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“Cosmopolitan Islam: Globalization, Transnationalism and Muslim Diasporas”

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**ABSTRACT**

“Clarifying Your Way through America:  
Civic and Muslim Identities on Campus”

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In the days following 9/11/01 diasporic US Muslims often felt like imposters, marginal citizens, almost-not-citizens, and, dangerously often, deportation material. Investigations, detentions, and deportations of Muslims along with the pursuit of *extremists* (sometimes rather broadly defined) at home and abroad generated a climate of fear, surveillance and self-surveillance - a climate that threatened to effectively *spoil* identities (playing on Goffman’s phrase “spoiled identities”). Many Muslims hastened to claim *safe*, moderate, *good Muslim* identities. Some voiced their protest against the attacks on their communities. Others shrank into the private and personal sphere to escape the unremitting gaze of the Panopticon. In my 2002-2003 ethnographic fieldwork at two private universities in Washington, DC, American Muslim undergraduate women constructed a broad range of modalities of being Muslim, American, ethnic, women, and students. This paper draws out their constructions of what it meant to be Americans in the post-9/11 era. The focus of this presentation is the intersection of Muslim identity construction with campus cultures. At elite universities that drew competitive and wealthy students from all over the nation, and as TV news specials on *Islamic extremists* seemed to run constantly, and oppressed Muslim women seemed to occupy a permanent home on the front pages of newspapers, what did it mean to be an *American* Muslim female undergraduate? In encounters with American Muslim women, majority individuals often anticipated an *Americanness* different from *normal* (Christian Anglo) Americans - the stigma of a *discounted* American identity, *infected* with Muslim identity. Muslim women constructed a variety of identities patching religion, gender, and culture together with civic identity. Sometimes they created dialogic encounters based on questions about their *Americanness* and at times they *passed* as normal Americans, internalizing their peers’ assumptions that they were indeed *less American* and needed disguise, but at other times they simply evaded the battle.