**As ‘Bosnia’ awakened the dead among Muslims worldwide,** new expressions of Muslim identity have emerged on college and university campuses in the US that stress the ‘local’, the ‘national’, and the ‘global’ that gives rise to Muslim student activism in the San Francisco Bay Area of California.

Central to Muslim student activism in California has been a critique of the contradictory position of Muslim Americans within US national discourses and practices in which they are marked simultaneously as US citizens and the ‘enemy within’. This tension among Muslim students explains that: Even though these students are born here, nurtured with apple pie, they are viewed as immigrants. The main place students experience rejection is in the classroom — which is full of representations of what they are. That is where the Muslim student is transformed into a terrorist. Their teachers who say things like, ‘Muslims are more inclined to kill because they’re Muslim.’ That’s when it’s not just about Arabs anymore.

Hanan, an undergraduate, articulates that ‘[w]omen are forced to represent the entire situation of Muslim women. The teacher has an anti-Muslim position, so even if I do not have a problem with the class, the class becomes the class vs. me, and I have to answer for Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and places I don’t know much about.’ As a strategy for resisting the racialization of Muslim men as terrorists and Muslim women as passive and oppressed, some Muslim students consciously assert a visible Muslim identity on their college campuses. Neesha recalls that she and her friends, all of them wearing headscarves, regularly walk into the classroom to ensure seats in the front row as a strategy to ‘force the class to deal with us’. Hanif explains ‘I see the students feeling comfortable wearing a head cover or Muslim beards. They care less that they might appear to be wearing a bizarre outfit.’

The viability of public displays of Muslim identity is enabled by the demographic make-up of California, the first state to be described in terms of a growing white minority. The student activists in the context of the San Francisco Bay Area in particular, considered the hotbed of US ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘diversity’, further empowers students to assert their ‘difference’ as intensified identity politics encourages the public display of identity symbols on the body. Yet as over 700 hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims were recorded for those who have been mistaken for them have been reported in the aftermath of September 11, students have become more cautious when it comes to publicly displaying their identities. That same hesitance to display their heads and beards to the contradictions of liberal US multiculturalism in which the assumption ‘different but equal’ is always already infected with power, inequality, and racism.

Noha explains that the racialization of Islam ranges from ‘comments such as “Look, Mohammed the terrorist is coming” to a spit in the face at the Emeryville Shopping Center, to the phrase “Go back home” in response to a Muslim student wearing a garment as made to someone in the city hall of Berkeley.’

Intensifying the interplay between the local and the national, students emerge in the interaction between Muslim student activists and neocolonialist capital on a global scale. In May 2000, when Madeline Albright was invited as the keynote speaker to the University of California at Berkeley’s commencement ceremony, Muslim student activists joined hundreds of Muslim students with diverse political loyalties in charging Albright with genocide and naming her ‘War Criminal’. Central to their critique was that Albright represents the State Department’s enforcement of US-led sanctions on Iraq and that she stated that the price of killing half of the population of Iraqi children is worth it on the Lamy King Live television show.

Converging to the diverse political ideologies publicly articulated at this campus event, an airplane, funded by a Muslim community organization, flew over the outdoor commencement ceremony with a banner attached to it that read, ‘1.7 Million Dead. End the Sanctions Now!’ The presence of this plane reenforced students’ in Muslim community organization as a viable framework for asserting their political critiques. Other acts, such as their call and response, ‘Takbir – Allahu Akbar’, more specifically distinguished Muslim students’ messages from other protest participants in that it indicated the significance of the ideological force of God in igniting their activism.

The Palestinian cause

Palestine has been another key issue on Muslim student activists’ agendas. At a student protest against Israeli occupation at the University of California at Berkeley, Basim, a Muslim student activist, declared: ‘We’re here to stand against oppression. This Israeli flag — known for killing innocent children who are throwing stones and fighting for their lives. Muslims all over the world are fighting against the oppressors, be it the Zionists, Rus-sia, Uncle Sam, or who ever it may be.’

Student activists’ loyalties to the Palestinian cause culminated in October 2000, when they joined millions of Muslims throughout the world in support of the Aqua Intifada. In teach-ins and protests, and in advertise-ment articles and letters sent to editors of campus newspapers, students declared that the purpose of their actions was to expose Israeli use of aggression, Republican and Democratic candidates’ pro-Israel bias, excess against Muslims.

While many student activists of Arab descent are tied to Palestine through diasporic kinship networks, those from various racial/ethnic backgrounds have become closely linked to Palestine through the global spread of technology (i.e., satellite television and the internet), which has strengthened students’ collective sense of attachment to the discussions and issues of Palestine, thereby creating a transnational Muslim community. Maha, a Muslim student activist of Palestinian descent, explains that ‘[w]hat makes me panic is when I hear people say things like, “Muslims are more inclined to kill because when they die they believe they will be given 75 virgins in heaven.”’

During the first few weeks of the Aqsa Intifada, Muslim student activists joined 5,000 Muslims for a jumaa prayer in solidarity with Palestinians on the grass in front of San Francisco’s city hall. This prayer became the largest political mobilization of Muslims in San Francisco’s history. Satellite TV and community leaders agreed that the internet was essential to the success of this mass mobilization. They have enhanced Muslim student activism, mobilizing ideas, opinions, and social linkages within and between Iraq, Palestine and San Francisco that are not re-calculated in the form of localized political projects and expressions.

As some Muslim student activists distinguish themselves in terms of those who are ‘Americanizing Islam’ as opposed to those who are ‘Islamicizing America’, they further expose the fact that Islamic ‘movement logics’ — through which lost histories are retold and silenced are transformed into expression — are constantly under construction. Despite the ongoing reproduction of these movement logics in light of historically specific interactions between the ‘local’, the ‘national’, and the ‘global’, the post-September 11 political climate has witnessed an increase in portrayals of the category of ‘Muslim’ in fixed, unchanging and abstracted from history. In the aftermath of September 11, the multiplicity of Muslim voices has been buried under the rubble of New York and Afghanistan, and all the Muslims of the world have been reduced to either the ‘good Muslims vs. the bad Muslims’, or those who are with us vs. those who are against us. During these difficult times, there exists an ever-growing need for historically situated research on Islam that traces its complexities and its various locaites. San Francisco, California, is one cultural location where the increasing global appeal for an Islamic framework to articulate political sentiments is empowered by local histories, cultural formations, and power relations as it takes on local form.