri helps us place ISNA within the larger history of Muslim American institution building, specifically its relationship with grassroots institution building and institutions. He argues, as we do, that American history played an important role in shaping Muslim-American institution building. He also shows the diversity of Muslim American institutions such as ICNA, the NOI, and Imam Warith Deen Muhammad’s community that operated successfully at the same time as ISNA.

Finally, he demonstrates that they all sought to reach out to a much broader audience than those who founded the organization. They had similar delivery methods: They all held conventions, published magazines and provided speakers and materials to the grassroots organizations. They all delivered their programs and materials in English to reach out to a diverse Muslim American population. However, they did not act in a vacuum, and there was a great deal of interaction between these national organizations and ISNA.

His analysis also explores the debate within ISNA over the role of Muslim Americans in society. ISNA’s decision to urge Muslim Americans to become involved in politics created controversy. The debate within ISNA mirrored the debate within Muslim Americans at large. His work shows the establishment of important organizations such as the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), the Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Muslim American Society (MAS). However, his analysis does not show the reason why former leaders of ISNA established these organizations instead of implementing those programs within ISNA. Furthermore, his analysis fails to show that the interaction between these groups may have helped change minds. People who were former activists later joined the progressives, and vice versa. Muslim American ideological positions did not remain static and did not move in a singular direction.

MUSLIM AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The bulk of Muslim American philanthropy can be understood through studies on Muslim institution building in the US (Haddad and Smith, 1994). Therefore, what is lacking is an analysis of this institution building and Muslim American philanthropy within the context of faith and giving. Also missing is an analysis of Muslim American civic engagement within the context of philanthropic studies.

In 1981, at the time of ISNA’s inception, the nonprofit sector in the
US was fertile ground for the establishment of a new Muslim American organization. Walter Powell and Richard Steinberg’s (2006) collection outlines the historical, religious, political, social and cultural influences that went into developing this sector. Peter Hall’s overview of the history of the nonprofit and voluntary sector in the US helps us overlay the Muslim engagement in this sector (Hall, 2006). Muslim American civic engagement in general mirrors the trends among nonprofits in America during the same period.

Economic theories like the “three-failures theory” have long been used to justify the existence of a nonprofit sector (Powell and Steinberg, 2006). However, as Richard Steinberg (2006) admits, these economic theories are incomplete. Economic theories articulate why consumers want to donate to nonprofits but fail to explain why nonprofits exist in the first place. In fact, organizations like ISNA were not established just to offer missing services; they also sought to shape the way Muslim Americans and non-Muslims think about Islam and Muslims. This perspective is missing from the economic theories, but Steinberg helps to integrate some of these questions in his chapter. ISNA fits within the framework of nonprofit theory within the US and can be understood using the same lens that we use to study other American nonprofits. Far too often, scholars make the mistake of focusing on the increasingly foreign-looking nature of the organization’s membership and leadership and then seek answers through a foreign lens.

However, as Cadge and Wuthnow (2006) point out, it would be a mistake to look at ISNA from the general prism of a nonprofit organization. The role of religion is not understood as well in earlier philanthropic studies, despite the strong role it has played in American civic life. “Long before social scientists and policy makers identified ‘nonprofits’ as composing a distinct social sector, religion offered ways of carrying out social activities that differed from those of either the marketplace or government,” they contend. ISNA understood the important role that grassroots Muslim organizations played in the congregational, spiritual and social lives of Muslim Americans and sought to harness that important resource by using the tools that the nonprofit sector used. ISNA, like many religious organizations, had to find a way to balance the special role of the nonprofit sector with its religious practices. Not all decisions that a religious nonprofit organization makes are based on nonprofit best practices. Organizations like ISNA rely on their religious values, which at times are in tension with the current political landscape.

ISNA established itself as a membership-based organization. This choice has traditionally been attributed to the fact that many of the founding leaders came from Muslim countries that were ruled by dictatorships. It is true that ISNA leaders consistently argued against dictatorships and
monarchies in the Muslim world and that this was an important factor in selecting an open, democratic system, as embodied by a voting membership system. However, it would be a mistake to think this was the only factor. Many Muslim American organizations at the national, regional and local level chose different models. These other Muslim American organizations have founding leaders who came from the same countries as the ISNA leadership.

It is important to consider the vision of these founding leaders and the role of the religious nonprofit sector in the US. “[R]eligious organizations generally fit the profile of voluntary associations that involve membership and support from members . . .” In fact, membership-based organizations represent 33 percent of the nonprofit sector; when religious congregations are included, this number reaches 60 percent (Tschirhart, 2006). Therefore, to attribute ISNA’s membership structure simply to the ethnicity of its founders would be a mistake; it is important to look at the complex structure of membership-based nonprofits and help situate ISNA within that subsector. ISNA’s selection of a membership-based structure was largely influenced by its need for legitimacy to fulfill its vision of being the representative of the Muslim American community.

ESTABLISHING MUSLIM AMERICAN UNITY: INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION

In 1981, a few major Muslim American organizations, which included the three groups (HSAAMs, activists and cultural pluralists), came together to establish ISNA. The new organization’s purpose was to serve as an umbrella organization, one that would provide a “platform of expression” for Muslims and Islam in America. This was not the first Muslim American organization seeking to serve Islam in America. Indeed, an Islamic presence has existed in America since the 1400s. Muslim organizations in the US were focused on certain ethnic or ideological communities. However, major institutional building in the early twentieth century took place at the grassroots level, largely by the establishment of Islamic centers or organizations. These institutions included ethnic and sectarian participation. In addition, organizations such as the FIA (which was established in 1952 by World War II veterans) were set up, but became less successful by the 1980s (Howell, 2010). Each of these organizations sought to meet the needs of the Muslim community in the US at that time.

The addition of a large number of Muslims from the Muslim world after
1965 dramatically changed the number and nature of Muslim Americans (Leonard, 2003, p. 10). A new organization was needed to mediate the transition of this changing Muslim American population. Initially, the MSA addressed this need. Later, this task was taken on by other organizations (for example, ISNA). The MSA initially tried to become a part of FIA, and the MSA gained sufficient memberships to secure a seat on the FIA board for many years. However, by 1978, it was clear that the MSA leaders and many of its members were not comfortable with the FIA's role as a national leader. It would be a mistake to assume that MSA members were completely opposed to the FIA, and Islamic Horizons continued to publish discussions both for and against the FIA.

A compromise among three distinctly pious, conservative Muslim American groups resulted in ISNA's founders designating it as an umbrella organization that would serve as a platform for Muslim Americans. Through ISNA, these three groups sought to develop a visible, powerful and representative national presence for Islam in America.

History had taught all three groups that it would be difficult to achieve their goals if they decided to go it alone. But utility alone did not bring these three groups together. As pious Muslims, they sought to embrace the unity that Islam called for, while simultaneously embracing the diversity it taught.

However, labeling these Muslim Americans as conservative, progressive, liberal or moderate would be a mistake. They had some basic unifying elements: all of them were religious and pious, they all embraced American ideals of democracy and pluralism, they all saw the great opportunity America presented to Islam and Muslims, and they all believed that the Islamic world was dysfunctional.

What separated them were their histories, their motivation to be a part of Islamic work and their vision for Islam in America. For example, in 1986 the ISNA Majlis Ash-Shura (majlis), or board of directors, voted to encourage Muslim Americans to engage in political and civic activities, including voting in elections. This was a historic position, but the organization's minutes noted dissenting voices within the board. The fact that the final board minutes include both favorable votes and the voices of dissent suggests the compromising nature of the deliberations.

These tensions and collaborations help explain ISNA today. They also shaped immigrant and HSAAM Muslim American identity. However, we should not exaggerate the differences between these groups. After all, they were able to come together, form an organization and help it become an influential Muslim American institution, despite the fact that they recognized their diversity. As the Islamic Horizons editorial quoted below suggests, they probably did not realize the depth of diversity or the intricacies of their differences:
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A quick look at . . . Muslims . . . in North America would reveal that there are three main streams:

1. Immigrants from the Muslim countries and mainly from the Middle East and Eastern Europe who came to North America due to political and economic reasons.¹¹
2. Students who are here for higher studies and many of whom stay permanently after graduation. Even for those who return home after graduation, the average length of stay is about five years.¹²
3. Native Muslims who have accepted Islam in increasing numbers in the more recent years, most of whom are Afro-Americans.¹³

Despite not fully comprehending their diversity, leaders of ISNA understood that differences existed among them and that some groups weren’t represented under their umbrella.

The eventual success of the cultural pluralists pushed forward an ethnic-religious group that is on the journey of integration (not assimilation) with which America is historically familiar. However, it’s vital that we know the historical journey this Muslim American identity has taken in order to understand how Muslim Americans and ISNA have evolved.

ISNA’s history helps us understand not only the development of a Muslim American identity, but also gives us a window into how the transitions and confrontations related to race and ideology affected Muslim America over the past three decades. Understanding this history helps us recognize that there is no homogenous Muslim American identity. Further, the evolution of ISNA as a Muslim American nonprofit shows us the complexities that these organizations have to deal with, by virtue of attempting to gain legitimacy, both internally and externally. ISNA’s history mirrors at the national level, in many ways, grassroots Muslim American civic engagement, philanthropy and ultimately institution building. ISNA’s story allows us to contextualize the work of building Muslim American nonprofit organizations at a time of crisis, conflict and scrutiny.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introduction chapter has laid out the background to the book and offered a preliminary survey of the history of the Muslim American nonprofit sector. While situating the Muslim nonprofits in the “nonprofit” world, we have sought to tease out their Islamic identity. How Islamic education and the schools have become a part of this mix is of importance to
us, as well. The introduction offered a brief literature review of the various studies and some key texts that have informed our work.

Chapter 2: Islamic Philanthropy as a Discursive Tradition

This chapter seeks to offer a theoretical framework for contextualizing Islamic philanthropy during “crisis” in the US and argues that philanthropy in this context should be seen as a gradually evolving “discursive tradition.” Given the discourse of Islam in America being one framed in the rubric of crisis and the attempts by Muslim American organizations to garner philanthropic support using this framework, it is important to understand how certain crisis situations have impacted discourses of philanthropy towards this sector. This chapter attempts a Foucauldian analysis of how Muslims Americans negotiate this discursive tension in the realm of giving. We build on the work of various scholars and offer a framework that treats philanthropy towards Islamic schools and cultural and educational institutions as a “discursive tradition” to understand how the dynamics of philanthropy are changing in this sector. We propose that a genealogical approach could also offer us new insights into how philanthropy is being transformed under certain institutional constraints and relations of power.

Chapter 3: Muslim Philanthropy and Nonprofit Institutions in America

This chapter examines the history of Muslims in America with a specific focus on philanthropy and nonprofit institution building as a method of sustaining identity. This chapter reviews existing research on Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, Muslim American nonprofits and philanthropy and provides an examination of the growth and evolution of Islamic schools in America. This chapter looks at the documented presence of Muslim Americans from colonial times and asks the questions: “Why did Islam not survive beyond the first generation that it was introduced to America until this most recent migration?” and “What is the role of nonprofit institutions in sustaining Muslim American identity and religious values?”

This chapter helps lay the foundations for the importance of nonprofit institutions and philanthropy in understanding Muslim American identity and the uniquely Muslim American religious identity.
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Chapter 4: Identification and Muslim American Philanthropy

The question “Who is a ‘Muslim American’” is a rather complicated one. It does not yield a straight-forward answer, as one would expect. From a legal perspective, one can argue that yes, indeed, it is fairly simple: anyone with an American citizenship is an American, and if they happen to be Muslim they become Muslim American or American Muslim. But beyond this clarity lies much confusion, especially when one gets into the realm of one’s “identity” as a Muslim American. We argue in this chapter that this identity is an evolution that has gained salience in a post-9/11 world. Several categories such as race, religion and ethnicity have been subsumed in this creation, and a closer examination shows that this identity is crucial for understanding how philanthropy occurs in the US. We build on Stuart Hall’s notion of identity as a “process” to argue that the Muslim American identity is a work in progress. Finally, we offer a framework to understand the six forces that are shaping the formation of a “Muslim American” identity.

Chapter 5: Philanthropy, Institution Building and Legitimacy in Islamic Schools in America

This chapter presents the results of a national survey of full-time Islamic schools in the US and their governance practices during times of crisis (9/11 and Great Recession). There have been two prior attempts to collect national data from Islamic schools. The first was conducted by the ISNA in 1989. The second data collection was by the Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA) in 2004. The survey results by ISLA have been published in a number of academic venues.

Our survey examines whether competition within the school district, greater bonding due to Islamophobia and economic stress influenced Islamic school governance practice. In addition, this chapter provides demographic data regarding Islamic schools. We draw upon existing literature on competition, Islam in America, Muslim American philanthropy, nonprofit diversity and legitimacy to examine how Islamic schools continue to navigate the challenges of Islamophobia after 9/11 followed by the economic challenges of the Great Recession of 2008. Our primary theoretical contribution is in re-examining the changing nature of philanthropy and its role in American Islamic schools. In particular, we examine how schools navigated identity, public policy and performance in search of legitimacy.
Chapter 6: Interlocutors of Tradition or Signposts of the Future of Islam in America? Islamic Schools in the US

Using data from 20 interviews with principals and board members of Islamic schools, this chapter builds a mid-range theory on how these schools have grown and the factors that have been responsible for their specific evolution in American society. While earlier studies of Islamic schools have focused on identity and curricula, we focus on organizational identity and community support for these schools, in an effort to understand and analytically frame the factors responsible for the rapid growth of such schools and what makes them unique. Using a Grounded Theory (GT) approach, we offer a theory of how these schools see themselves, their role in American societies and what strategies they have adopted to survive and thrive.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Prospects for Future Growth and Development

The conclusion chapter draws from the various chapters from the book and offers a comprehensive overview of what is going on in the world of Islamic schools in the US. While there is a move to retain the “Islamic” in the Islamic schools, we see that there is also an increasing focus on quality, accreditation and legitimacy. While the debate about funding public schools heats up in the Trump administration, the real issues facing Islamic schools are not public funding or even vouchers, but the tension surrounding their identity factors and legitimacy. Public support of Islamic schools could become a contentious issue in the years to come with the new administration; however, it is not likely to be the key source of conflict. Islamic school leaders seem to be prioritizing leadership development, skills enhancement and networking with other institutions, to gain acceptance in the broader community as well as within the Muslim community.

NOTES

2. This section is taken from Siddiqui (2014).
3. The first Curtis book is an invaluable primary source tool while the second is the first encyclopedia on Muslim Americans.
4. This section is taken from Siddiqui (2014).
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11. International activists, cultural pluralists and FIA.
12. International activists and cultural pluralists.
13. HSAAAMs and other African American Muslim groups.

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Islamic education in the US and Muslim nonprofit institutions