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“Crossing Boundaries: Mobilizing Faith, Diversity and Dialogue”

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ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Diversity, Self, Faith and Friends:
Muslim Undergraduates on Campus”

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Through my ethnographic data on Muslim undergraduate women’s identity work gathered at two universities in 2002-03, this paper examines Muslim women’s religious identity politics within the gaps in educational pluralism. Acutely aware of the power of college culture, many women tried to *limit* themselves to ethnic and religious *sites of resistance*. Though not problem-free, such sites (e.g., Muslim sub-cultures) can provide safe zones to Muslims. My research participants grapple with the challenges of inter-community and intra-community dialogue. They cross boundaries of religion and culture, work to preserve their identities, and creatively combine experiences and practices. This presentation examines three of my research subjects to illustrate the multiple identities Muslim women construct as they encounter other faiths and cultures at college. Universities recruit *diverse* students as poster children, but college culture remains *White*, and minority students must play a delicate game of being *just* different enough, but not too different. Many administrators still accept that students must dissociate themselves from past religious and ethnic communities even though such communities can actually facilitate students’ adjustment to college. In this paper, Intisar is fighting to find a foothold in faith and racial community, navigating lonely intersections of race, religion, culture, and gender – sometimes by limiting involvement with majority peers. Haseena finds her religious identity at risk in the new college environment. Tahira is feverishly trying to replace her school memories of rejection, by assimilating and *becoming popular* on campus, and in the process she goes down a path that reduces her religiously and personally. These participants had their own private personal, religious, spiritual and cultural goals, beyond *White* universities’ agenda of establishing a *multicultural* profile.