



Smithsonian Institution

Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections

Folklife Festival Narrative Session: Migration Across Generations: What Does It Mean to Be Muslim-American?

Extracted on Mar-29-2024 01:30:00

The Smithsonian Institution thanks all digital volunteers that transcribed and reviewed this material. Your work enriches Smithsonian collections, making them available to anyone with an interest in using them.

The Smithsonian Institution (the "Smithsonian") provides the content on this website (transcription.si.edu), other Smithsonian websites, and third-party sites on which it maintains a presence ("SI Websites") in support of its mission for the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." The Smithsonian invites visitors to use its online content for personal, educational and other non-commercial purposes. By using this website, you accept and agree to abide by the [following terms](#).

- If sharing the material in personal and educational contexts, please cite the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections as source of the content and the project title as provided at the top of the document. Include the accession number or collection name; when possible, link to the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections website.
- If you wish to use this material in a for-profit publication, exhibition, or online project, please contact Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections or transcribe@si.edu

For more information on this project and related material, contact the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections. [See this project](#) and other collections in the Smithsonian Transcription Center.

WEBVTT

00:14:03.000 --> 00:14:09.000

[Speaker 1]: Thank you Saber. Sanjana:

00:14:09.000 --> 00:14:13.000

[Speaker 2]: Alright hello everyone. Lemme just get this a little closer. Alright.

00:14:13.000 --> 00:14:26.000

So unsurprisingly as you may know was mentioned 9/11 was a significant event in the development of the Muslim-American community and similarly it had a very significant impact on our individual identity development.

00:14:26.000 --> 00:14:31.000

While I was aware that I was Muslim growing up, that identity was reinforced after 9/11.

00:14:31.000 --> 00:14:44.000

Up until then, most people saw my ethnicity, which was perceived to be as Indian, although I was Bengali as my primary identifier, and then when I was in seventh grade 9/11 happened and suddenly there was a shift in how I was perceived.

00:14:44.000 --> 00:14:53.000

This hijab which I chose to put on when I was ten no longer was just an expression of my worship, but it became a statement and a flag that screamed "I am Muslim."

00:14:53.000 --> 00:15:04.000

So being 12, my religion, while it was important, it wasn't something that I had really engaged in because I was twelve, but now I was asked to speak for this entire group.

00:15:04.000 --> 00:15:13.000

So, 9/11 for me really catalyzed the development of my Muslim identity and it also made me so much more aware of my own "Muslimness."

00:15:13.000 --> 00:15:17.000

On the one hand, it led to a lot of discomfort.

00:15:17.000 --> 00:15:20.000

You know, I got called a terrorist. I got asked if I had a bomb under my scarf.

00:15:20.000 --> 00:15:26.000

I probably got a lot more weird and angry looks than the average American got, especially when they were twelve or thirteen.

00:15:26.000 --> 00:15:30.000

But on the other hand, it also cemented for me the importance of a psalm in my life.

00:15:30.000 --> 00:15:44.000

I knew that whenever people saw me, the first thing that they would think is a Muslim woman, so I felt the need to rise to that occasion, and to be the best version of myself because I knew that I had to actively fight the Muslim stereotypes that was inundating society.

00:15:44.000 --> 00:15:49.000

So it also forced me to learn more about Islam than I probably would have at twelve,

00:15:49.000 --> 00:15:52.000

And it really required me to navigate that intersection my identity.

00:15:52.000 --> 00:15:59.000

So in terms of the question "what it means to be an American-Muslim?" I have a really hard time answering that question because the term "American-Muslim,"

00:15:59.000 --> 00:16:03.000

it really just lumps together two things that I am: it's an American and a Muslim.

00:16:03.000 --> 00:16:08.000

America is the only home that I've ever lived in. I was born and raised in Maryland.

00:16:08.000 --> 00:16:21.000

I grew up trading Lisa Frank stickers, going to Sunday school, obsessing over 90's boy bands, learning the Arabic alphabet, you know, catching fireflies with my friends in the summer time but at the same time, learning about the stories of the prophets.

00:16:21.000 --> 00:16:29.000

There was no end point and middle point. All these activities bled together. There was no Muslim activity and American activity. This was simply who I am.

00:16:29.000 --> 00:16:39.000

So really to me, you know, I am an American who just happens to be a Muslim. They aren't mutually exclusive. American-Muslim is simply my existence.

00:16:39.000 --> 00:16:46.000

While there is so much emphasis put on one over the other, it's really just two parts and it's intersection of who I am.

00:16:46.000 --> 00:16:49.000

Those are two different layers of my identity.

00:16:49.000 --> 00:16:53.000

They're just combined together.

00:16:53.000 --> 00:16:58.000

And that's kind of, a little bit, you know, my response for that first question.

00:16:58.000 --> 00:16:59.000

[Crowd applause]

00:16:59.000 --> 00:17:01.000

[Speaker 1]: Alright, Naziyah.

00:17:01.000 --> 00:17:11.000

[Speaker 3]: Alright. Hello everyone, I'm Naziyah. So post 9/11. Honestly, I learned about 9/11 when I was in fourth grade. I didn't even know it happened.

00:17:11.000 --> 00:17:19.000

I was actually shocked when it happened. Like I heard about all these things like oh like this happened, there was this, and I'm just like "whoa this happened."

00:17:19.000 --> 00:17:30.000

I was two and a half when 9/11 happened. So i-i like when I found out about it was like, "oh okay it's just another part of history. Whatever" and moved on and played with my toys.

00:17:30.000 --> 00:17:41.000

But this question you know, what it means to be an American-Muslim, to me it just means being an unapologetic Muslim-American who just lives the American life. You know?

00:17:41.000 --> 00:17:52.000

For me personally, you know, it's a constant battle for me is just finding out what values I believe in as an American, and what values I believe in as a Muslim. You know?

00:17:52.000 --> 00:18:04.000

And that's just something I'm constantly struggling with, but as a Muslim American, you know, when you, I think being an American in general is just being who you are and just being who you want to be, regardless of what anybody says. You know?

00:18:04.000 --> 00:18:13.000

And that's what I love about America and that's what being an American is, just being proud of who you are and just being you, you know?

00:18:13.000 --> 00:18:29.000

And I think living in American, you just live with so many different types of people. A diverse community, and I think that's what I love about it because if everyone believed in the same thing and wore the same thing, and like everyone was just the same, we would just be boring. You know?

00:18:29.000 --> 00:18:38.000

We're amazing. People love America why? Because we're so different and we're, we stand out.

00:18:38.000 --> 00:18:41.000

Like the other day, I was buying some supplies for Fourth of July and some of my friends were like,

00:18:41.000 --> 00:18:48.000

Yo Naziyah, why are you buying supplies for a party, like for America, for a country that doesn't love you?

00:18:48.000 --> 00:18:58.000

And i was like you're wrong. There's some people in this country that don't love me, but this country gave me the opportunity that I would not have if I lived back home in Bangladesh with my parents.

00:18:58.000 --> 00:19:10.000

And it just wouldn't have worked out. And I am who I am because America has given me the opportunities that I have today, and I am a very proud, unapologetic Muslim-American Bengali teen.

00:19:10.000 --> 00:19:13.000

And, that's just who I am.

00:19:13.000 --> 00:19:14.000

[Crowd applause]

00:19:14.000 --> 00:19:18.000

[Speaker 1]: Great, thank you Naziyah. And then last, we'll do Azeez.

00:19:18.000 --> 00:19:27.000

[Speaker 4] Alrighty. So I mean kind of piggybacking a little bit off of what everyone said, but kind of adding my own twist to it.

00:19:27.000 --> 00:19:35.000

To me, being an American-Muslim is embracing my individuality and my differences while at the same time, being an American.

00:19:35.000 --> 00:19:48.000

And kind of what everybody said, but America is a place where everybody, no matter your differences, or who you are, it's a place where you can be who you are.

00:19:48.000 --> 00:20:03.000

I don't think there is a place where I would be, or any of us would be able to practice our religion the way we could here in America. With its freedoms and with the civil liberties that we have here, there's definitely not a place where we could be proud Muslims.

00:20:03.000 --> 00:20:16.000

And i think that just goes, in this day and age, I mean we have people who pre 9/11 and in the 9/11 era, and I guess me and Naziyah in our post 9/11 era, we have our own challenges in 2017 with the different things we have to deal with.

00:20:16.000 --> 00:20:27.000

But I don't think there's a better time for me to being an American-Muslim, seeing as though although we have the hate on end, we have so much support and love for us. Just by-

00:20:27.000 --> 00:20:31.000

[Audience applause]

00:20:31.000 --> 00:20:40.000

[Speaker 4]: Just by being who we are, unapologetic and being Muslim, we can, I mean we're just as American as anybody else.

00:20:40.000 --> 00:20:41.020

I mean I think that's what makes me an American-.



Smithsonian Institution

Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections

The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

Join us!

The Transcription Center: <https://transcription.si.edu>

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SmithsonianTranscriptionCenter>

On Twitter: [@TranscribeSI](https://twitter.com/TranscribeSI)

Connect with the Smithsonian

Smithsonian Institution: www.si.edu

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Smithsonian>

On Twitter: [@smithsonian](https://twitter.com/smithsonian)