How Does It Feel to Be a Problem

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI

Professor and journalist Moustafa Bayoumi was born in Switzerland to Egyptian parents and raised in Canada before moving to New York City for graduate studies at Columbia University in 1991. He still lives in New York, where he teaches in the English department at Brooklyn College and has won two awards for excellence in teaching. His scholarly work has focused on the history of Islam and Islamophobia in American culture as well as the work of Edward Said, an esteemed Palestinian American postcolonial scholar and public intellectual who mentored Bayoumi during his doctoral studies. Bayoumi has also written on a wide variety of political topics, primarily American foreign policy in the Middle East and immigration policy, for various popular media outlets including *The Nation*, *CNN*, the *London Review of Books*, and the *Progressive Media Project*. He is probably best known for *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?*—which won an American Book Award in 2008 and the Arab American Book Award for Non-Fiction in 2009—or perhaps for composing the most re-tweeted tweet of the 2016 Presidential Debates between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton ("I'm a Muslim, and I would like to report a crazy man threatening a woman on a stage in Missouri. #debate"). His most recent book, *This Muslim American Life*, explores Muslim Americans' perspectives on the War on Terror and also won the Arab American Book Award for Non-Fiction.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the aftermath of the militant Islamic group al-Qaeda's attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, Arab and Muslim Americans were thrown into the national spotlight, portrayed as enemies to the country where they made their homes. There was immediately a spike in hate crimes against Muslims (and people mistaken for Muslims, like turban-wearing Sikh men), including a number of random murders around the U.S. whose perpetrators claimed to be avenging 9/11; the American government took a series of measures supposedly intended to target al-Qaeda, creating the Department of Homeland Security (which is charged specifically with preventing future terrorist attacks) and passing the USA PATRIOT Act (which radically expanded the government's surveillance power and made it legal to indefinitely detain non-citizens without trial). In practice, Bayoumi suggests, these policies did more to trample on the civil liberties of minorities than fight terrorism. In the months after September 11, the government detained roughly 5,000 Arabs and Muslims essentially at random based solely on religion and ethnicity, deported many thousands more, and captured precisely zero suspected terrorists. The United States's most significant response to September 11 was launching the "War on Terror" abroad: it invaded Afghanistan and Iraq in order to depose the nations' governments, which it believed were linked to Al-Qaeda. In fact, over the next two decades the American presence in the Middle East did little to stop the threat and only destabilized Iraq and Afghanistan further, as extremist groups were able to flourish in the absence of a stable central government. And the image of Iraqis and Afghans as enemies was imported back to the United States: with Arabs and Muslims fixed as "the enemy" in American minds, Arabs and Muslims living in the U.S. grew to fear not only the racism of those around them, but also the formal infrastructure of the state, which often presumed them guilty of ties to terrorism until they were proven innocent and even infiltrated their communities with spies. While this American state of affairs is the most important backdrop to Bayoumi's book, various other historical events profoundly affect his individual subjects: the American sanctions on Iraq before the 2003 invasion (for Lina), the creeping authoritarianism of the Syrian government in the late 1990s (for Rasha), the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese War underway during Bayoumi's interviews (for Rami and Ezzat), and most of all the dispute between Israel and Palestine for the territory they both claim (for Sami, Akram, Omar, and Rami). The Israeli military continues to occupy Palestinian territory (divided into the West Bank and Gaza Strip). Israel restricts movement in and out of Palestine, controls the flow of goods and services (including humanitarian aid and medical supplies) there, and is often criticized by the international community for using disproportionate (often lethal) force against Palestinians, especially those who protest the occupation. The United States's vigorous support for Israel leaves Bayoumi's four Palestinian American subjects feeling unrecognized and fearful about taking pride in their heritage.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Bayoumi takes his title from African-American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), which explores how black people navigated their status as a racial underclass in the decades after the end of slavery. Bayoumi's other main influence is his mentor Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism* (1978), which explores how Western countries historically projected an exoticized, condescending image of "the Orient" onto the Middle East, and then used this constructed image to justify colonizing and dominating the Arab world. There is a clear parallel between Said's thesis and Bayoumi's argument that the U.S. construes all Muslims and Arabs as violent "enemies" in order to justify persecuting and racially profiling

them. Other books on the experiences of Arab and Muslim Americans in the 21st century include Louise A. Cainkar's *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11* (2009), which offers a more academic look at the discrimination during the Bush administration's draconian racial profiling policy; David Cole's *Enemy Aliens: Double Standards and Constitutional Freedoms in the War on Terrorism* (2005), which looks specifically at how the U.S. government used the War on Terror to justify eroding civil liberties; and the anthology *Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit After 9/11* (2009), which looks at how Detroit's Arab and Muslim American communities (the largest in the U.S.) conceived their relationship to American identity in the early 21st century. For more information about the occupation of Palestine that Bayoumi frequently references, an excellent source is Rashid Khalidi's *The Iron Cage* (2006). Complements to Bayoumi's book also include Gregory Orfaela's memoir *Angeleno Days: An Arab American Writer on Family, Place, and Politics* (2009), and Vijay Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2001), which takes Du Bois as inspiration from an opposite perspective, exploring how South Asians have come to be considered a "model minority"—the "solution" rather than the "problem"—because of the fraught history of American immigration policy. Prominent recent works of Arab American fiction include Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Arabian Jazz* (1993), about a Jordanian Muslim family moving to rural upstate New York, and the bestseller *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) by Mohsin Hamid, about a Pakistani American forced to grapple with the conflict between his two nations in the aftermath of September 11.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America
- **When Written:** 2005-7
- **Where Written:** Brooklyn, NY
- **When Published:** 2008
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Nonfiction
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, Memoir, Ethnography
- **Setting:** Primarily in Brooklyn, NY; also Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan
- **Climax:** The beginning of Bayoumi's Afterword, in which he synthesizes the stories of his seven subjects to show how Arab and Muslim American youth in the 21st century must go through the normal motions of growing up amidst an atmosphere of discrimination, suspicion, and intimidation that effectively renders them second-class citizens
- **Antagonist:** American Islamophobia, both informal and institutionalized
- **Point of View:** First-person (interviews), third-person (characters' stories)

EXTRA CREDIT

Book Battle. Every year, Brooklyn College chooses a book of memoirs set in New York as required summer reading for all incoming first-year students. In 2010, it chose *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* and quickly received a number of complaints from right-wing commentators who believed the university was trying to indoctrinate students into what they described as Bayoumi's "radical pro-Palestine" views and hatred for the American government. This eventually ballooned into a media firestorm as various outlets picked up the story. The author responded with an op-ed in which he argued that this reactionary attitude from people who clearly had not read his book was all the more proof that Americans needed the nuanced perspectives on Arab American life he offered in it, and that many Americans remain eager to conflate any mention of Arab or Muslim people with terrorism and violence.

PLOT SUMMARY

Journalist and professor Moustafa Bayoumi offers "portraits" of seven Arab Americans in their late teens and early twenties who have grown up in Brooklyn in the years since the September 11 attacks. Bayoumi argues that most contemporary Americans lack any real understanding of how Muslim and Arab Americans experience a post-9/11 political climate that has persecuted them on the basis of ethnicity and religion and left them feeling insecure in the very place where they sought refuge, economic opportunity, and cultural acceptance. His subjects all face the challenge of defining and pursuing their futures—and the future of Arab America as a whole—despite the threats to their place in the multicultural world of the United States.

Rasha's family fled authoritarian violence in Syria when she was five and settled in Brooklyn. In February of 2002, her family is arrested in the dead of night "for possible terrorism connections," interrogated for hours, and thrown in jail—they have no idea why they are under investigation, but it's clear that they are "going to be staying for a while." Rasha grows depressed, unable to reconcile her love for the freedoms her family has in the U.S. with her feeling that the government has "abducted" her. The family is freed abruptly, without any explanation for their three-month detention. Bayoumi explains that, simply because of their ethnicity or religion, thousands of Arabs and Muslims went through the same process of arbitrary and unexplained detention after September 11, which international watchdog organizations recognized as violating basic human rights; and in light of her experience, Rasha decides to work in human rights.

Sami is a Christian of Egyptian and Palestinian descent who considers himself "the most far-off Arab you'll find" who identifies primarily with the community where he grew up in

New York. After a lackluster first year in college, Sami joins the Marine Corps on a whim in early 2001 and receives news of the September 11 attacks on his way to combat training. He is horrified to realize that "*Arabs did this?*" and realizes that he might be going to war; his superiors dismiss his feelings that he "can't fight against [his] own people" and he leaves to fight in the Iraq War in 2003.

In Iraq, Sami is troubled by the gap between what he sees in the people he encounters—innocent, frightened peasants trying to avoid getting caught up in violence—and what his fellow marines see—potential terrorists. These other marines proclaim their intention to kill all the Iraqis and call Sami things like "terrorist" and "al-Qaeda." After Saddam Hussein's government is deposed and Sami's unit has done nothing but sit around in Iraq, he begins to question why he is in the country at all. After eventually befriending Arabic interpreters, he begins to see the war as a pointless exercise. When he returns from his second tour, he gets a tattoo of the Twin Towers that were destroyed on September 11 and moves back to New York with his girlfriend Ana.

High school student Yasmin's outspokenness contrasts with American assumptions about women who wear the **hijab**. She goes to school in Bay Ridge, the epicenter of Arab American life in New York. She wins a race for class secretary, but quickly runs into a problem: her faith prevents her from going to school dances, which her new role in student government requires her to attend. Although her school frequently makes exceptions for students of other faiths, its student affairs coordinator forces Yasmin to resign. Furious, Yasmin devotes her free time to researching anti-discrimination law. She finally gets pro bono representation from the legal organization Advocates for Children, which gets her school to change its policy. Her senior year, she is elected class president. She goes on to college and a master's program and hopes to tackle law school next.

Akram is a hard-working Palestinian American college student who has helped out in his family's Brooklyn grocery store since age 10. Arabs own a disproportionate number of stores like this in New York, Bayoumi explains; in the 1980s, Akram's father bought his in the heavily Caribbean-American and African-American neighborhood of East Flatbush. Akram is popular at his heterogeneous high school in 2001. After 9/11, however, other students and even teachers openly proclaim their contempt for Arabs, and at the grocery store he notices a split between the Caribbean-Americans who share Arabs' "postcolonial sensibilities" and the African-Americans who do not, and in some cases grow hostile to his family.

By 2003, Akram is in college and goes to spend the summer with his grandparents in the West Bank. There, he notices the concrete effects of the Israeli occupation: people are constantly waiting for an Israeli attack, and he watches another group of soldiers shoot at Palestinian children who are throwing rocks at them. He feels deeply wounded by Palestine's fate and the U.S.'s increasing hostility to Muslims—so much so that he decides to move to Dubai.

Lina's family, like Rasha's, moves to the U.S. to flee authoritarianism; her father is an open critic of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. After her father lands a job at the National Institute for Drug Abuse, the family moves to an affluent white suburb and Lina begins to feel out of place. In high school, she rebels against her strict family: she wears makeup, smokes, and skips class to hang out with her boyfriend. To set her straight, her family sends her to Iraq twice. On her first trip, she is overjoyed to reunite with her extended family and temporarily escape her mother's oversight; but on her second, she finds herself bored: there is nothing for her to do and, since Iraq's economy is devastated by American sanctions, she lacks the material comforts of her life in the U.S.

Shortly after Lina returns to the U.S. and returns to her old, rebellious self, Maisa dies suddenly and Lina grows alienated from her family. She moves out and falls in love with an Iraqi man named Wisam, but ends up engaged to one of her new stepmother's brothers, Laith. She later learns that Wisam is in prison: he was a double agent, a spy for both Saddam's regime and the FBI. Lina ends up building a relationship with Laith in Virginia. When Bayoumi visits them. Lina and Laith lament that, with the war in Iraq, they do not recognize their country anymore.

In 2006, Omar is 22 and unable to find a job despite sending out almost 1,000 applications. He needs money and independence to marry Nadine, a fellow Palestinian student at Hunter College, in a traditional Palestinian ceremony. He should have better prospects, especially after his prestigious internship at the international media company Al Jazeera—but he realizes that other companies might worry about hiring him, an Arab American who worked at the only major Arab news network.

Omar has not always identified with his Arab side—he is also half Chilean and spent five years living in Santiago during his childhood. A few years later, however, he visited Palestine and began taking pride in his heritage. During his internship at Al Jazeera's office in the United Nations, his boss introduced Omar to Kofi Annan (the Secretary-General of the UN) and called him the network's best intern ever. At his next job, however, his boss calls the organization a "terrorist network" and Omar decides to take "Al Jazeera" off his résumé. He even applies for jobs at the FBI and Drug Enforcement Administration (who are looking for Arabic and Spanish translators), knowing that they might involve "spying on his own community" but feeling that he lacks other options.

Rami grows up in Brooklyn and is a star football player in high school before his father has a string of bad luck: a store he buys burns down, and then he gets arrested twice—first for illegally selling out-of-state cigarettes, and then because a man who shares his name has been cashing fake checks. He ends up in

prison in New Jersey; Rami is devastated and loses all motivation to keep playing football. Instead, he turns to the Qur'an, which gives him a "foundation in the religious life."

Rami learns Arabic and begins going to mosque on Fridays, which he feels recharges his spiritual batteries. In college, he meets Ezzat, who inspires Rami with his depth of knowledge and reflection. They grow close as they wonder how they can show the West that Islam is a religion of peace, not violence. He also befriends Mohammad, a young man who is already a star preacher and community leader in the New York area, and Bayoumi follows them on a number of Fridays (the Muslim day of prayer). They spend a few hours in the office they have set up for their website, which sends copies of the Qur'an to anyone in the world who requests one. They consider this da'wa, meaning religious charity work. Rami has also started working at a local Muslim youth center and leading prayers. He plans to dedicate his life to da'wa, family, and strengthening the relations between Muslim Americans and the communities where they live.

Bayoumi examines the stories he has told in an effort to answer the question, "what does it mean to be young and Arab in America today?" He concludes that young Arab Americans are constantly forced to cope with "fear, suspicion, curiosity, and misunderstanding" as they struggle to find a place in American society.

Bayoumi summarizes the long and usually forgotten history of Arab and Muslim immigration to the United States, which stretches back centuries. Numerous Muslim West Africans were enslaved and brought to what would eventually become the U.S.; in the 19th century, New York already had a "Little Syria" in Manhattan. In the first half of the 20th century, a debate raged over whether Arabs were "white" (which was a central criterion for American citizenship), but this was settled in 1944 by a judge who thought the United States should give Arab immigrants citizenship in order to improve its relations with the Middle Eastern (and, Bayoumi explains, get access to its oil).

Since then, Arab and Muslim Americans' fate has been inextricably tied to American foreign policy; they have been under routine surveillance since the 1970s and subject to being tried with "secret evidence" in immigration courts since the 1990s. The situation worsened considerably after 9/11, when the government began using similar tools against citizens and non-activists—with the tools of American imperialism turned against America, the foundational values of equality, freedom, and compassion have come under threat. But they live on formidably in Brooklyn, which remains a place "of everyone for everyone and by everyone."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Moustafa Bayoumi – The author of *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* is a journalist and professor of English at Brooklyn College whose research centers on the cultural discourses about Islam in the United States. In this book, he seeks to understand how the generation of Arab and Muslim Americans below him—those growing up "in the age of terror"—understand their American identities and cope with suddenly being deemed a "problem" by society at large. He approached his research by reaching out to acquaintances and leaders in Brooklyn's Muslim community, who ultimately introduced him to the seven young people whose narratives form the core of this book—each of whom he met for a series of extended interviews, mostly in 2006. Bayoumi recognizes that none of these subjects share his class background or particular life experience—he and both his parents have PhDs, and he has lived in Switzerland, Canada, and the United States at various points in his life, whereas most of the people he profiles are working-class and have lived most of their lives in Brooklyn. Nevertheless, he clearly sees all seven of these young people's stories as reflecting a shared cultural predicament for Arabs and Muslims in the 21st century: they all have to reckon with the relationship between their Arabness and their Americanness; they all have to cope with discrimination and suspicion, usually from legal institutions as well as in their day-to-day relationships; and they all worry about their families and futures, at once appreciating the privileges of life in the United States and fearing that they will be excluded from them.

Sade – A 24-year-old Palestinian-American who appears briefly in the book's introduction and penultimate chapter. He used to have a comfortable job working for commodities traders in New York and even managed to get his brother hired at the same company, but his colleagues constantly berated him with Islamophobic and anti-Arab slurs, and his boss fired both him and his brother after finding out that his brother was born in Jerusalem. Sade was anxious and depressed for a whole year, barely able to sleep. Later, however, he found work at a technology company whose other employees were also mostly immigrants; he is now delighted to be surrounded by people who better understand his experience, but at the beginning of Bayoumi's preface he is also upset to have learned that one of his friends was actually an undercover spy investigating terrorism. He tells Bayoumi that Arabs are "the new blacks" in the United States.

Rasha – The first of Bayoumi's seven main subjects, Rasha is a Syrian American in her early 20s who moved to Brooklyn with her family at an early age. During high school, just after September 11, she is arbitrarily thrown in jail with her family for three months, like thousands of others, simply because she

is an Arab Muslim and therefore under suspicion "for possible terrorism connections." The experience is devastating and degrading—prison guards treat her, her sister Reem, and her mother like "a subhuman species," and her friends at school, Gaby and Nicky, are dumbfounded and worried at her abrupt disappearance. After her release, she is ecstatic to see the sky for the first time in months, but her family remains scarred by their detention and she is distraught to see prejudice against Muslims all around her. As of the book's publication, she is hoping to pursue a career in human rights. Her story demonstrates the severe, often forgotten human consequences of the American government's draconian crackdown on Arabs and Muslims after September 11, but also the passionate dedication to social change that can emerge from the experience of injustice.

Sami – Bayoumi's second (and only Christian) subject, who calls himself "the most far-off Arab you'll find." Born and raised in New York as the son of a Palestinian father and an Egyptian mother, he is immensely proud of his city, which he considers the most important part of his identity. He impulsively enlists in the United States Marines during his first year of college, just before the September 11 attacks. He serves two tours in the Iraq War, but is frustrated by his fellow marines' racism and reluctance to see Iraqis as full human beings. During his second tour, he befriends translators and begins to learn about his Arab heritage, but also decides he can no longer support the war, which seems to serve the interests of those in power at the expense of American soldiers and the Iraqi people. When he returns home, he is unsure what to do with his future; he moves back to New York with his girlfriend Ana and goes back to college in 2006. Sami's story shows the human consequences of the War on Terror, during which he feels torn between his identities as an Arab and an American, but also how he manages to make his these identities complementary rather than contradictory and reconcile them into a multifaceted but coherent sense of self.

Yasmin – The focus of Bayoumi's third chapter, a devout, **hijabi** high schooler who lives in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and gets into a protracted argument with her high school's administration over her role in student government. While the school's policy requires members of the student government to attend all school functions, she cannot go to school dances because of her faith, and the school's student affairs coordinator makes her resign her post. Incensed at what she considers religious discrimination, she spends years furiously researching anti-discrimination law and trying to make her case to the school. Armed with pro bono representation from the legal organization Advocates for Children, she finally gets the school to change its policy and ends up getting elected class president for her senior year. By the time of the book's publication in 2008, she has already finished college and is planning on going to law school to fight cases like hers from high school. Beyond contradicting stereotypes about Muslim women, Yasmin's story shows the insidious, often everyday character of anti-Muslim discrimination in post-9/11 America but also dedicated advocacy work's power to overcome it.

Akram – The subject of Bayoumi's fourth portrait, a Palestinian American college student who works at his family's grocery store in a largely Caribbean neighborhood of Brooklyn. In high school, he is gregarious and popular, but he feels increasingly vilified and disconnected from the community where he lives in the years after September 11. When he goes to Palestine for a summer, he discovers a deep sense of connection to and pride in his heritage, but also feels exasperated at Palestinians' mistreatment by the occupying Israeli military. He decides that he will have better financial, cultural, and social opportunities in Dubai than in the United States, and is planning his move there as of the book's publication. Bayoumi sees Akram's story as "about trying to figure your way in a world of progressive disenchantment"; his decision to leave the United States suggests that, at least for Muslims, it has failed to live up to its promise as an inclusive, multicultural land of opportunity.

Lina – The woman at the center of Bayoumi's fifth chapter, an Iraqi American who grows up in Maryland, Brooklyn, and Colorado but, by the time of the book's publication, lives with her husband in Virginia. She grows up in a largely African-American neighborhood where she feels understood and accepted by her peers. When her father gets a prestigious job, however, Lina's family moves to a wealthier white neighborhood, where she feels ostracized at school and starts rebelling against her parents: she smokes, wears makeup, skips school, runs away from home, and has a secret boyfriend. Her family sends her to Iraq—twice—to try to reform her. Both times, she returns more connected to her heritage but no less rebellious, and after her mother Maisa suddenly dies, she leaves home for good. She ends up back in Brooklyn and meets an Iraqi named Wisam online, whom she later learns was a spy working for both Saddam Hussein and the FBI. She joins and quits the military, then gradually grows to love Laith, her fiancé and her stepmother's brother, whom she moves to join in Virginia. Lina's story is the classic tale of an immigrant struggling to reconcile two cultures—that of the homeland she scarcely remembers halfway across the world and that of her new home country, the United States, which is also busy destroying her old country.

Omar – A young Palestinian Chilean American college graduate who cannot find a job, which frightens him because, without one, he will not be able to marry Nadine, the Palestinian girl on whom he has set his sights. Passionate about improving American media and interested in becoming a war correspondent, he interns at a community television station and then the United Nations office of Qatari media giant Al Jazeera. Although his boss loves him and the internship goes marvelously, he realizes that he has a scarce chance of finding

another media job as an Arab with the name of an Arab media organization on his résumé. After applying for almost 1,000 jobs, including (reluctantly) for translator positions at the FBI and Drug Enforcement Administration, he still has no prospects at the end of Bayoumi's portrait and does not know whether he will be able to marry Nadine. His sense of hopelessness, uncertainty, and powerless shows the insidious and cyclical nature of contemporary discrimination against Arabs and Muslims—Omar's prospective employers, it seems, never take him seriously because they cannot get past the identity his résumé signals, just as so many Americans cannot push back the veil of stereotype to see the humanity and complex experiences of Arabs and Muslims in the United States.

Rami – The subject of Bayoumi's final portrait, Rami is a devoutly religious Palestinian American teenager who has decided to dedicate his life to Islam. He wants to teach Muslims to live more virtuously and show the West that Islam is, in the vast majority of places and forms, a peaceful and community-oriented religion. He is physically imposing, a star football player in high school. But, when his father goes to prison, he turns his energy to religion, which offers him a sense of fulfillment and solace he sees nowhere else. In college, he befriends Ezzat and Mohammad, who are also pious and ethically-minded; the three hope to do their part spreading peace, good will, and wisdom among Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike. With Mohammad, Rami runs a nonprofit website that sends copies of the Qur'an to anyone who requests one, which he considers a form of da'wa (missionary work). At the end of Bayoumi's portrait, Rami gives an eloquent speech about life and death at a mosque. He starkly contrasts with the common American picture of a devout Muslim, which associates religious conservatism with violent fundamentalism, and his aspiration to heal a Muslim community that has lost its moral compass and an American community that has lost its sense of compassion offers a kind of hope that is increasingly rare in the tense, divided world of post-9/11 America.

Yasmin's Father – He helps Yasmin appeal to the student affairs coordinator in an attempt fight the school policy that excludes her from serving in student government. The school administration derides him for supposedly trying to "control [his] daughter," perpetuating stereotypes that Muslim women are powerless and controlled by men. In fact, he supports rather than directs Yasmin's decisions: while he is invested in Yasmin's legal battle, he also knows they cannot afford the legal fees that CAIR wants to charge them, but is happy when his daughter finds pro bono representation through Advocates for Children; while he hopes that Yasmin will become a doctor, she ultimately decides to go to law school instead. He is an Egyptian Muslim but married a Filipina Catholic (Yasmin's mother) who converted to Islam.

Maisa – Lina's strict Iraqi mother, who is horrified at her rebelliousness and sends her back to Iraq for a summer and then again for a year. She worked at the Iraqi embassy and then a thrift store to help support the family in the first years after they move to the United States. She dies suddenly just after Lina returns from her second trip to Iraq, just as the family is starting to get along for the first time.

Wisam – An Iraqi Lina meets on the internet and falls in love with, even though they never end up as anything more than friends. About two years after they meet, the FBI informs Lina that Wisam is a spy working for Saddam Hussein, and he spends almost two years in prison before being deported to Jordan. Lina is horrified to hear both that he is incarcerated and that he may have been deceiving her; at first, she is unsure whom to trust, but after visiting Wisam repeatedly in prison, she begins to feel that he is probably guilty.

Ezzat – A towering, garrulous, brilliant, and devout 21-year-old Lebanese American who is close friends with Rami. After meeting at their college's Muslim Student Association, Ezzat starts to grill Rami on his religious beliefs and guides Rami to something of a theological awakening. They become close friends and go to an Islamic study group together; Bayoumi meets him a handful of times during his interviews with Rami.

Mohammad – A friend of Rami's and a religious scholar who, despite his youth, is already a local celebrity in New York's Muslim community. He dresses traditionally, which makes his parents worry for his safety, and spends his Fridays giving sermons and Qur'anic recitations at mosques around the New York area. Out of a tiny "office" in Staten Island, he and Rami run a website that sends free copies of the Qur'an to anyone who requests one, in various languages, which they consider an important form of da'wa (missionary) work. While he is deeply aware of the discrimination and suspicion his community faces, he is dedicated to offering non-Muslims a more positive and holistic view of Islam. Bayoumi spends many Fridays with him and Rami.

The Student Affairs Coordinator – An administrator at Yasmin's school who is responsible for overseeing student government. While he is polite and always listens respectfully to Yasmin's arguments for why she should be allowed to serve on student government despite not being able to attend school dances for religious reasons, he always rejects her requests. When she gets elected class president, he is immensely supportive, and they remain close in the years after she graduates high school.

Rasha's mother – After raising her daughters with "the simple values of honesty, compassion, and the protection of [their] honor," Rasha's mother suddenly finds herself detained without charge alongside them in a New Jersey jail after September 11. She is frightened and frail in detention, and although she grows close to a few of the other inmates, Rasha and Reem focus their energies on looking out for her.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Laith – Lina's husband and the older brother of her father's second wife, who lives in Virginia. After their families set them up together, their relationship is tumultuous for many years, but they reconcile and marry in 2006.

Nadine – Omar's love interest and a fellow Palestinian student at Hunter College. Omar hopes to marry her in a traditional Palestinian ceremony, but their families will not allow the marriage until he finds a job.

Gaby – One of Rasha's two best friends, along with Nicky. She is from Ecuador and writes letters to Rasha in prison; they tearfully reunite after Rasha's release.

Nicky – Along with Gaby, one of Rasha's two best friends, who is distraught to see Rasha detained and ecstatic to reunite with her after she is released. Nicky is from Azerbaijan.

Reem – Rasha's older sister and cellmate for three months in detention.

Ana – Sami's girlfriend, a Puerto Rican woman from New Jersey, whom he meets as a pen-pal while in the Army.

TERMS

Advocates for Children – A public interest legal organization in New York that fights for equality in the public education system (especially for low-income and immigrant groups), largely through pro bono work.

Allah – The Arabic word for "God," which is frequently associated with Islam but also commonly used by a variety of non-Muslim groups as well.

Al Jazeera – A major global media network owned by the government of Qatar (a small, wealthy, highly developed country on the Arabian Peninsula), which is often controversial in the West for presenting multiple competing viewpoints about Middle Eastern politics.

Al-Qaeda – A terrorist network of extremist Muslim fundamentalists founded by Osama bin Laden in the 1980s, which has carried out a number of suicide attacks, including the September 11 attacks, against the citizens of countries it considers enemies of Islam (and, often, controlled by Jews). Contrary to the Qur'an, al-Qaeda believes that the murder of innocent civilians is justified and violence is a legitimate means to unite the Muslim world under a single government. Al-Qaeda has become more and more loosely-organized and fragmented since the War on Terror, which the United States launched specifically to destroy it. (In 2011, the United States finally killed bin Laden.)

Bay Ridge – A middle-class neighborhood in Southwest Brooklyn where several of **Bayoumi**'s subjects live. Historically dominated by Greek, Norwegian, Irish, and Italian immigrant communities, Bay Ridge has become the epicenter of Arab American life in New York over the last few decades.

CAIR – A civil rights and legal advocacy organization that pursues equality for and fights discrimination against Muslim Americans.

Da'wa – Spreading Islam through preaching and missionary work. **Rami** and **Mohammad** suggest that, in the United States, da'wa is as much about showing non-Muslims a positive image of Islam as about winning converts to Islam and teaching Muslims to live more virtuously.

Fahrenheit 9/11 – A polemical political documentary by the progressive activist Michael Moore, which explored the War on Terror and Iraq War, pointing out the bias of mass media and the American government's connections to the organizations that launched the September 11 attacks. Moore's film won numerous international awards and remains the most commercially successful documentary in history.

FBI – The American Federal Bureau of Investigation, the nation's main domestic surveillance, security, and counter-terrorism agency. Despite its noble aims, the FBI has been responsible for numerous human rights violations since its creation in 1908, including illegally spying on American citizens and government officials around the world; sabotaging and murdering communists, civil rights activists, and Puerto Rican independence leaders; and arbitrarily detaining people solely on the basis of ethnicity, race, or religion (including **Rasha** and her family). Since the September 11 attacks, Arabs and Muslims have become the FBI's primary target, which has made many of the young people **Bayoumi** interviewed lose their sense of trust in the American government and even many of the people they encounter on a daily basis (who may be informants).

Hamas – One of the two primary Palestinian political parties, an Islamist group that favors armed rebellion to the Israeli occupation. In contrast, Hamas's main opponent, Fatah, is secular and rejects violent resistance to Israel. Fatah primarily controlled the Palestinian Authority's government until Hamas won the 2006 elections; violent clashes between the two groups were frequent in 2007 but have continued occasionally ever since. As of 2018, Fatah controls the West Bank and Hamas controls the Gaza Strip.

Imam – A Muslim religious leader, especially one who leads services at a mosque.

INS – The Immigration and Naturalization Service was an agency responsible for processing legal immigration and preventing illegal immigration to the United States. In March 2003, it was dissolved and became three separate agencies: Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Like the INS before them, these new organizations have been criticized for violating international laws by surveilling, detaining, and torturing immigrants.

Iraq War – The conflict between an American-led coalition and the Iraqi government led by Saddam Hussein, which was quickly deposed in 2003, and then between the same coalition and Iraqi insurgent groups that flourished in the absence of a functioning government (from 2003-2011). The United States initially justified invading Iraq in March 2003 by declaring that the Iraqi government had weapons of mass destruction and was supporting al-Qaeda, but both these claims were soon disproven; ultimately, many observers have condemned the war as illegitimate under international law (including Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1997-2006). While President George W. Bush openly denied that the Iraq War had anything to do with the September 11 attacks, he also called it "the central front in the War on Terror." Beyond committing numerous human rights violations (torturing prisoners, killing and displacing civilians, and using chemical weapons), the American coalition also arguably left Iraq far more politically unstable and hospitable to fundamentalist terrorist groups than it was before the war.

Keffiyah (Hatta) – A kind of traditional scarf generally worn around the head in the Middle East. The black-and-white Palestinian variety has become a common symbol of protest against the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Mecca – The birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, an ancient city in present-day Saudi Arabia that remains Islam's holiest site. Millions of Muslims come to Mecca each year, mostly for the annual pilgrimage (the *Hajj*).

The No-Fly List – A list of tens of thousands of people who are considered terror threats and accordingly banned from all commercial flights in the United States. In practice, tens of thousands of people (including small children) have also been inadvertently prohibited from flying because they share a name with someone on the list, which has been expanded to include many liberal activists, priests and nuns, and even American congresspeople.

Pro Bono – Legal work performed for free, short for *pro bono publico* ("for the public good").

Qur'an – The primary religious scripture in Islam and the most important text in Arabic literature, which God reportedly revealed to the Prophet Muhammad piece by piece over his last 23 years of life. Muslim religious services often include recitations of the Qur'an (also a popular competitive activity) and sermons interpreting it.

Ramallah – A city in the West Bank that effectively serves as the Palestinian Authority's capital (since Israel controls Jerusalem, the official capital of Palestine).

Saddam Hussein – The authoritarian president of Iraq from 1979 until 2003, when he was deposed by the invading American-led coalition in the Iraq War.

September 11 – On the morning of September 11, 2001, the fundamentalist terrorist organization al-Qaeda hijacked four American planes and flew two into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan's financial district, one into the Pentagon (the headquarters of the United States military), and one into a field in Pennsylvania (after the aircraft's passengers revolted against the hijackers). The 9/11 attacks killed approximately 3,000 people, plus many more due to later complications, making it the deadliest peacetime attack on civilians in history. In retaliation for the attack, the American government radically expanded its power to surveil and imprison those suspected of terrorism without due process, effectively legalizing the racial profiling of Arab and Muslim Americans, who faced hate crimes and growing prejudice in the years after the attacks. The United States also launched the controversial "War on Terror," which led it to invade Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in March 2003.

Shisha – Tobacco smoked through a large water pipe (a hookah), a common social activity in the Arab world and among Arab immigrant communities in places like Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.

War on Terror – A term that loosely refers to the ongoing series of American-led military campaigns in the Middle East and anti-terror efforts in the West that started after the September 11 attacks.

W.E.B. Du Bois – An acclaimed African-American sociologist and civil rights activist who fought for racial equality in the early 20th century. He remains best known for the classic study *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), which he opened by asking, "How does it feel to be a problem?" **Bayoumi** took Du Bois's question for his title because he sees Arab and Muslim-Americans as the 21st century version of this "problem."

West Bank – The larger of the two Israeli-occupied territories that comprise the State of Palestine. (The other is the small, densely-populated Gaza Strip, and the two territories are separated by Israel.)

Yasser Arafat – The longtime leader of Fatah, one of Palestine's two primary political parties (along with Hamas), and president of the Palestinian Authority from 1994 until his death in 2004.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, AND FOREIGN POLICY

Moustafa Bayoumi takes the title of *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* from the seminal African-American sociologist W.E.B. DuBois, who asked the same

question of black America at the beginning of the 20th century. After September 11, Bayoumi suggests, Arabs and Muslims have become the new "problem" group in the United States: they are treated as second-class citizens as a result of developments in U.S. foreign policy that conflate terrorist groups with Arabs and Muslims in general. Bayoumi demonstrates how the U.S. selectively suspends its values of tolerance, excluding Arabs and Muslims from the nation that is supposed to pride itself on diversity and equality.

Bayoumi's subjects see their lives tangibly change after September 11. As Arabs, they are deemed "enemies" and associated with violence committed by other groups halfway around the world. A customer who shops at Akram's family grocery store tries to launch a neighborhood-wide boycott of it and, after this fails, rants about Middle Eastern politics for hours. After 9/11, other students at his school declare in class that the U.S. should "bomb [Arabs]" and one teacher even derides him for wearing a hatta (traditional Palestinian scarf). Rasha, Yasmin, Omar, and Rami also feel ostracized by many of the non-Muslims around them, who begin viewing their families with suspicion after 9/11. And in the American military, Sami realizes that his fellow soldiers in the Iraq War view all Arabs and Muslims as the enemy, rather than just the authoritarian government and violent fundamentalist groups they are sent to fight. They call him "terrorist," "sand nigger," and "al-Qaeda," even though he is fighting on their side.

These individual incidences of racism also translate into systemic discrimination in work and school. Yasmin argues that she cannot serve in student government because her religion prohibits her from attending events like school dances; but while the student affairs coordinator makes exceptions for Greek Orthodox and Jewish students, he forces Yasmin to resign. A thousand applications deep into his job search, Omar begins to fear that his prestigious internship is hurting him: he worked at Al Jazeera, a major international news network that is often derided in the U.S. because it is based in the Arab country of Qatar and closely covers American foreign policy. Omar wants to work in media in order to *fight* bias, but finds that this same bias prevents him from getting a job at all. Bouyami also notes that Muslims and Arabs file five times as many discrimination complaints in the year after 9/11 as the year prior, suggesting that this kind of prejudice is widespread.

Finally, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim attitudes both start and end with law enforcement and the military, the institutions that have the most power to define and conquer the "enemy." The most salient example of this is Rasha's story: her family members are labeled terrorism suspects after 9/11 and thrown into jail for three months without any evidence. One of the officers tells them they should expect to be jailed in "times like these," and the guards treat them as "a subhuman species." Thousands of Muslims have faced similar arbitrary detentions, and an unknown number were abruptly deported in the years after 9/11. One of the policy's masterminds later admitted that it was mostly for "PR purposes," so Americans would believe their government was doing something about terrorism. The subjects of Bayoumi's portraits also confront their communities' infiltration by law enforcement: Sade learns that one of his close friends is actually a spy hired to surveil the Muslim American community in New York, and Lina learns that the man she loves is working not only for the FBI, but also for Saddam Hussein, and plotting to murder one of her family members. In his preface, Bayoumi recalls a closed-door meeting that proves the disconnect between law enforcement and the Muslim community: the FBI wants Muslim leaders to proclaim their opposition to terrorism, but the leaders are astonished that this is not obvious to them. They are worried about how people who are not supposed to be on the no-fly list can get off—but the FBI has no advice.

Bayoumi argues that American foreign policy casts Arabs and Muslims as "enemies" on the national stage, which leads individual Americans to internalize the association between them and terrorism, makes institutions wary of openly supporting them, and allows the government to validate forms of legalized discrimination—al-Qaeda is decentralized and very difficult to eradicate, so the government uses innocent Arabs and Muslims as scapegoats to show that the U.S. is winning. Bayoumi emphasizes that this is not a new phenomenon, as various other groups have been targeted by the government in the past. American society, Bayoumi suggests, has always oscillated between acceptance and discrimination, promoting certain groups to the level of true "Americans" and demoting others to an inferior class of citizenship. As one of Omar's friends puts it, "before, they went after the Jews, the Italians, the Irish. And now it's our turn." While this pattern is pervasive, Bayoumi insists, it is neither inevitable nor worth preserving.

ARAB AMERICAN IDENTITIES

Bayoumi emphasizes and attempts to circumvent the dangerous American assumption that all Arabs and Muslims are somehow the same. His subjects come from a variety of national backgrounds and identify to varying degrees with their nations; the label "Arab" does not fully capture any of their identities any more than the label "American" does. Ultimately, Bayoumi shows not only how the youths he profiles actively define their identities in complex ways, only some of which depend on the places where they and their parents have lived, but also how all identity is complex and all labels are imprecise.

American discourse flattens Arabs and Muslims into a uniform category based on stereotypes. Americans tend to use the words "Arab" and "Muslim" interchangeably but forget the vast differences between them: "Arab" is an ethnic identification and "Muslim" a religious one, the "Arab world" is not the same thing as the "Middle East," the majority of Muslims are not Arab, and

the majority of American Arabs are not Muslim. American Arabs also come from dozens of countries with distinct cultural traditions and political histories (and American Muslims from an even wider variety of places). The American notion of "Arab" or "Muslim" usually refers to people from Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, and the Levant, in addition to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (whose majority populations are not ethnically Arab). Yet Bayoumi's subjects often see their families' complex stories reduced to this category of the "Muslim Arab" (with "terrorist" often implied). Sade, Sami, and Akram hear their peers cheer that the American military should kill "those Arabs," all Iraqis, and the ambiguous "them."

Bayoumi's subjects actually define themselves in a variety of ways, through a variety of labels that demonstrate the diversity often effaced by the American insistence on the simple categories "Arab" and "Muslim." Omar and Akram grow up scarcely identifying with their Palestinian heritage, but it becomes much more central to their concepts of self after they visit Palestine. Omar decides to have a traditional Palestinian wedding because, "since we have no country [...] the only thing we have is our identity." Akram decides to move to Dubai to learn Arabic and connect more deeply with his culture. Neither of them is particularly religious, however. In contrast, Rami is also a Palestinian American Muslim, but his religious identity is far more important to him than his national one. (Contrary to stereotypes, he and his friends Ezzat and Mohammad are far *more* religious than their immigrant parents.) Rasha and Lina's identities depend centrally on the violence in their countries of origin, which they fled to come to the United States. After the Iraq War, Lina and her husband Laith realize that their identity is tied to a version of their country that no longer exists. Bayoumi's subjects have other identities besides their Arab ones as well: Omar is half-Chilean, spent five years living in Chile in his childhood, and speaks fluent Spanish. Yasmin is both Egyptian and Filipina but identifies primarily with her religion; Sami is Egyptian, Palestinian, and Christian, but identifies most of all with New York City. In the limited American imagination of Muslims and Arabs, these varied identities are often erased.

The people Bayoumi profiles also identify as American, which they often find difficult to reconcile with their various Arab identities. They succeed not by balancing loyalties or choosing one side or the other, but by integrating their Arabness and Americanness, which become two parts of their more complex identities. Rasha adores the freedom of expression she gets in the United States (but never had in Syria) and retains the "hard fragility" of "a pessimist brimming with humanist hope," despite her horror at being detained by the government. Akram loves Brooklyn's incredible diversity, yet also decides to leave the United States for Dubai because he sees the racism and essentialism that form the flipside of America's incredible capacity for tolerance. Bayoumi emphasizes this split: the United States tends to either exalt Arabs as "exceptional assimilated immigrant[s]" or vilify them as "violent fundamentalist[s], with very little room in between." Sami's tattoo elegantly captures the way he combines his Arab and American identities: the memorial light beams that illuminate where the Twin Towers stood every September 11 after the attack, with the words "always remembered, never forgotten" in Arabic. It shows his simultaneous love for the United States, devastation by the September 11 attacks, and Arab pride.

Ultimately, Bayoumi suggests that it is impossible to understand people through a label because people are not born into a box. Rami, who dedicates his life to building cultural understanding in America and teaching Muslims to live more benevolently, has far more in common with a Christian pastor than he does with Akram, a fellow Palestinian Muslim, who decides to leave America for a place that readily accepts him. When someone primarily describes someone else as "Arab" or "Muslim," identity—which is really a kind of tool for grouping similar experiences—is being conflated with essence. Bayoumi aims to remedy this with portraits that do not claim to show the entirety of the Arab or Muslim American experience, but rather point to certain continuities and differences among the variety of such experiences.

FAITH, TRADITION, AND ISLAM

Islam plays widely different roles in the lives of the seven people Bayoumi interviews, but all of them (including Sami, who is Christian) nevertheless grapple with their relationship to it. They struggle to bridge their personal knowledge of Islam with the negative representations of it that dominate American discourse, and one of Bayoumi's central motives is to dispel the assumptions that make up these negative representations: that Muslims are usually devout, conservative, and fundamentalist; that Muslims who *are* pious are also somehow violent or anti-American; and that Islam is a "traditional" religion incompatible with "modern" Western societies. His portrayal of a variety of ways to be Muslim and a variety of people who do not fall into stereotypes is an important step towards this end, but his subjects also undertake their own efforts to portray Islam in the positive light in which they experience it.

Contrary to stereotypes, Bayoumi's subjects and their families relate to Islam in a wide variety of ways, often independently of their relationships to their national and ethnic identities. Religion is one—but not the only, or even often the main—source of community among Arabs and Muslims, and Muslim moral values are no different from the ones instilled by most other major religions in the United States. Some of Bayoumi's subjects, like Yasmin and Rami, see religion as central to their lives; they feel it provides them with essential moral guidance and could not imagine giving it up. Islam is central to their beliefs in equality, peace, and the value of community; in particular, faith was Rami's only source of solace

after his father first got sent to jail, and it allowed him to meet friends who shared his perspective and build a community of support. He also breaks conventional assumptions about the conflict between tradition and modernity, choosing traditional ways *in spite of* his much less religious parents. On the flipside, Akram almost never attends mosque, but still feels intensely connected to his Palestinian heritage. And while Rasha's family is not devout, her mother emphasizes many of the same moral values that Rami (and, of course, religions everywhere) believe in: "honesty, compassion, and the protection of her honor." Lina alternates between disavowing and embracing her family's religious traditions, going from teenage rebellion to suddenly donning "the entire regalia of a religious woman" in Iraq, then back again. She still marries a fellow Iraqi, in accord with (but not because of) her family's wishes. Finally, Sami is not a Muslim at all—he is an Arab Christian, but he grows close to a number of Muslim locals, who help him understand his Arab heritage.

Despite their varied and sometimes ambivalent relationships to Islam, the young people Bayoumi interviews also recognize the need to combat negative stereotypes about it. One of Omar's central motivations for starting a career in the media is his desire to combat bias, and especially the default pro-government bias of American media that, for instance, led his mentor John Alpert to be fired from NBC for reporting the destruction caused by American bombs during the First Gulf War. Another of his mentors, the imam who leads his discussion group, emphasizes that Muslims have a "public relations problem" in the United States, which further inspires Omar to fight negative media representations of Islam that conflate all Muslims with a handful of radical groups. Yasmin's portrait opens with a story about her watching a white couple harass a hijabi woman on a bus, yelling that she might be a terrorist and have a bomb under her blanket (it is actually a baby). Yasmin is furious to witness this stereotype in action and sees her own fight against her school, like her decision to wear the **hijab**, as a way to improve Muslim representation and teach people to "have confidence in me because of what was in my heart and not prejudice against my outer appearance." For Rami, da'wa work and wearing traditional Muslim garb are as much a means to represent Islam in public and perhaps open conversations with non-Muslims as they are an expression of his own personal faith.

Ultimately, Bayoumi's subjects are all too aware that they are caught in a double bind: they are forced to apologize for believing in a religion that preaches the values of moral thinking, community, and nonviolence. It is, then, unsurprising that they make light of this situation by turning to humor. One comedian Rami's friend Mohammad brings to a school Muslim Students Association jokes, "I consider myself a very patriotic American Muslim, which means I would die for this country by blowing myself up." And Akram tries to show that his family is no different from other Americans (and make sure they do not get swindled) by posting a sign in their window: "IN ALLAH WE TRUST. EVERYONE ELSE MUST PAY—*NO CREDIT*."

GROWING UP AND SELF-DISCOVERY

While the seven individuals at the center of Bayoumi's book all face discrimination based on their Arab and Muslim identities, they are also just young adults trying, like people of their age everywhere, to determine who they are, what matters to them, and what they want to do with their lives. Most graduate from the confusion of adolescence, often exacerbated by 9/11, to the provisional certainty of young adulthood. All affirm their cultural identities in various ways, whether by pursuing religious work (Rami) or moving to the Middle East (Akram), committing to work for civil equality (Rasha and Yasmin) or choosing to marry within their communities (Omar and Lina). And while the challenges they face as Arab Americans inform their processes of self-discovery, these struggles do not ultimately define or constrain their senses of possibility. They cannot avoid living as second-class citizens, but they do manage to flourish in spite of it.

All of Bayoumi's subjects profoundly reckon with their identities, coping with the confusion and sense of sudden freedom that defines the lives of many American teenagers and college students, regardless of ethnic or religious background. For five of the seven, this confusion results from experiences closely tied to their Arab and Muslim identities. After her family moves from the primarily black neighborhood where she felt at home to a white neighborhood where she feels marked as "other" for her identity, Lina has a long rebellious phase and gets herself sent to Iraq as punishment. Rasha's detention and Yasmin's dispute with her school make them question their love for the United States and ability to find a place for themselves in American society. Akram's sense of belonging at school and in Brooklyn begins to erode after 9/11, when he and his family start getting singled out for being Arab, and Rami is devastated after his father is arrested in a post-9/11 police operation; he no longer feels fulfilled playing football and finds himself with nowhere to turn.

But these same experiences of cultural conflict also contributed to Bayoumi's subjects' sense of purpose. Rasha and Yasmin's tribulations lead them to pursue careers in human rights and law, respectively, in order to help fight the same kind of injustices they experienced. Rami finds his sense of purpose through the Qur'an and his theological discussions with other Muslim students in his college; he realizes that he can use Islam as a force for good, both by helping Muslims to live more virtuous lives and by helping improve understanding and relations between American Muslims and the American public at large. Akram, on the other hand, follows his newfound connection to his identity abroad, to Dubai, where he feels that he has a much better shot at "the American dream" than he does in New York.

But, while all of Bayoumi's subjects grow to better understand themselves and their relationship to American society through experiences of cultural tension, not all of them translate these experiences into career goals: Omar and Lina commit to marrying people who share their cultural backgrounds and sustaining their traditions; Sami, who also finds love, pursues his future by returning to New York, the place that is most central to his identity. When Omar's internship with Al Jazeera threatens his future job prospects, he is distraught: he originally found a sense of purpose after recognizing both bias and potential in American media, but cannot achieve his goals precisely because of the media's bias. He decides to focus on his other main goal instead: marrying Nadine in a traditional Palestinian ceremony, which is important to him because it allows him to help pass on his culture, which manages to thrive in diaspora despite not having a sovereign country of its own. Lina, too, decides to marry another Iraqi and pass on her traditions, allowing her to sustain Iraq—which she and Laith do not recognize anymore—as an idea and cultural practice. And after returning from his five years of military service, Sami has a one-track mind: instead of the leisurely road trip he had planned with his girlfriend Ana, he speeds his way across the country. His destination: New York City, his home, the only place he can imagine living.

At the end of their respective chapters, all of Bayoumi's subjects are heading into unknown waters with more or less defined senses of direction. While the author does largely focus on the discrimination and cultural uncertainties that affect them, he also shows how they all define themselves in spite of their struggles rather than letting these struggles define them. In the afterword to the book's new 2018 edition, Bayoumi briefly mentions what each of his seven portraits' subjects have done in the 10 years since he first wrote their stories. Akram did end up moving to the United Arab Emirates—so did Rasha, although they both moved back to Brooklyn and are now high school teachers. Yasmin has successfully become a lawyer and Rami is combining Islam with community development, as he hoped, working for the Muslim American Society in Texas. Omar did end up marrying Nadine, but not working in the media, and Sami and Lina have taken more roundabout paths, but both ended up in New York as well.

JUSTICE, ACTIVISM, AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Bayoumi's subjects stand at a crucial juncture not only in their lives, but also American history: they are living through a radical change in American institutional and popular attitudes toward Arabs and Muslims, and they face the burden of defining the future of Arab and Muslim America—and, to an extent, the United States as a whole. They all recognize not only the United States' parallel histories of racial persecution and acceptance of outsiders, but also see that the fate of Arabs and Muslims in America is a test of what many consider the nation's fundamental principles: equality, civil liberty, and compassion for the marginalized—and some of them dedicate themselves to making these principles a reality. Beyond emphasizing how the United States has historically been a land of both radical inclusion and violent exclusion, then, Bayoumi and the people he interviews also insist that citizens have the responsibility and potential to fight for an American future that lives up to the promise of equality and justice.

Bayoumi's subjects are aware of the long history of racial discrimination in the United States and their place within it. Akram and Sade both mention the similarity between Arabs' and Muslims' place in post-9/11 America and the historical subjugation of African-Americans. Yasmin also latches onto this connection, initially comparing her moral stand to Martin Luther King Jr.'s (but later regretting this as an overstatement). Still, she sees how other racial groups have had to advocate for themselves in order to break social barriers and wants to do the same for Muslims. Omar and his friends have the most developed—but also most pessimistic—view of the American tradition of racism. They recognize that "the Jews, the Italians, [and] the Irish" have faced the same suspicion they do now, but wonder if it is just inevitable—if everyone simply gets their "turn."

But many of the young people Bayoumi meets also have a tenuous optimism about America—though they have experienced it at its worst, they also understand its promise at its best: the life often vaguely referred to as "the American dream," which, for Arabs and Muslims, more concretely refers to the chance at finding economic stability, cultural acceptance, and personal freedom in a multicultural nation. (Not everyone maintains their faith in it: Akram decides that he has better odds in Dubai.) Rami's vision is particularly unique, because he seeks to achieve equality and understanding *through*, rather than despite, Islam. He has a moral vision for Muslims—who he thinks have often lost sight of their community, family, and ethical obligations—as well as for America—which he thinks needs a more positive vision of Islam. And while Rasha recognizes the injustice of her detention, she also has firm "humanist hope" that a world without such injustice is worth pursuing. Similarly, after Yasmin sees the movie *I Am Sam*, she realizes that she can seek pro bono representation and is ecstatic. She tells Bayoumi, "I feel like I have been taught a lesson that just because something seems impossible, it doesn't really mean that it's impossible, and that you never really know what you're capable of or what you can accomplish if you don't keep fighting for it, no matter how bad things are."

Bayoumi also points out activists' success in fighting discrimination, gesturing particularly to the hard-fought but often invisible battles that they have waged since September 11 to combat the unjust treatment of Arabs and Muslims. Rasha's family stays in the United States because of their

immigration attorney, and Yasmin wins her case against the school through Advocates for Children, a well-resourced organization dedicated to fighting for justice. The author also points out how organizations like Amnesty International and even officials within the United States government have spoken out against indefinite detention, warrantless surveillance, and arbitrary deportation policies. He shows how filmmaker Michael Moore's documentary Fahrenheit 9/11 helped convince Sami that the Iraq War was unjust, proving that media (like this book) can change cultural norms. Finally, he takes as inspiration activist thinkers from the past, like historian J.A. Hobson, philosopher Hannah Arendt, and most of all W.E.B. Du Bois, who have developed a theoretical framework for understanding the way states turn some of their constituents into second-class citizens.

Just as Du Bois considered African-Americans' fate "a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic," Bayoumi sees Muslim and Arab Americans' treatment as a referendum on the United States' self-image as a melting pot. A country, he argues, is only as good as the treatment it offers its most disadvantaged residents. But just as a country can choose to ostracize its citizens or help them flourish, people can push their country to be better. His subjects' ethical vision is their greatest strength and one of America's greatest assets, and this is why Bayoumi concludes his book with the image of a diverse Brooklyn block party, a vision of community "of everyone for everyone and by everyone."

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HIJAB

An Arabic word with a wide range of meanings, hijab most commonly refers to a specific kind of headscarf worn as a veil by some Muslim women. (Someone who wears the hijab is called a *hijabi*.) In other contexts, the word also denotes the principle of modesty, the social separation of men and women, and codes of women's dress in general.

Many Westerners interpret the hijab as evidence of women's repression under Islam because they assume that men force them to wear it in order to cover their bodies. But, in reality, the hijab is often a feminist symbol in the West; Bayoumi suggests that most American hijabis, like Yasmin, are "far from the stereotype of the submissive and retreating female" but rather see the hijab as an expression of cultural pride and statement against Islamophobia, even if they recognize that wearing one can open them to discrimination or violence. He cites one scholar who argued that, in France, wearing the hijab is a way for Muslim women to "mark and claim a presence in the public sphere" where they are otherwise invisible. The standard Western narrative is based on the false assumption that feminism is a necessarily secular struggle, which requires women to give up cultural and religious symbols and adopt a uniform code of Western dress that is ostensibly "neutral" (but actually just as culturally particular as the hijab).

The hijab therefore symbolizes not just Islam, but also all the assumptions about Islam that divide Muslims from non-Muslims and reproduce deeply-embedded, centuries-old stereotypes of Muslims as violent, culturally backwards, and hostile to Western culture. For a white couple on Yasmin's bus in Brooklyn, for instance, a woman's hijab signifies that she must be a terrorist; but for Yasmin, the same woman's hijab stands for the inclusive, multicultural society and right to free expression that she values so dearly in the United States.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem* published in 2008.

Preface Quotes

The last several years have taken their toll. I ask him about life after September 11 for Arab Americans. "We're the new blacks," he says. "You know that, right?"

Related Characters: Sade, Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Sade, a young Palestinian American man Bayoumi briefly mentions at the beginning of his Preface and then again in Omar's chapter, has listened to his coworkers disparage Arabs, gotten fired from his job because his brother was born in Jerusalem, and then discovered that one of his friends was actually a spy for the FBI. He has experienced discrimination at all three levels: the informal world of friends and coworkers, the formal world of employment, and the legal power of law enforcement itself. This is the context of his claim that "we're the new blacks," a comment that helps explain Bayoumi's title, borrowed from the eminent African-American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois, who asked black Americans, "what does it feel like to be a problem?" at the beginning of the 20th century.

Bayoumi argues that Arabs and Muslims are the new "problem" in America because, after 9/11, they are permanently and constantly conflated with the "enemy"—namely, the fundamentalist terrorist groups like al-Qaeda that the American military is busy fighting in the Middle East. Much like black Americans under Jim Crow laws, Muslim and Arab Americans are often presumed guilty until proven innocent, like when thousands (including Rasha) were arbitrarily detained after September 11, later to be abruptly released when the government realized they had no connection to the attack. Their communities are frequently surveilled, infiltrated by spies, and forced to publicly disavow terrorist groups that have nothing to do with them and operate halfway around the world. Notably, Bayoumi is *not* arguing that African-Americans have been suffering less discrimination, police profiling and brutality, or economic hardship since Arabs and Muslims became the United States' new racial underclass, but rather that, since 9/11, the long tradition of racial oppression in the United States has especially turned toward Arabs and Muslims, for whom the law is a formality and equality before the law is a rhetorical ideal, not a reality.

> But what exactly is a profile? It's a sketch in charcoal, the simplified contours of a face, a silhouette in black and white, a textbook description of a personality. By definition a profile draws an incomplete picture. It substitutes recognition for detail. It is what an outsider from the street observes when looking through the windowpane of someone else's life.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Understanding Bayoumi's distinction between a *profile* and a *portrait* is central to grasping his purpose in writing this book and structuring it as he does, with seven young Arabs who live in the same city but have profoundly different concepts of identity, belonging, and purpose telling seven otherwise unrelated stories in seven disconnected chapters. Bayoumi sees the dominant way of representing Arabs and Muslims (and minority groups more broadly) as *profiling*: people view others through the lenses of preconceptions and received ideas; one part of someone's identity comes to define them through stereotype. Arabs and Islam are immediately associated not only with each other (when most Arab Americans are not Muslim and most American Muslims are not Arab), but also with images of terrorism, anti-American violence, religious conservatism, gender hierarchy, closed-off ethnic communities, and many others. Bayoumi argues that this tendency to profile Arabs and Muslims perpetuates discrimination and racism, preventing Americans from seeing Arabs' and Muslims' humanity and complexity.

Instead of profiles, Bayoumi chooses portraits: he approaches subjects in their individuality, pointing to their complex, varied, and sometimes inconsistent relationships to American, Arab, Muslim, and other national identities; their psychological and emotional reactions to racism and Islamophobia, anti-American violence, violence perpetuated by the United States in the Middle East, and the everyday struggles they face; and the hopes and dreams for the future that, like any other young people, they are busy developing or pursuing. These portraits, which try to be faithful to personality and experience, challenge the idea that there is a single Arab or Muslim identity, set of beliefs, or pattern of feeling. By showing the diversity of Arab and Muslim life, Bayoumi demonstrates that profiles will never suffice because one dimension of someone's identity (their ethnicity or religion, but also any other identity) can never be sufficient to understand or define them.

> It seems barely an exaggeration to say that Arab and Muslim Americans are constantly talked about but almost never heard from. The problem is not that they lack representations but that they have too many. And these are all abstractions. Arabs and Muslims have become a foreign-policy issue, an argument on the domestic agenda, a law-enforcement priority and a point of well-meaning concern. They appear as shadowy characters on terror television shows, have become objects of sociological inquiry, and get paraded around as puppets for public diplomacy. Pop culture is awash with their images. Hookah cafés entice East Village socialites, fashionistas appropriate the checkered keffiyah scarf, and Prince sings an ode to a young Arab-American girl. They are floating everywhere in the virtual landscape of the national imagination, as either villains of Islam or victims of Arab culture. Yet as in the postmodern world in which we live, sometimes when you are everywhere, you are really nowhere.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Because they are so often profiled in the 21st-century American public sphere—but usually as a collective, and often by outsiders claiming to have captured the whole truth of their experience—Arabs and Muslims face a variety of contradictory representations that are "all abstractions," based on political goals, cultural representations, and "the virtual landscape of the national imagination," but seldom on actual people. They are "everywhere" as objects but "nowhere" as subjects. Most of all, this relates to American foreign policy: the United States fights some war overseas, and the image of its enemy—al-Qaeda, the Taliban (who are not Arab), Palestinian nationalists protesting the Israeli occupation, or whomever else—becomes a stand-in for hundreds of millions of Arabs and more than a billion Muslims around the world, including those in the United States. These careless generalizations blind people to the truth and imprison Arabs and Muslims in stereotypes. Because the dominant mode of storytelling about them is profiling from the outside, Bayoumi tells this book from the inside, allowing people's experiences to speak for themselves and refusing to overanalyze, question, or label them.

> Brooklyn is the concentrated, unedited, twenty-first-century answer to who we, as Americans, are as a people.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Besides their Arab heritage, the one uniformity among Bayoumi's subjects is that they all live (or have lived in the past) in New York City's most populous borough, Brooklyn. It is an ultra-diverse place, with dozens of distinct ethnic neighborhoods that grow, meld, and turn over in time; it has every imaginable style of architecture, food, and entertainment; and, most relevantly for Bayoumi's work, it has the United States' largest concentration of Arab Americans (by absolute number, but not by percentage, an honor which goes to Dearborn, Michigan).

Brooklyn is not just interesting to Bayoumi because it is diverse and has plenty of Arabs. He also sees it as representing a certain vision of the United States as a whole: the promise of coexistence among people from various backgrounds, the "American dream" that immigrants can build a stable financial future for themselves and create educational opportunities for their children, and the ability to become American without having to give up one's other identities. But these are ideals, and while Brooklyn comes close to fulfilling them, they remain ideals besieged by reality for many Arab Americans who feel like those two words are construed as opposites and they are set to be the only ones excluded from the "melting pot." Bayoumi contrasts these two images of America—the multicultural ideal of Brooklyn and the exclusionary racism of profiling—and implores the nation to pick, and become, the former.

Rasha Quotes

> "If there's anything that I've discovered out of this whole thing, it's that people take for granted being a citizen of this country. They don't see the importance of having a privilege like that. I've been in this country for eighteen years, and I'm working hard, and I'm qualified, but I've missed all these opportunities. I feel like it should be a lot easier than this. It's not fun. It's not fun at all."

Related Characters: Rasha (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

After she is released from jail, Rasha points to a little-acknowledged line, distinct from and sometimes much more powerful than race, ethnicity, or religion, that (in theory) solely determines whether people get full legal rights in the United States: citizenship status. Even though she grew up almost exclusively in the United States from the age of five, Rasha did not get her citizenship until after Bayoumi published this book, decades later. Naturalization is not an easy or automatic process, and her family had to wait a decade for their application for political asylum to even be processed. While her family's indefinite detention was certainly a violation of human rights and standard due process protections in any democracy, Rasha effectively had no constitutional rights because of her citizenship status. And, while the government expanded the illegal surveillance of citizens, too, after 9/11, its detention, registration, and deportation policies deliberately targeted noncitizens from Arab and Muslim majority countries, who were effectively deemed criminals and rounded up, jailed, and/or deported *en masse*—legally—because they were deemed to lack rights and not merit equality before the law.

Sami Quotes

"I'm like the most far-off Arab you'll find," he complained to me one day when talking about his relationship with some of the guys in the club. We were sitting in the backyard of a Starbucks in Park Slope. "You have to be a Muslim to be an Arab. You have to listen to Arabic music all the time to be Arab. You have to be in love with going wherever your parents are from. You have to marry an Arabic girl to be Arab. Certain things. You're not a real Arab if you're like me. I don't listen to Arabic music. I don't watch Arabic programming. I hate going to Egypt. I hate going overseas. I date a Puerto Rican female."

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi, Sami (speaker), Ana

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Sami recognizes that he defies the American stereotype of an Arab—his tastes in entertainment, culture, travel destinations, and romantic partners do not match up. He is also Christian, an anomaly among Bayoumi's subjects (though not among Arab Americans). But he is Arab nonetheless, and throughout his story he connects and comes to terms with his Arab identity in an authentic and novel way that does not rely on this profile. His sense of being "far-off" demonstrates the deceptiveness and arbitrariness of prescriptive stereotypes—and also how these stereotypes are not just the province of non-Arab observers, but also the students at his Arab Students Association. Of course, the most "far-off" thing about Sami is that he fought in the Iraq war—but Bayoumi has not quite gotten there yet.

Around this time he decided on the tattoo he wanted to have, once he'd saved enough money. With his large, muscular bulk, he has acres of skin to plow ink into, but he never wanted to stamp himself with the regular bulldog or the eagle, globe, and anchor symbol of the Marine Corps. If he was going to paint himself, he needed something that expressed who he is, something that really spoke to him. What he came up with was the New York City skyline as the tattoo's basis, but instead of the World Trade Center towers, two memorial beams of light will shine upward. The moon, vaguely imprinted with the marine emblem, will land high on his shoulder. The stars will spell out "N-Y-C." Underneath, and in Arabic, will be written the words "Always remembered, never forgotten." A little bit of everything—New York, Marine, Arab—to be put carefully together and marked indelibly.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker), Sami

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Sami's tattoo represents how, beyond defying stereotypes of Arabs and Marines alike, he manages to incorporate the different components of his identity into a complex image where his Arabness, Americanness, military service, and New York pride work together as a coherent whole, when they might ordinarily be in tension. Rather than pick a readymade sign ("the eagle, globe, and anchor"), he narrates his own story about his service through the tattoo, which combines the tragedy that motivated him to go to war, the institution he served for, the sense of Arab identity he gained, and the place that was his ultimate goal all along: home, New York. This creative construction of identity exemplifies what Bayoumi believes the United States is about in its best incarnation of itself. The two memorial beams Sami chooses are also real: every year on the anniversary of September 11, they shine upwards from the places where the Twin Towers used to stand, continuing far beyond the other buildings and well into the clouds.

Yasmin Quotes

"911. What's your emergency?"

"There's a white couple on a city bus. I think she has a bomb in her purse. It's a 863 bus, going up Fifth Avenue. The license plate is . . ."

She wanted to call. She really did, just to make a point, to make them feel the same way—singled out, powerless, discriminated against, a source of irrational fear. But she didn't call. In fact, she didn't do anything, and because of that she was annoyed with herself.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi, Yasmin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

After Yasmin watches an old white couple on a Brooklyn bus harass a *hijabi* Muslim mother, insisting that she has a bomb under her blanket when she really only has a baby, Yasmin is furious; she not only feels for the young mother, but is also

frustrated at the white couple's inability to feel for her, the way their stereotype cuts them off from her humanity and prevents them from feeling any remorse for humiliating her. Yasmin then imagines calling 911 on the white couple in return, giving them the experience of discrimination they will never have in the United States so that they can understand what it feels like to "be a problem."

Yasmin also identifies with the woman because she, too, wears the hijab and recognizes that it is a contested symbol: to her, it represents a pride in Islam that is also a pride in the United States, where (at least in theory) she should be able to express her religion in the public sphere. But to Americans like the white couple on the bus, the hijab is associated with all the standard accouterments of the Arab-Muslim profile: terrorism, violence, and anti-Americanism.

> "With all due respect to your religion, sir, how long do you think you can control your daughter?"

Related Characters: The Student Affairs Coordinator (speaker), Yasmin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

When Yasmin insists that she cannot go to the school dance and ends up at a meeting with her father, a sheikh (religious leader), and her school's student affairs coordinator, who oversees the student government, the coordinator asks her father this. Beyond the fact that this does not show the "due respect" the coordinator shows other students' religions, this statement is significant because it shows how the coordinator's picture of Yasmin's religious objection to her job requirements is embedded in a gendered stereotype about family structure and power in Islam. In fact, although the sheikh has final say on whether Islam will allow or prohibit Yasmin going to the dance, she fully believes in Islamic precepts on her own; she does not secretly want to go to the dance or to be freed from her father or religion's "control." Despite the similarly patriarchal structure of Western societies, many Americans assume that Islam is inherently repressive towards women, that men make decisions for powerless women, and that therefore living a secular lifestyle constitutes a kind of freedom under Western feminism that Muslim women would naturally want. But Yasmin's agency is her decision to follow her religion and stand strong against this kind of stereotype: to wear the hijab, to refuse to compromise her beliefs, and to fight against discrimination from her school.

> I was forced to submit my resignation due to the system's inability to understand my moral obligations. For example, my beliefs prevent me from having anything to do with drinking/dancing. When I was young, the system told me to stand up and fight for what I believe in. While now I am being told to do the exact opposite, instead I should give up what I believe in for some rules and regulations. Martin Luther King Jr. fought for what he believed in and gave up his life for it. I too am taking that same stand by giving up my position to defend what I believe in.

Related Characters: Yasmin (speaker), The Student Affairs Coordinator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

This is Yasmin's first letter to her school, which has forced her to resign rather than let her skip school dances and remain in the student government. While she later regrets comparing herself with Martin Luther King, Jr., Yasmin's central argument holds true: not only is she standing up for her beliefs, but American institutions are contradictory in encouraging people to stand up in theory but dissuading them from doing so in practice. She offers the same argument that Bayoumi ultimately makes to explain what it will take to save America from its worst, most exclusionary impulses: people (especially marginalized people and those in power) must hold the United States to its principles of acceptance, diversity, and equality before the law. Even if ideals can never be fully achieved, they should be fought for, and the closer a nation gets to its ideals, the better.

What hurt me most was that when I won secretary as a Freshman, I felt that I had achieved my dreams and broken a racial barrier that I thought would hold me back. I finally felt that as a Muslim that I was doing something and I could make a difference in the world. I believed people would have confidence in me because of what was in my heart and not prejudice against my outer appearance—I had hope that I could achieve my dreams—but when they took me out I felt different and segregated and it shattered everything I had hoped and dreamed of. Now all I feel is hurt, sadness, and I feel that as a Muslim I can never be something because America is prejudiced so much and will never let people like me succeed no matter how hard we try. I never told anyone that this is what really hurts me and makes me cry. My family doesn't even know that I still cry and that I am still hurt and think about it every day. I felt so bad, and knowing how that feels, I don't want to have anyone else go through what I went through, Muslim or non-Muslim.

Related Characters: Yasmin (speaker), The Student Affairs Coordinator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100-101

Explanation and Analysis

In a heartfelt letter to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Yasmin explains how her motivation for running for student government in the first place has transformed into her motivation for fighting the school's exclusionary policy. When running for secretary, she was initially convinced she would never win; her very victory broke barriers among her peers, but then she encountered exactly the same barriers among the school's administration. She gained and lost hope in turn as America revealed its two opposing tendencies—radical acceptance and radical exclusion.

Crucially, despite her sense of despair in this letter, the fact that she is writing it at all suggests that she maintains some hope—or at least blind motivation—that she can still change her situation and overcome the new barrier she has encountered. Secondly, it is telling that she elaborates her desire to save people from "what [she] went through," because it shows that she has already begun translating her experiences into an activist, political mindset by applying the fundamental principle of equality—one of the very American values that America so often forgets.

Akram Quotes

What do you do when everything and everyone—from teachers to TV—is screaming that you and your culture just don't belong? You have to come up with your own solutions, and Akram has found his answer. He's quitting the United States and heading to Dubai, a newfound land of opportunity, a global oasis of modern wealth done up Arabic style. Dubai. It's the latest Arab-American dream.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker), Akram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Akram, who is born and raised in the United States, comes to the conclusion that his country no longer welcomes him. It has relegated those who look like Akram to the roles of terrorists and villains, enthusiastically supported the Israeli occupation of his people's land, and treated his symbols of Palestinian pride as symbols of anti-Semitic hate. It has, in short, failed to live up to its promise as a land of inclusion, tolerance, and financial opportunity; furthermore, other places are now doing the American dream better than America can. Akram's decision is calculated and resolute, but still full of feeling and disillusionment; he is making the same rational decision to pursue a better life that his father did in coming to the United States a generation before. Among Bayoumi's subjects, Akram is the only one who gives up on the United States, but this is telling because he also encounters more diversity in his day-to-day life and is more attuned to the subtle shifts in racial dynamics than anyone else Bayoumi interviews. Realizing that his country sees an inevitable opposition between itself and his ethnicity—and that he can choose his country but not his color—Akram makes the choice that he thinks provides him with the best environment to finish coming of age and establishing his life.

He's a curious mix that isn't so strange in Brooklyn, equally at home with Arabs, African Americans, and West Indians. He's a twenty-first-century United States American, absorbing and refracting all the ethnicities and histories surrounding him. What he loves most about Brooklyn is this heady human geography.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker), Akram

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

Ironically, Akram embodies the very American ideal that he finds America failing to live up to: social heterogeneity, the melting pot—not just the co-presence of different peoples and ways of life but also their generative intermixture. For at least this early phase of his life, he knows more about the dozen or so nations in the West Indies than he does about Palestine. His ethnicity does not begin to capture the diverse range of cultural influences that have shaped him, and this is why it is so frustrating for the world to reduce him to what he is not, denying his flexibility and adaptability by insisting on treating him as though he embodies a profile.

American idiom: "IN ALLAH WE TRUST. EVERYONE ELSE MUST PAY—*NO CREDIT*." The customers laughed.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi, Akram (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

This comedic handwritten sign above the cash register, dreamed up by Akram, is a rough translation of an older sign in calligraphy that the family keeps on the wall: "TAWAKKALTU ALALLAH," or "I place my trust in God." Akram's sense of humor plays on a variety of culturally-specific pieces of knowledge: the literal meaning of the sign, which is only available to his own family; the fact that all U.S. currency includes the line "In God We Trust," which everyone knows; the use of "Allah" instead of "God" on the sign, to refer to his family's cultural difference from the customers (and perhaps write this off as the reason they do not give credit); and, of course, the common practice of selling goods on credit in low-income neighborhoods of New York, like East Flatbush. This kind of joke represents Akram's intercultural savvy: he can at once understand and look past cultures and stereotypes, acknowledging their limits by making a joke out of them while also communicating his real message clearly.

Lina Quotes

What happens when your homeland is in the process of disintegrating in front of your eyes? What do you do, especially when Iraq's turmoil has always hovered in the background of your life? Perhaps you do what immigrants to the United States and their children have done for generations. You build your own destiny from your American home while keeping one eye open to that which has been lost. And while your American life largely takes over, you still live somewhere between geographies, as you have for most of your life. It's just that the in-between has become harder than ever to locate.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker), Laith, Lina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Lina has a unique set of relationships to home: firstly, she is born in Kuwait, not her parents' home country of Iraq, because they had already fled Saddam Hussein; secondly, she only ever visited Iraq as a counterpoint to the United States, namely when she was being punished for being, in her mother's eyes, too much of an American teenager. But she also saw how the tense relationship between the United States and Iraq devastated the latter; she went for a year during the UN economic sanctions and found a country struggling to survive. Then, as if this accumulated trauma were not enough, she watched the United States invade and demolish her country, and while she is grateful that Saddam is gone, she can no longer recognize the country that was her parents' home.

So for Lina (and her husband Laith), Iraq is ultimately more of an idea—remembered, imagined, and preserved through cultural traditions in diaspora—than it is a real place anymore. "Their" Iraq no longer exists, and though they find a sense of belonging among Iraqi communities in the United States, they are now "in between" an idea and a place, unable to capture their identities as Iraqi Americans through either or both of those words. Lina's story is a reminder that identity is always more complex than it seems to outside observers, and that labels cannot express the tenuous allegiances and ambiguous modes of feeling that people actually use to position themselves in relation to places, cultures, others, and ideas.

Omar Quotes

"But look, Omar," she said. "I'm a friend of your family. And just for the future, I'd like to warn you." She paused. "This," she said, pointing to the line on his résumé that Omar was most proud of, his work at Al Jazeera, "this could work against you in the future. Especially if you want to get work with people who feel threatened by the whole Arab thing."

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker), Omar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

After his illustrious internship at Al Jazeera, Omar briefly works at a small nonprofit run by a family friend, who sits him down and tells him that his internship might actually hurt his chances for future employment. He is shocked and dismayed. Omar sought to work in the media precisely so that he could counter the biases of American journalists, who often presented competing American sides of a story but never considered what U.S. foreign policy looked like from the perspective of the foreigners it affected—and now he is told that his balanced perspective is unwanted and excluded from the industry precisely because of the bias he wanted to fight. The conflation of Al Jazeera with extremism and terrorism is itself a symptom of the American refusal to sincerely engage with Arab and Muslim perspectives, and in allowing Omar to connect with and affirm his own identity it solidifies the world's view of him through the lens of stereotype.

"Look. It's like this," Eyad, a portly young Egyptian, explained to me. He leaned in to the table and put his weight behind his words. "Before, they went after the Jews, the Italians, the Irish. And now it's our turn. Everybody gets their turn. Now it's just the Muslims." He leaned back. To my ears these young men were living uneasily in an unresolved contradiction.

They acknowledged that the rights of Muslims were being unfairly trampled on, but they were seduced by the lure of owning a marketable skill (the Arabic language) that was currently in high demand. What they didn't voice was the idea that the culture of the FBI would be changed by their contributions to the Bureau or that civic participation was calling them to serve. They saw an open avenue, wide and empty of traffic, to a job, a profession, a career. It was as if the grinding pressure on their generation to succeed at any cost was taking precedence over everything else.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker), Omar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

Desperate in their job searches, Omar and some of his friends turn to the last place Bayoumi expects: the FBI, which is desperate for Arabic translators for its surveillance and espionage in Arab Muslim communities like their own. While Omar's friend Eyad fully understands the American history of racial persecution, he uses this as an excuse rather than an objection: if they are already discriminated against enough that they cannot find ordinary jobs, he thinks, why not take a well-paying job that someone else would take anyway, wait out their time at the bottom rung of American society, and move on when it passes?

What they may not realize is that, even if the current degree of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim persecution is a relatively recent phenomenon, FBI surveillance against their communities has been ongoing and serious since at least the 1970s—the wheel of racial exclusion does not turn on its own, especially since it relies on foreign policy (and especially the Israel-Palestine conflict, which does not seem poised for any near-term resolution). Racism may be cyclical, but it is cyclical *because of* people rather than despite them—it starts and ends because people make efforts to change American culture, which as young Arabs they are in a place to do. Nevertheless, the men's level of demoralization shows the pernicious effects of that racism when it seems completely unsurmountable: it fragments group identity and care for others, leading them to only look out for their own survival. Whereas people like Rasha, Yasmin, and Rami overcome the problems they face and translate their success into a collective political perspective, Omar and his friends' failure to build an immediate future leads them to progressively shut out everything but their own personal interests.

Rami Quotes

But still it's not enough. "There are a lot of Muslims," Ezzat says, "but there is no Islam."

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi, Ezzat (speaker), Rami

Related Themes:

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

Rami and Ezzat meet Bayoumi in a Dunkin' Donuts and explain their perspective on contemporary Islam. It has lost its moral grounding, they believe, especially in the mid-20th century, when Western influences and colonialism turned Muslims away from their traditional lifestyles and toward vices like drinking. Contrary to American expectations that a transition from conservative traditionalism to secular modernity is inevitable after immigration to the West, the last two generations have grown more religious, not less—but, in Ezzat and Rami's eyes, still not religious enough. While their vision of "true" Islam is centrally about creating a community around shared moral values from the Qur'an, it is not necessarily fundamentalism and resolutely opposed to violence and coercion. They want to spread the true, morally upstanding version of Islam in order to rehabilitate a Muslim community they see as ethically and spiritually lost, out of touch with the wisdom in the Qur'an, which many follow blindly and without personal reflection.

In short, they are much like most other religious leaders, trying to spread goodwill and create community through a specific doctrine; there is little reason to think Islam, especially their version of it, is hostile to Christianity or the United States. Rather, Ezzat and Rami's quest for a new Islam is in large part a quest to find a place for Islam in American culture and society, to contribute to the promise of a pluralistic United States.

"Oh, man," he said. "I forgot a good ending!" He pursed his lips. "Sometimes you just forget," he explained.

"How did you want it to end?" I asked.

He paused to get the expression just right. "You come into the world crying while everyone around you is laughing," he said. "But when you leave this world for the next life, and everyone else is crying, you should be laughing." He summed up what he meant. "You've done good. Now all you have is bliss," he explained with wide eyes. "That's what I should have said."

The young imam was kicking himself and smiling.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi, Rami (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256-257

Explanation and Analysis

Appropriately enough, with this elegant tale Rami ends his own chapter (and Bayoumi ends his portraits) in a kind of bliss, showing that he has no regrets or doubts about committing his life to religious principles. He has a fundamental moral optimism about the universe: "do[ing] good" gets rewarded with "bliss" in the next life, and he continues to emphasize moral virtue above all else. These are relatively common sentiments, easy to find in most of the world's major religions, and they show Islam's unity (or at least overlap) with them. As Bayoumi intends the reader to recognize, it is impossible to criticize Islam categorically when faced with Muslims as virtuous and dedicated as Rami. His is a vision not only of personal morality but also of a collective ethic: to live without deathbed regrets, and be missed by one's crying loved ones, implies playing a valuable and consistently positive role in one's community. Islam seems to be offering America the message it needs to become inclusive and live up to its promise of equality; the only question is whether or not it will listen.

Afterword Quotes

On any given day, popular feelings seem to swing wildly between these poles of fear and acceptance, illustrating what the sociologist Louise Cainkar has called "the apparent paradox of this historical moment: [where] repression and inclusion may be happening at the same time."

It's a strange place to inhabit, and it reveals not only the bifurcated nature of contemporary American society but also the somewhat precarious condition of Arab and Muslim Americans. Because their situation here is ultimately dependent less on what happens on the home front and more on what happens in the Middle East, Muslim and Arab Americans know that their own domestic security and their ability to live full American lives turn on the winds of global conflicts and on America's posture in the world and its policies abroad.

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 260-261

Explanation and Analysis

Cainkar's work helps Bayoumi theorize the two opposing tendencies he has observed not only in contemporary society, but also in American history throughout the book; immigrants' inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and revilement, or tendency to stand for both the essence of

American society and the enemies posing mortal threats to it. The former relies on the conception of the immigrant as an individual: hardworking, able to seamlessly assimilate, with talents to contribute—but the latter means seeing immigrants as a homogeneous horde with some ulterior motive, threatening to invade and change the America built out of individual, assimilating immigrants. The relationship between cultural attitudes toward immigrants and the mode of storytelling about them—portraits of individuals or profiles of an anonymous crowd—again supports Bayoumi's choice of format and voice. Arab and Muslim Americans' individual stories are firmly within their control, even if their collective stories are determined from without and often translate into official policy.

❝ What we are currently living through is the slow creep of imperial high-handedness into the rest of American society, performed in the name of national security and facilitated through the growth of racist policies. This fact alone menaces the foundations of American society far beyond what has happened to Arab- and Muslim-American communities. "It is indeed a nemesis of Imperialism," writes [historian J.A.] Hobson, "that the arts and crafts of tyranny, acquired and exercised in our unfree Empire, should be turned against our liberties at home."

Related Characters: Moustafa Bayoumi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of his Afterword, Bayoumi emphasizes how the accelerating violations of Arabs and Muslims' human rights in the United States threaten the essence of American democracy: the notion that rights are absolute and inalienable. In the name of "national security" and for years at a time, the United States can throw out its own foundational ethical principles, the constitutional rights of citizens, and the human rights of noncitizens. The conflation of specific enemies and generalized groups affects everyone because it leaves space for anyone to be portrayed as the enemy, when doing so is politically expedient. Indeed, writing in 2008, Bayoumi seems to have accurately predicted the meteoric rise of far-right racist nationalism less than a decade later.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

Talking and smoking with his friends at a hookah café in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, 24-year-old Palestinian-American Sade is distraught to have learned that someone he considered a friend was actually an undercover detective, spying on Muslim Americans to investigate terrorism. This is increasingly common; trust is hard to come by for people like Sade, who works at a technology company full of immigrants after losing his job on Wall Street. There, other employees had been vocal about their anti-Arab and anti-Muslim feelings. Sade says that Arabs are "the new blacks" in America.

Bayoumi opens with this anecdote to emphasize the human dimensions and implications of 21st-century America's pervasive anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia, which affects Sade in every domain of his life: through the formal government channels of legal surveillance; at work, where his employer fires him without cause (which he later argues relates to his identity); and informally, in his coworkers' off-color remarks.

Speaking of the African-American experience under the system of Jim Crow segregation more than a century ago, the black sociologist and activist W.E.B. Du Bois asked, "How does it feel to be a problem?" Throughout American history, groups from Native Americans to Catholic immigrants to Jewish, Asian, and Hispanic Americans have been treated as threatening outsiders. Arabs and Muslims are the new "problem," despite the pervasive American belief that people should not be judged by race, gender, religion, or country of origin. Hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims have risen precipitously since the September 11 attacks and many Americans—39 percent, according to one poll—openly admit their prejudices against Muslims.

Bayoumi's provocative comparison between contemporary Arab and Muslim Americans and African-Americans after the Civil War suggests that Arabs and Muslims have become something of a racial underclass, an exception to the supposed inclusivity and tolerance that remains so central to the United States' self-image. But he notes that this internally contradictory core value—the belief in equality, but only for some—is a historically consistent feature of American life with historically measurable (and currently palpable) effects.

The government has also relentlessly tracked and arrested Muslims since September 11—George W. Bush even made Arabs and Muslims the only legal exception to his ban on racial profiling. A profile, by definition, is an incomplete view, an outsider's perspective devoid of detail. And profiling now affects Arabs and Muslims in all realms of American society, treating them as either "the exceptional assimilated immigrant or the violent fundamentalist, with very little room in between." Although stereotypes and images of them are everywhere, they almost never get a chance to speak in public. When they *are* asked to speak, Arabs and Muslims are mostly forced to answer for others' crimes and affirm their loyalty to the United States. Otherwise, they speak in the private spaces that will accept them; "the human dimensions" of their lives are still invisible to most.

Bayoumi suggests that "profiles" are the wrong way to view people because they latch onto details that might seem defining to observers but actually say little about people themselves. Like the discrimination Sade experiences, these profiles cross the porous borders between government policy and popular attitudes, which end up reinforcing one another. The split between "the exceptional assimilated immigrant or the violent fundamentalist" is an insistence that people can either become American or stay Arab and Muslim (and therefore anti-American). These identities are understood as opposites, and there is no public understanding that someone can truly be both Arab and American. Bayoumi seeks to offer pictures of this invisible experience, but from the inside rather than the outside: through people's own words, not profiles; through experience, not theory.

Bayoumi has written this book to uncover "what it is like [...] to be young, Arab, and Muslim in the age of terror." He includes the stories of seven Arab Americans living in Brooklyn, focusing on the paradox of their youth: their elders expect them to contribute to their communities, yet the national culture feels threatened by them. While Arabs and Muslims are a younger and more affluent demographic than America as a whole, many in Brooklyn are working-class, and the Muslim experience is remarkably diverse—the Arab experience is less so, even though the majority of Arab Americans are Christians. But "Arab American Muslims are at the eye of today's storms," and Brooklyn has the largest population of them in the nation. It is one of the most diverse urban areas in the world, with innumerable communities and ways of life coexisting packed densely together.

The popular understanding that Arabness is the opposite of Americanness creates a false choice for the young people Bayoumi interviews, who are forced to publicly pick a side and therefore asked to forsake either their families or their country. The implicit question throughout this book is what being both *Arab and American means, requires, and creates for the world. Bayoumi emphasizes that there are many Arab and Muslim American experiences to counteract the single, essentialist image of Arab and Muslim life that circulates in the American public sphere, and he chooses Brooklyn because it is the epicenter of not only Arab and Muslim diversity, but also the more general multiculturalism that plays such a central role in American identity.*

Bayoumi begins his research by reaching out to friends and community leaders; he is an Arab American Muslim, but from an elite academic background, unlike most of those who appear in this book. His subjects welcome him with open arms—one imam even tries to marry him off, and he is allowed to attend a private community meeting between Muslim leaders and the FBI, "an example of the failed communication that marks our era." The FBI tells the leaders they should revere America's "precious freedoms" and asks them to condemn terrorism. The FBI does nothing to help the community leaders, who ask how to strengthen Muslim charities and avoid the no-fly list.

Bayoumi's own unique Muslim Arab American experience attests to the diversity and complexity of Arab and Muslim identities, and as both an Arab Muslim and an American elite, he is in a particularly unique position to help overcome "the failed communication that marks our era." The meeting between the FBI and Muslim leaders shows how both sides are fixated on the image of Muslims as anti-American terrorists: the FBI assumes this profile and tries to talk people out of an extremism they do not believe in, while the Muslim leaders want to overcome this image and show the government that their interests match the interests of the United States as a whole.

After hearing about his project, some people even reach out to Bayoumi. But the author insists that his seven stories do not tell the whole story of Arab American life. The most substantial gap is regarding Arabs who have decided to "pass" as another race "out of either shame or fear or both," most often as Latinos.

Bayoumi does not want the reader to simply replace their existing "profile" of a large and diverse community with a new, more favorable one; rather, he wants them to see the limits of profiling altogether, how it not only renders certain experiences invisible but even leads some Arabs to choose invisibility to avoid racism. The fact that many Arabs "pass" as Latino shows how racism defines people based on arbitrary, inaccurate judgments: if Arabs were really all fundamentalist anti-Americans, it would be easy to tell them apart from others with similar skin tones.

This book's "very American stories" concern young Arab Americans who want the same thing as most other people of their age: "opportunity, marriage, happiness, and the chance to fulfill their potential." They face various burdens that others do not, however, including discrimination, violence, surveillance, cultural misunderstandings, and more. Yet Bayoumi is optimistic, realizing that his subjects have "an enviable maturity" about their situation and need to negotiate multiple identities. They are incredibly knowledgeable about their struggle's place in American history, and their stories have the potential to reveal the humanity of a profiled people, to help others overcome their prejudice through empathy and recognition.

Bayoumi points to another concept of Americanness, one based on inclusion in common purpose rather than exclusion from a community of political interests. The portraits he offers are not merely stories of suffering and discrimination: they are also stories about how people have managed to define themselves and "fulfill their potential" despite *suffering and discrimination. Bayoumi suggests that these young people's early struggles, based on identities they have been assigned rather than any personal choices, have forced them to build the kind of wisdom and moral strength that are necessary to overcome prejudice in their personal lives and in society at large.*

RASHA

Riding the nearly-empty subway to university one afternoon, Rasha accidently makes eye contact with a homeless man and "finds the connection rapturous." Later, she writes about it in the notebook where she composes poetry and collects her favorite quotes: "his captivity reminded me that I was free." Nineteen-year old Rasha and her family have just spent three months in prison.

This initial anecdote shows the connection between Rasha's depth of empathy and experience of suffering; she is not celebrating her freedom at the man's expense, but rather realizing that she no longer takes her freedom for granted and has the potential to connect with (and, presumably, do something to help) those who still lack it.

Rasha is petite, modest, with the "hard fragility" of "a pessimist brimming with humanist hope." Born in Syria in 1983, she moves to Brooklyn with her family on a tourist visa at the age of five. Syria is embroiled in violence under the authoritarian rule of Hafez al-Assad, so Rasha's family quickly applies for asylum in the United States as her father works his way up at a discount clothing store in New York. Rasha asks her mother about Christmas and learns about her Muslim identity—while the family is not devout, Rasha's mother instills "the simple values of honesty, compassion, and the protection of her honor" in her and her siblings (two older, three younger, including two born as American citizens).

Contrary to the stereotype of Muslims as promoting violence against the United States, the United States actually saved Rasha's family from violence; similarly, whereas traditional values play an important part in her early life, these beliefs are not because of religion, and Rasha never saw the world in terms of an us versus them *dichotomy of Muslims versus Christians. Rather, her family's hard work and emphasis on morality are clearly also* American *values.*

In 1996, with their asylum applications stalling, the family returns to Syria; Rasha finds school difficult. They discover they have won a green card interview, but since they have left the United States, they have already lost eligibility. Instead, they manage to get a visa for a visit back to the United States, where they reapply for asylum. They move back to Brooklyn, which feels like home, seven months after landing in Syria. Rasha goes to James Madison High School and grows close to two other girls, Gaby from Ecuador and Nicky from Azerbaijan. After graduation, Rasha's family buys a house in Bay Ridge; in September 2001, she begins college. On September 11, Rasha's mother says she cannot go to school because the subway is broken—there has been an "accident [...] with a plane."

Notably, after eight years, Rasha's family still did not have asylum status, which attests to the complicated and sluggish character of the American immigration system; contrary to much political rhetoric, it is not easy to come to the United States. But Rasha's loyalties are resolutely to the United States, and although she identifies with other immigrant students in Brooklyn, she has little concept of her Arab or Muslim identity as being unique.

One night in February of 2002, Rasha is shaken awake by the police in the middle of the night to find her entire family arrested and fifteen officers occupying their house—an FBI agent explains that they are under investigation "for possible terrorism connections" and could be detained and deported. The family's two younger boys, who are United States citizens, are left at home under the care of the men renting downstairs rooms. The family rides to Manhattan's Federal Plaza in a windowless van and is thrown in a holding cell. There they are interrogated—the officers show them pictures of suspected terrorists and ask them about their past whereabouts and activities.

Rasha and her family's arrest comes completely out of the blue, with no warning or clear pretense, although it remains to be seen whether the government has any legitimate basis for detaining them. Taking them in the middle of the night and leaving the two young boys alone seem like particularly draconian measures, but the boys' freedom from arrest also shows the enormous benefits conferred by US citizenship—and yet these benefits seem distributed arbitrarily, for Rasha also grew up in the United States.

Years before, in Syria, Rasha learned to shoot a gun and worship the nation's president in school. While her family was critical of Assad, she realized she could repeat their feelings in public and began to strongly value the freedom of speech she had in the United States. In the holding cell, Rasha's father pleads to simply have them deported—instead, they are investigated and detained by the INS; a condescending officer tells them they should have expected this in "times like these." The family is split up and sent to three separate detention centers.

Again, there is an enormous rift between how Rasha and her family see their relationship to the U.S.—a country that offered them freedoms (but is now taking them away)—and how the INS officer does in assuming that they should understand that their freedoms are contingent and depend on the "times." They are detained without charges or explanation, which would be a clear violation of constitutional due process if they were US citizens (and is generally considered a violation of human rights).

Rasha, her mother, and her older sister Reem go to Bergen County Jail in New Jersey, where they are strip-searched, photographed, and locked in a filthy, overcrowded holding cell for six hours, and then in another holding cell for two days. Rasha's mother manages to call her brother-in-law and explain their circumstances. They then end up in yet another cell and realize they are "going to be staying for a while." Guards watch them constantly and their blankets are like "hairy cardboard." Rasha is soon "extremely depressed" and feels powerless and suicidal, barely able to eat. Then she grows furious: she has not committed a crime but has "been abducted" by the state.

Rasha is depressed not only because of the horrible conditions she is forced to live in, but also because she has no idea why she is in jail or when, if ever, she will be released. The government leaves her in a state of emotional and legal limbo, with nothing to look forward to and a sudden, serious reason to distrust the government she had previously appreciated for granting her family asylum. Her tale is significant because it offers a perspective usually silenced: that of someone deemed unworthy of basic human rights.

Rasha watches her mother pray and befriend other inmates. Meanwhile, Rasha grows closer to her sister Reem, with whom she shares a cell. The other women are Muslims there for similar reasons, Israelis and Russians there on immigration charges, and African-American and Latina women there on drug charges. Most have committed their crimes just for the sake of survival; unlike on TV, they treat one another with the humanity and goodwill they were denied by the government. But the abusive guards treat them like "a subhuman species."

Much like many Arab and Muslim Americans on the "outside," Rasha's mother finds solace through religion and empathetic relationships with those who share her predicament—they are also imprisoned for trying to evade adverse circumstances and achieve the comfort so often advertised to the world as the "American Dream."

Gaby and Nicky are confused: Rasha has disappeared. A family friend of Rasha's explains what happened, and they are all frightened. Luckily, Rasha's family gets attorneys, but they are still miserable in prison—Reem develops a rash from the blankets, but the prison guards ignore her. After three weeks, the women are transferred to the same facility in Brooklyn as the men. Conditions are marginally better there, but Rasha begins to see her future fade away as she realizes "as a detainee she had no idea when she would be let out."

Rasha's incarceration traumatized those around her, too—unlike with normal criminal charges or immigration cases, she disappeared without a trace, and Rasha's family has to take all the initiative to keep the outside world informed of their status. The prison guards seem unwilling to empathize with their predicament and therefore unable to see them as fully human. Social divisions translate into psychological ones, much like in the broader patterns of discrimination that Du Bois argued created a "veil" between the worlds of whites and minorities.

Helping their mother keeps Rasha and Reem sane—when a tyrannical counselor denies her the right to call her son, Rasha's mother is distraught, but the girls convince the man to permit the phone call. Rasha's mother befriends an Egyptian woman brought to detention straight from the airport, even though she has a valid visa, as well as a Nigerian born-again Christian woman who gives her holy water that eases the pain of her gall stones. Once, they distract their mother from the sound of two inmates having sex nearby. When she starts getting letters from Gaby, Rasha realizes that "I'm being remembered."

Needless to say, this is a less than ideal way to grow up: Rasha and Reem are forced to suddenly play adult roles, caring for their mother in their alien and threatening environment. The prison is its own kind of cosmopolitan community, full of confused immigrants from various parts of the globe, and it is worth asking what the U.S. stands to gain from incarcerating (rather than deporting) immigrants. As Rasha soon discovers, there is profit in the prison system.

Suddenly, near the beginning of May, Rasha and her whole family are freed with no warning or explanation. An immigration officer tells them they have a court date, but also a valid case for residency. Outside, the sky is "glorious and familiar"—Rasha has not seen it for months. The family reunites at home and solemnly eats dinner. The next morning, Gaby and Nicky learn that Rasha is free; Gaby rushes over to Rasha's house and they reunite in tears.

Rasha's family never gets an update on their case or the reason for their detention; they are freed as abruptly and bafflingly as they were first abducted, and while they are overjoyed to be free, their battle continues because they still have to defend their immigration status. The fact that they are lucky to have a residency case implies that other detained immigrants may not have been so lucky as to be able to stay after being freed.

Rasha's parents sell their house and she tries to explain to the dean of her university why she disappeared for three months. She feels freer than ever but hears constant talk about 9/11 and wants to scream, knowing the injustice of her situation. Nobody in the family talks about their experiences; Rasha's older brother Munir, who was in a prison wing full of "violent abuses," retreats from everyone. Rasha decides that she wants to be like the activists and lawyers who took up their case; she begins working on Middle East peace issues but cannot go to an international conference because of her undocumented status. She realizes how much "people take for granted being a citizen of this country."

Clearly, Rasha's family's trauma does not end when they leave prison; she returns to an atmosphere of constant, unspoken suspicion and continues facing obstacles because of her citizenship status. But she also realizes that her experience connects to broader immigration and foreign policy issues, which shape her orientation toward the future and sense of personal purpose.

Unlike Rasha and her family, most of the people arbitrarily and indefinitely detained after 9/11 have no counsel to help them or family to support them. Many are deported in secret; human rights organizations like Amnesty International recognize that the U.S. government is widely violating basic human rights, but have no power to change the situation. Later, the U.S. Justice Department's Office of the Inspector General agrees, proposing that perhaps the government should seek "some level of evidence linking the alien to the crime" before randomly detaining people on the basis of race and religion. There are still no good statistics regarding the number of people arrested, but with the usual 24-hour limit on detention without evidence relaxed, the average victim appears to have spent about 80 days in detention.

Bayoumi shows how 9/11 created what many scholars call a state of exception: the government suspended normal laws, procedures, and civil rights in a circumstance it deemed exceptional. Yet it remains unclear what, if anything, these violations of human rights did for the national public good. They cast a wide net based purely on profiles, turning people like Rasha and her family into collateral damage of the War on Terror—which was, and continues to be, waged in the United States in addition to abroad.

This is not an unprecedented policy: the FBI interned more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry after the Pearl Harbor attacks in 1941. The post-9/11 detentions were nowhere near as massive, but the parallels are clear: neither had any effect on national security, and both "exploited the jingoism and the racism of the moment." Even one of the procedure's orchestrators later admits that the detentions were mostly for "PR purposes," so that the government could claim it was rounding up terrorists.

Bayoumi points out the history of arbitrary detention to show how the U.S. has failed to learn from its mistakes. Racism continues to fuel official policy as immigrants are declared enemies based on their country of origin, not their individual actions. They become pawns in a symbolic game: the United States proves its strength and suggests that it has defeated its enemies by punishing people who look like those enemies and encouraging the American public to conflate a country halfway around the world with innocent people at home.

After the first wave of arbitrary detentions, the Bush administration quickly begins arresting Arabs and Muslims who "absconded" deportation orders—in practice, most either never receive their orders or are waiting for appeals. In one scholar's words, the government is "blurring the distinction between alien, criminal, and terrorist." The system lets people like Rasha sit in detention indefinitely, without having committed a crime, while both public and private prisons profit from their detention. Rasha's experience leads her to pursue a career in human rights.

Again, the government uses ambiguous rhetoric to create politically advantageous exceptions to its own policies, which are designed to protect immigrants' rights. In a sense, it buys into al-Qaeda's us versus them *logic and shows that equality before the law is a mere ideal, not a reality. Bayoumi suggests that the government, by "blurring the distinction," also leads the way for American culture at large to scapegoat Arabs and Muslims.*

The weekend after her release, at dinner with her friends, Rasha is astonished to see the counselor who made her mother cry in prison sitting at a nearby table with his family. She goes up to him and, after he eventually recognizes her, he remarks that she has "cleaned up [her] act." She explains that she never committed a crime, that he treated her mother disrespectfully, and that he is "a fucking asshole." She is elated when she returns to her friends, satisfied to confront her jailer "on this side of freedom."

This unlikely meeting, in which the equality of normal human encounters replaces the hierarchy of prison, symbolizes Rasha's new life goal: to confront unjust jailers who violate people's rights. But the guard's belief that Rasha "cleaned up [her] act" shows that he thinks of her as a conventional criminal; he clearly believes in an idealized version of the justice system, in which only criminals go to prison, but sticks Rasha with a presumption of guilt when the government fails to follow that ideal.

SAMI

Sami, an imposing but gentle and upbeat 24-year-old, returns to college in 2006 after having been away for four years. He starts in January, when the campus is freezing and the other students seem to have already fallen into their social groups. But he is thrilled to be back: "the world [...] seemed open and exciting and full of possibility."

Like Rasha's delight at the end of her story, Sami's euphoria and motivation show that his very presence at college—something other students take for granted—is an accomplishment, proof that he has surmounted a personal obstacle of some sort.

One day, two girls yell at Sami: "Yusef! Mohammed!" He is confused. Soon thereafter, he sees and stops to talk with them: they are also Palestinians from Brooklyn and invite him to the Arab Student Club. He is surprised—while growing up, people assumed he was Latino, and being Arab scarcely meant anything to him. Sami's parents are Christian—his mother an Egyptian waitress, his much older father a Palestinian taxi driver—and, like him, uninterested in politics. He is more concerned about school and the two jobs he works at night, but he still quickly falls in with the other Arab students, even if they often argue about foreign policy. Sami is "the most far-off Arab you'll find." He is not Muslim nor a fan of Arabic music, he hates visiting Egypt, and his girlfriend is Puerto Rican. And, for four years, he was an American soldier in Iraq.

Sami breaks stereotypes left and right; he is Christian (actually, like most American Arabs), grew up much more connected to his local community and way of life than his parents' home countries and traditions, and of course fought in a war against other Arabs—which likely explains why he is overjoyed to be back at college in the United States. Unlike so many of the other people in this book, Sami is first called out as an Arab in a positive light, and his interest in the Arab Student Club suggests that he may not be as "far-off" anymore as he used to.

Three years before, Sami is "full of both dread and desire" waiting in Kuwait for the order to invade Iraq. For the first month, their main enemy is the sand, which gets everywhere, all the time, and ruins their weapons. They soon learn to avoid it; then, the others learn that Sami speaks Arabic and start calling him "al-Qaeda" and "sand nigger," which he does not particularly mind.

Even when fighting against *al-Qaeda and (at least in theory) for the interests of Iraq's Arab majority, Sami is immediately associated with the "enemy" because of his identity, which clearly puts distance between him and the other soldiers in his unit (even if he does not take it personally).*

One day, the commanding officer tells Sami that they want him to be the major's driver, which he soon realizes means he will be "at the very front of his company, at the head of the cavalry and first in the line of fire." They go into Iraq in March, and Sami, like everyone else, has no doubts about the American mission. It will be payback for 9/11; they are following the orders of their president and commander-in-chief. Watching the first airstrikes at 5:00 a.m., Sami realizes that "they're about to murder everybody in this place."

Sami is evidently ambivalent about putting his life on the line—as anyone would be in his situation—but his uneasiness about his fellow soldiers speaks volumes more about the hastiness and faulty assumptions he sees behind the Iraq War: he realizes he may watch his fellow soldiers attacking innocent civilians in a war retaliating against a devastating attack on innocent civilians (9/11).

Bayoumi turns to Sami's childhood. He is born, raised, and educated in New York City. After one year of college, he finds himself utterly bored and decides to join the marines after some encouragement from a persuasive recruiter, who gets him to sign up for active duty by falsely promising that he can "change down to reserves anytime you want." Sami's mother is horrified but his father is proud. Sami tries to back out, but the recruiter again lies, telling him his decision is irrevocable. Sami is afraid of the unknown but has scarcely even thought about going to war. He goes to boot camp in South Carolina on May 28, 2001.

In fact, Sami's ambivalence about war started before he even signed up—and the recruiter's underhanded tactics set the stage for Sami's later feeling that he has been deceived by the military and his realization that he does not fully understand why he is even in Iraq to begin with. Like Rasha, he is ushered into the most transformative phase of his life with little knowledge of where or why he is going.

In boot camp, Sami meets the other recruits—there are a few "crazy psycho guys" but most, like him, have joined out of ignorance, stupidity, or necessity: they are "lost." He loves the movie *Full Metal Jacket* for its accurate picture of basic training: the drill sergeant is "intimidation personified" and boot camp is completely exhausting. He fights the desire to leave, makes friends with other recruits, and gains "an inner confidence that he'd never had before." He goes home for a brief vacation and leaves for combat training on the night of September 10, 2001.

Sami realizes that his pathway to the military—stumbling into it because he did not yet have a clear sense of direction in his life—is the norm, not the exception. Boot camp seems designed to further erode any sense of self he does retain, to turn him into an obedient soldier—and offering him a substitute sense of purpose in the process.

News of the 9/11 attacks comes during a rest stop the next morning; Sami cannot contact his family until the drill sergeant, frustrated by his mother's incessant calls from the recruiter's office, finally passes him the phone. Sami realizes he will be going to war—but, "out of his New York pride," he cannot bear to watch the news. He prays for the first time in his life; he cannot sleep and worries he will die.

As with the rest of Bayoumi's subjects, 9/11 is a major turning point in Sami's life—but, at least initially, not because of his Arab ethnicity. Like Rasha's mother in prison, he turns to religion in a time of crisis and uncertainty, and for the first time he fully understands the consequences of his decision to join the military.

Next, Sami goes to California for "job school"—technical training for his specific post, which is telecommunications. He is promised "that he would be in a room, far away from war, working with satellites and state-of-the-art equipment." He has still never mentioned his Arab American background; everyone assumes he is Hispanic. A rabid Yankees fan, he stumbles on news about 9/11 for the first time after watching the Yankees lose the World Series to the Arizona Diamondbacks. Seeing video of planes crashing into the World Trade Center, he is horrified, thinking, "*Arabs did this?* […] *My own people?*" He grows angry and ready for war—but still has months of training left.

Sami's superiors make him another promise that, as the reader already knows from the beginning of his chapter, turns out to be false. It is unclear whether he hides his ethnicity because he worries about his fellow soldiers' reactions or simply because he does not consider it important. It is telling that Sami's anger drives his motivation to fight—as Bayoumi noted at the end of the previous chapter, the government carefully managed outrage as a political tactic, channeling it to justify war as well as racist policies like indefinite detentions and arbitrary deportations.

Using the laptop his parents buy him for Christmas, Sami meets a Puerto Rican woman named Ana from New Jersey through a pen pal service, and they start dating in 2002. Later that year, a general tells him after a party that "you boys better get ready [...] it looks like we're going somewhere." He eventually admits to his commanders that he is Arab and insists that he "can't fight against [his] own people." His superiors are dismissive: Sami is Christian; "they" (meaning Iraqis) are Muslim. Sami lies that his parents are having issues, but is again dismissed and starts feeling guilty, like "less of an American," for not wanting to go to war. Three weeks after returning to California from Christmas break, the news comes: he will be leaving for Iraq in two weeks, on Valentine's Day, 2003.

It is also telling that Sami continues to think of Arab Muslims as "my people," even though he is Christian, while his superiors think this religious difference should be enough to make him consider them "other;" they think in terms of religion, while Sami thinks in terms of ethnicity, and (as Bayoumi argued in the preface) popular representations of Arabs and Muslims tend to merge the two, combining them into the image of anti-American violence. Similarly, Sami comes to feel that he is "less of an American" for rejecting his orders based on his conscience, which further suggests that (one form of) the concept of "Americanness" is used to secure people's uncritical loyalty to the government's interests. This contrasts with Bayoumi's vision of "Americanness" as social inclusivity.

After a month in Iraq, Sami is woken up in the middle of the night. So far, he has not seen combat, only Iraqi peasant farmers innocently walking down the road—nothing like the bloodthirsty murderers his superiors tell him to expect. At first, he is nervous and unable to focus; the landscape and poverty remind him of Egypt, and he does whatever he can to help the people he passes, trying to "show some kind of humane feeling" and prove that the Americans are "here to help." Other marines believe the United States should kill all Iraqis, and call Sami a "terrorist."

Yet again, Sami feels deceived by the military: the Iraqis he meets do not fit the image he was fed (that they would be violent, hostile, anti-American enemies). But he is only able to form his own picture of them because he can empathize with them, and therefore see through stereotypes; this requires the kind of underlying faith in people's common humanity that Bayoumi hopes to encourage through his book.

This particular night, a group of old men approaches the Americans; a marine named Andrews screams at them, fondling his weapon, and Sami tells him to calm down, advice Andrews ignores until Sami gets the commanding officer involved. Sami is furious at Andrews's indifference to the Iraqis' humanity, at his inability to imagine how he would feel in their shoes. But, not wanting to "appear soft on the enemy," Sami says nothing about this.

Andrews, like many of the other soldiers around Sami, continues to see a profile rather than the people behind it, which is a salient example of how anti-Arab and Islamophobic stereotypes operate at home in the U.S., too. Sami again feels caught between his conscience and his reluctance to make trouble—the military punishes empathy because it has already defined all Iraqis as the "enemy."

In June, Sami's company arrives at their destination, the ancient city of Babylon, well after president Bush has declared "Mission Accomplished." Sami translates for the American officers during their tour and is surprised at their respect for the Iraqi tour guide. They settle into the palace that will serve as their base and quickly grow bored because they have nothing to do. They go to another palace for fun one day and "pillaged the guts out of the complex," breaking and stealing whatever they want. By September, they finally get the news that they are to leave; Sami's communications team is the last to go, and on his flight home Sami reflects on his past fears, success in the line of duty, and newfound connections to his Arab heritage. When they return to California, everyone celebrates with American beer and cigarettes.

While the officers' respect for the tour guide shows Sami that racist stereotypes are not always the norm, his unit's utter disrespect for the palace they "pillage" not only serves as a clear metaphor for the American involvement in Iraq as a whole, but also appears to stem from their boredom and purposelessness at their base—the same feelings that led them to join the military in the first place. Sami's entire tour feels like one big exercise in futility, but his unit still celebrates a "Mission Accomplished" (despite not doing anything at all) with symbols of their national pride (for their *America—but not necessarily Bayoumi's).*

When he is called for his second tour in Iraq, Sami is "pissed." He feels "a sense of failure," as though the military has fallen short in its mission and he is being forced to make up for its ineptitude. In his first months back from his earlier tour, he enjoys relaxing, spending the combat pay that has accrued in his bank account. People see him and his fellow soldiers as heroes, and they appreciate the comforts of everyday life in the United States. When he goes home for Christmas, his family respects him like never before. He cannot bear to tell them he is likely to go back, which he does in February of 2004.

Sami's feeling that the military has failed him finally makes explicit his longstanding, creeping sense of discomfort and suspicion in Iraq; it also implicitly undermines his status as a "hero." Moreover, his time in Iraq has done little to give him a sense of purpose or direction.

On Sami's second tour, the conditions are much more comfortable than they were during the first: the soldiers have regular shifts and functional facilities. He also gets promoted, and praise from the ranking major above him is a strong source of pride for Sami. But he is also trying to avoid the Iraqis who pass constantly through the camp: he does not want them to identify him as an Arab, but nobody ever asks him. Sami does spend time with the Arabic interpreters, one of whom reminds him of his father and teaches him about Palestinian history. He gains a deeper sense of pride in his heritage.

During his second tour, Sami finds a dual sense of belonging: first, in the military, where he finally feels respected and valuable, and second, in his ethnic background through his conversations with the interpreters. Yet he still recognizes that this heritage associates him with the "enemy," which is why he seeks to hide it from the other soldiers—the fact that none of them realize shows again that such stereotypes are based on preconception, not perception.

The camp starts facing constant mortar attacks, but the marines cannot leave or fight back. One day, a mortar nearly hits Sami's building and kills one of his respected superiors. Sami is distraught, as the man seems to have died for no reason: he was just headed to the bathroom. The soldiers begin to resent their jobs and wonder why they are even deployed at all. One day, one of them buys a bootleg copy of Fahrenheit 9/11 from an Iraqi, and Sami realizes that he is only fighting for the personal gain of those in power (although many of his fellow marines see the film as an unjustified attack on the President). Sami decides he cannot support the Iraq War, but has to "support the men and women in the war." Their lives have become pawns in someone else's game, he thinks, but he refrains from voicing his opinions.

Just after Sami finds a sense of loyalty to the military—"the men and women," but not the institution—he is again overcome with doubt about the government's rationale for sending him to Iraq, and much more deeply than ever before. His superior officer's death symbolizes the war's gruesome and futile violence, and Sami recognizes that (like with the detentions suffered by people like Rasha) people in power make decisions for their own political benefit and image, without considering or ever having to personally engage with the human consequences of those decisions. This likely makes the fact that he and most of his fellow soldiers joined because they were "lost" (and/or deceived) all the more infuriating.

With less than a year of active duty remaining, Sami is sent home and returns demoralized, with nothing to do. He spends his accumulated combat pay on an expensive Acura car and has a delightful reunion with Ana. But he has no idea what to pursue next. He considers reenlisting or doing equipment maintenance, for which he found a natural aptitude in the military, but his mother and Ana refuse to let him stay in the marines and "make the same mistake twice." To his horror, his brother ends up enlisting the next year.

Sami again leaves Iraq with no more sense of purpose than he had before—in fact, his main lesson was the war's utter purposelessness, and he returns unsure of how to translate the skills he learned in the military into civilian life. He then sees his brother (and nearly himself) make the same fateful decision.

Sami tries to help Dan, his closest friend in the military, move in with his family. But his mother is uncomfortable with the idea, and while doing their discharge paperwork, Sami and Dan have an explosive argument about nothing, which ends their friendship. Sami decides to get a tattoo: the New York skyline, with "two memorial beams of light" in place of the Twin Towers, the moon and stars spelling "N-Y-C" around it, "always remembered, never forgotten" in Arabic underneath. His discharge ceremony is "a little underwhelming," and immediately afterwards he and Ana begin a cross-country drive from San Diego to New York. But "that's when the anxiousness and the panic set in"—he gets sick, then insists on driving almost nonstop, even for 22 hours in a single stretch at one point. He nearly cries when they finally reach New York—which was his real mission the entire time.

Sami and Dan's explosive and pointless argument, a neat metaphor for the war's own pointlessness, shows their mutual sense of disillusionment and suggests that they are putting their pasts behind them, moving on to new phases of life. As the reader knows from the beginning of this chapter, his next step is college. But Sami does find one overwhelming sense of purpose: to return to New York, the place that is still most central to his sense of self. His tattoo also shows how he has integrated this identity as a New Yorker with his background as an Arab, which he refuses to let stand for "anti-American," as it did in the military.

YASMIN

One day, heading to Taco Bell on the bus to pick up food for her sisters, Yasmin watches a white couple harass a fellow **hijab**-wearing Muslim woman, suggesting that she has a bomb under her blanket. It is just a baby, Yasmin insists, as the white couple wonders aloud whether the woman might be a terrorist. The couple forces the driver to check—it is a baby, indeed—and then returns to reading the newspaper as though nothing has happened. Yasmin is angry, certain that the targeted woman must "feel humiliated and upset." When she gets off the bus, she writes down its license plate number and thinks about calling 911, reporting that the white woman has a bomb in her purse, "just to make a point, to make them feel the same way—singled out, powerless, discriminated against, a source of irrational fear."

Yasmin witnesses an extraordinary scene of racial profiling that all involved—except the victim—treat like an inconsequential routine. The woman's hijab marks her as a threat, representing the "enemy." In reality, she is the opposite of a heartless terrorist: a protective mother. Undoubtedly, Yasmin also feels "humiliated and upset" to live in a country where treating someone this way can be routine; she sees how Du Bois's "veil" separates the white couple from the Arab woman whom they humiliate without regarding as a full human being.

Yasmin, like many **hijab**-wearing women in the United States, is fearless and formidable, "far from the stereotype of the submissive and retreating female." Western people who accept the notion that the hijab represents repression and silence often do not realize that, precisely because they must counter this stereotype, hijabi women are often courageous and vocal. Yasmin, for one, had to endure a lengthy battle with her school's administration in order to express her religious beliefs. She grew up wearing the hijab and attending Muslim private girls' schools; she is devoutly religious. Yasmin's father is an Egyptian Muslim while her mother is a Filipina Catholic who converted to Islam. After finishing at her private school, Yasmin goes to public junior-high and high schools in Brooklyn.

The hijab is itself a symbol for the misinterpretations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States: for the former, it is a form of personal expression and the ability to wear it in public is a cause for pride in American multiculturalism; for the latter, it symbolizes the suppression, not expression, of women's voices and Islam's ostensible desire to destroy the American way of life. Of Bayoumi's subjects so far, Yasmin is the only one who sees religion as central to her identity and daily life, and her ethnic identities tell an unusual story contrary to stereotypes of traditional Muslims as only marrying within their immigrant communities.

At Fort Hamilton High School in the wealthy, quiet, tree-lined area of the same name in Bay Ridge, Yasmin stumbles into student government, filling out the onerous application and gathering the necessary 100 signatures to run for secretary. On the day of the speeches, Yasmin is sure she will lose—her opponents are a popular Greek boy and a scantily-clad Russian girl—but Arab and Muslim students start coming up to her afterward to express their pride, and she wins in a landslide. She soon begins attending Executive Board meetings and virtually moves into the school's Leadership classroom.

Yasmin is simultaneously optimistic and pessimistic about student government: she wants to represent her peers but fears that she will not be accepted. It turns out that others not only welcome her, but also see her as a role model for Arab and Muslim students struggling to find a place in their school. From the moment she enters high school, Yasmin's fearlessness and personal drive help her break down barriers.

One day, two secular Albanian Muslim girls ask her about the year's first dance—Yasmin is not planning to go, but the other girls think this might be a problem. She explains to the student affairs coordinator that her religious beliefs preclude her from going to the dance, but he says that her position in student government requires her to go. Their argument reaches a standstill; the administrator calls Yasmin's father, who consults a sheikh (a Muslim community leader). The sheikh agrees that Yasmin cannot go—she cannot even sit in another room during the event, as the school proposes (this would be like sitting in a house where someone else is using drugs—she would also be arrested for "being a part of that house").

After overcoming the prejudice she perceived at her school, Yasmin immediately runs into it again: her religious obligations conflict with those of her role in student government, and the school forces her to choose between desires that she does not see as mutually exclusive—what does it matter to the school, she wonders, if she sits in the basement or goes home for a few hours, when it matters immensely to her ethically?

The Executive Board meets without Yasmin and agrees with the student affairs coordinator that she has to go to the dance or else resign. The coordinator meets with her father and then with Yasmin, who protests and cites the Federal Equal Access Act. But the coordinator does not budge. During his meeting with Yasmin's father, he asks, "how long do you think you can control your daughter?" Yasmin and her father are hurt; she resigns, but includes an explanation that she is "giving up my position to defend what I believe in." She finds a copy of the minutes from the Executive Board meeting about her: everyone else in the student government voted against her. The Russian girl takes over her job.

The coordinator's provocative question to Yasmin's father blatantly ignores the fact that, as she emphasizes in her letter, Yasmin is making the decision not to go to the dances herself, *because of her own beliefs rather than any forced onto her by her parents. The coordinator plays on stereotypes about Muslim gender roles (that men hold all authority and women are powerless victims of male "control") and the presumption that immigrant children will inevitably give up more traditional, conservative religious beliefs in mainstream American societies.*

At home, in her father's tiny office, Yasmin begins printing and organizing files about anti-discrimination laws and the school's "Bill of Student Rights and Responsibilities." After months of obsessive research and conversation with her friends, she e-mails a trustee of the New York City Board of Education and begins a dialogue about investigating her case—but she is unwilling to name her school, so the investigation cannot happen. She talks to the school superintendent, but also gets nowhere. She begins reading law books at the Brooklyn Public Library and talks to the student affairs coordinator whenever she comes up with a new argument—he always listens patiently but ultimately refutes her ideas. Meanwhile, the student government is rescheduling events to accommodate the Jewish holidays, and "steam pour[s] out of Yasmin's ears at the double standard."

Yasmin pursues her appeal with the same passionate energy that led her to run for student government in the first place. But she again finds her loyalties split, this time between her desire for justice and her love for her school. While the student affairs coordinator never budges, he and Yasmin do have a mutually respectful relationship. He also clearly treats her differently from the Jewish students, though: he forces her to accommodate the school but makes the school accommodate the Jewish holidays, even when accommodating Yasmin would be far easier than rescheduling entire school events.

Yasmin is also worried about the statute of limitations—she only has a year to file a lawsuit—so she decides to run for student government again, this time for the office of vice president. This year, the application includes a new line: "If elected, I agree to attend all Student Organization sponsored events." She does something she learned from a law textbook: she crosses out the clause and writes her own objections on a separate sheet, explaining that she would "attend the events within the guidelines of my beliefs." The principal calls her in for a meeting and insists that Yasmin's father, not the school, is to blame and has the power to choose whether she would resign or serve.

The school not only refuses to accommodate Yasmin, but now takes steps to explicitly write her out of its policies; since she is fighting the same institution that ultimately gets to decide her fate, she is powerless unless she appeals to some outside authority, much like Rasha's family in immigration court or Sami debating whether to discuss his fellow soldiers' racism with his superiors in Iraq. The principal, like the student affairs coordinator, simply assumes that Yasmin is being controlled by her parents rather than truly devoted to her faith.

Yasmin decides to contact the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), but the school ignores CAIR's letters. A Pakistani Muslim girl wins the vice president position and stays in the basement during the dances—she does not understand why Yasmin cannot do the same. Yasmin sends a hand-written plea for help to the CAIR. She believes that she is breaking "a racial barrier" and "mak[ing] a difference in the world" as a Muslim, even though her school rejects and ignores her; she still feels deeply hurt by America's prejudice against Muslims.

The difference between the Pakistani girl's decision to go to the dances and Yasmin's belief that she cannot shows that there are a variety of ways to be Muslim and that faith is ultimately an individual matter, based on which interpretations and authorities a believer trusts. Yasmin continues to see her struggle for accommodation as a microcosm of Muslims' broader social effort to forge a place for themselves in American society.

The next school year starts in September of 2001. On the morning of the 9/11 attacks, the school falls into chaos but Yasmin goes to the Leadership room and has an understanding, productive conversation with the members of student government: "if Muslims did this […] then they didn't do it because of Islam." Worried, Yasmin's parents keep her home from school for a few days.

Ironically, in a moment of crisis Yasmin finds acceptance and understanding about her religion in the same organization that has excluded her because of it (perhaps the Leadership class is a microcosm of the United States as a whole in this sense, with its oscillation between including and rejecting minorities). Like her worried parents, Yasmin is clearly aware of how Islam is likely to be misinterpreted in the aftermath of 9/11 and has to play defense from the outset.

Yasmin continues corresponding with CAIR and arguing her case with the student affairs coordinator; she also convinces her sister Mariam to run for freshman representative and add on the application that she will attend events "as long as it doesn't conflict with our religious beliefs." Mariam gets a letter from the Student Organization rejecting her addition to the application. Yasmin's father threatens to sue the school, but he and Yasmin's mother also insist that Yasmin is wasting too much time on legal research. Mariam, too, quickly gives up, but Yasmin decides to run for president the next year. CAIR contacts the school and then sets up a meeting with Yasmin and her father.

Yasmin's parents continue to support her but also begin to worry that her campaign will distract her from her future—in reality, it turns out to be the beginning of it. Her sister, too, seems to think that student government is not a huge deal at the end of the day. But, of course, Yasmin is no longer just fighting for the student government seat: she is fighting for principles.

CAIR's attorney advises Yasmin to make notes of anything anyone mentions that pertains to her situation. They might have a case, he says, but it will cost thousands of dollars to bring to trial, and Yasmin's father cannot afford this price tag. Yasmin notes when the student affairs coordinator lets Greek students out of a bodybuilding event because of a religious conflict and starts thinking about how to raise $20,000, calling lawyers in her spare time.

The tragic irony of CAIR's proposition is that it takes an inordinate amount of money to claim the right to equality—which, of course, would prevent most oppressed groups from making that claim. So economically, too, equality is a right in theory but can only be claimed in practice by those who least need to do so. This parallels the way Yasmin's school only selectively honors religious obligations for students from its most firmly-established religious communities.

Yasmin goes with her family to watch the movie *I Am Sam*, in which a developmentally disabled man gets pro bono representation (a free lawyer, for the sake of the "public good") in a custody battle for his child, and she realizes she can do the same. She soon discovers the organization Advocates for Children, which she immediately contacts. One of their attorneys, Jimmy Yan, enthusiastically takes up her case pro bono.

Just as Sami consolidated his feelings about the Iraq War after watching the documentary Fahrenheit 9/11, Yasmin realizes how to make her case through a movie, which illustrates media's power to shape debate about and encourage activism against injustices. This implicitly points to Bayoumi's purpose in writing this book.

During a phone call with Bayoumi, Jimmy Yan explains that racism in education often impacts "the most vulnerable members in our public schools" and notes Yasmin's remarkable zeal in researching her case. After taking up her case, Yan first confirms with other attorneys at Advocates for Children that the guarantee of the free exercise of religion in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, as well as legal precedent, should support Yasmin's claims—especially since the school has changed the requirements for student government to specifically exclude Yasmin. Because the school makes exceptions for Greek and Jewish students but not for Yasmin, its "policy is neither neutral nor generally applicable." He calls the school and considers filing a formal discrimination complaint—but the school quickly reworks its requirements to run for student government. Yasmin is elated.

Yan's thoughts about structural racism in education again point to the gap between American ideals—equality before the law—and American realities—those whose pleas are not heard end up, unsurprisingly, unequal before the law. Again, this is a closed loop of discrimination: because they are marginalized, marginalized groups are not heard, which prevents them from fighting their marginalization. But Advocates for Children promptly resolves Yasmin's year-long fight, further demonstrating dedicated legal activism's ability to claim a voice for people who lack one. (This also happened in Rasha's case—which could have gone much worse had her family lacked an attorney.) Crucially, what ultimately takes the school down is not merely its requirement that Yasmin go to the school dance, but specifically its double standard with regards to other students (and therefore the policy's failure to be "neutral").

That spring, Yasmin runs for president, noticing that the school will now allow members of student government to "provide a reasonable justification" in case they cannot fulfill some of their duties. She collects 500 signatures instead of 100, just to be sure, and runs against "Andrew, a very popular Greek boy," who makes his campaign entirely about her inability to attend events. Her speech, meanwhile, is about students' rights. After two vote counts, the race is still too close to call, and the coordinator of student affairs tells her there would be one more count, although she has the right to ask for a public recount afterwards. She confirms her intention to ask for one, but later that day the coordinator calls her at home and explains that she has won the election by seven votes.

Yasmin's second race for student council is an almost play-for-play recapitulation of her first one: even if she does not believe in herself, her peers do. Andrew's focus on her inability to attend school events, however, shows that her battle for equality and recognition is not over: it has shifted from the formal domain of the school administration to the informal one of her relationships with her peers. Her emphasis on students' rights and resolute decision to call for a recount demonstrate how her fight with the administration has helped consolidate her values.

Yasmin is a well-respected and successful class president; the coordinator of student affairs even writes her a college recommendation, and they are still friends many years later. She finishes college in three years and, at the time of this book's publication, is in a master's program. Although Yasmin's father always wanted her to be a doctor, she decides to go to law school.

Despite her protracted battle with the school, Yasmin manages to surmount the racial barrier that she spent years convinced would hold her back. And, like Rasha, she decides to translate her experiences into a future fighting injustice, holding American democracy to its promises of inclusiveness and equality before the law.

AKRAM

Serious-looking but jovial Palestinian American Akram is 21. He goes to college full time but also works 65 hours a week—90 hours a week during the summers—at the family grocery store. He spends most of his free time watching television in the family's crowded Sunset Park home; he fixates on the way Arabs are vilified on TV, laughing at but also scarred by American culture's rejection of his people. Feeling that he does not belong in the United States, he has decided to leave and move for Dubai.

Akram's classic immigrant tale of hard work is undermined by his creeping sense that, for people who look like him, hard work is no longer enough to achieve the classic version of American success and nothing he ever does will be enough to get past stereotypes. In pushing him away, Bayoumi implies, the United States is losing not only a man with remarkable drive and insight but also its reputation as a nation where anyone can succeed.

Bayoumi knows Akram from Mike's Food Store, his family's grocery store in East Flatbush, which is a largely Caribbean neighborhood mostly full of small single-family homes. Invariably, besides the four men who work there, everyone in the store is black. Customers buy food staples on Sundays, and luxuries like phone cards and beer on paydays (Thursdays). The store is the centerpiece of his family's life, "but it also swallows their time." Akram notes that, unlike his white friends, he never eats dinner with his family. He reads the newspapers until they sell out and strikes up conversations with regular customers. Akram is not very religious—he seldom goes to mosque—but he does know everything imaginable about the West Indies. He loves Brooklyn's diversity, which he reflects, and the American poet Walt Whitman.

Akram embodies the contradiction between American tolerance and American racism: the nation's insistence on reducing him to a single identity contrasts with his incredible ability to comfortably navigate and connect multiple identities. He is completely embedded in his local community, and attuned to its rhythms and complexities—he knows more about the world than the world does about him.

Arab American groceries are a staple of Brooklyn life. Most are run by Yemenis and Palestinians; sociologists call them "middlemen minorities" because they connect inner-city residents with the corporations that sell their goods. Throughout the world, such people usually come from persecuted groups and find themselves marginalized in the countries to which they immigrate, excluded from most conventionally lucrative professions. Many become merchants and most live in tight-knit families. But they also often have to work extraordinarily long hours. Whereas Yemeni store owners save up for trips back home, Palestinians like Akram's family cannot return home. They also often get caught up in the ethnic tensions within their inner-city communities—in the case of East Flatbush, there are complex relationships among Caribbean Americans, African Americans, and Arab Americans.

The story of "middleman minorities" is also a story of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion: they manage to find a place in American society only by occupying niches outside the mainstream; Akram's family can connect disparate groups, rich white business owners and poor black consumers, only because they are neither. Due to their nation's occupation by Israel, Akram's family is also cut off from its original home. They must instead forge a new sense of identity and belonging, and moving to Dubai is Akram's strategy for doing so.

In 1982, Akram's father, Abdel Salam, bought Mike's Food Center, more than a decade after leaving Israeli-occupied Palestine for the United States. He found an Arab community in Brooklyn and, before buying the store, started selling "whatever he could get his hands on"—even, at one point, a stray cat in exchange for some pizza. He worked in Arab grocery stores, sharing a studio apartment with six other men, until he bought Mike's with his brother, as East Flatbush was transitioning from a Jewish to Caribbean majority. The brothers each married and had five children. The boys worked in the store from age ten onwards, and by the time Akram started college, his two older brothers had already moved on to other professions. Now, Akram will be the family's first college graduate—he accomplished the "textbook American dream"—but he is unsatisfied in the United States. "What's America to me?" he asks.

Akram's work ethic runs in the family—his father epitomizes the "middleman minority," relying on his family and ethnic community for support in a country where all his other relationships are financial transactions. Akram's father also epitomizes the first stage of the "textbook American dream"—building opportunities for one's children through cleverness and grit—just as Akram epitomizes the second: education, assimilation, and a shot at joining the mainstream elite. But it seems that following the "textbook" no longer guarantees achieving the American dream, as Akram's ethnicity makes it increasingly difficult for him to break into mainstream success.

Bayoumi meets Akram at an Egyptian-run Dunkin' Donuts in Sunset Park, a neighborhood of southwest Brooklyn near Bay Ridge. Akram remembers going to Edward R. Murrow High School in the ethnically diverse neighborhood of Midwood, a special school for the academically gifted where he "majored" in English and social studies. As an Arab student there, he feels comfortable around all his peers, but mostly hangs out on the school's heterogeneous third floor. He also grows wildly popular because of his sense of humor. But he claims his Palestinian heritage by wearing a keffiyah (or hatta), a traditional scarf, which a teacher once misinterpreted as a sign of anti-Semitism. (Bayoumi has encountered numerous stories of racist teachers in his research, especially after September 11).

Like in the store, at school Akram is comfortable navigating difference without sacrificing his own identity—but others often fail to give his identity the same benefit of the doubt that he offers everyone else's. Palestinian identity is a particularly thorny issue, since the Palestinian and Israeli governments claim sovereignty over the same land, but Israel's military occupies and controls the parts of it where Palestinians live (in decrepit conditions, compared to Israelis). Israel also has no greater ally, in terms of military aid, diplomacy, or public attitudes, than the United States. Many on both sides of the issue feel that pride in an Israeli or Palestinian identity comes at the expense of the other side.

Akram is in his senior year of high school during 9/11, which he initially thinks must have been a joke. In the class after the news breaks, they listen to the news for an hour; in the next class, a teacher asks for the students' reactions. Multiple offer versions of "bomb them" and "kill them." Akram reminds other students that "over there" could mean anything and that most of the people in the Middle East have "nothing to do with it!" He thinks about his childhood visits to Palestine and the children who are no different from the ones in New York; he starts to cry and the class, full of unfamiliar students who had no idea Akram was Arab, falls silent.

Like Sami and Yasmin, Akram reacts to 9/11 with both horror and the realization that his community stands to come under attack. He is attuned to the Middle East's fine-grained diversity just like he is to Brooklyn's—he does not just differentiate races, or Caribbean-Americans and African-Americans, but knows about the dozen or so major nations in the West Indies, and recognizes the vast difference between al-Qaeda and the rest of "them" in the Middle East. He also sees the similarities and shared humanity among diverse groups, but his classmates seem to think in broad strokes, seeing neither complexity nor humanity.

Akram's next period is a community service class. Before the teacher arrives, another student loudly announces that Hamas is responsible for the attacks. Astonished, Akram punches out the room's glass doorframe and walks down the hallway, asking people to leave him alone. When the teacher arrives, Akram returns to class, lays his head on his desk, and worries about his family and nation: "*what's going to happen to us now?*" After their early dismissal, Akram walks 45 minutes to the store with a cousin and friend, since buses are not running. When he arrives, he laments to his uncle that "we did it [the attacks]," but his uncle disagrees with him.

Hamas (a militant political party in Palestine) was not *connected to the 9/11 attacks, but the rumor that it was drives a wedge between the two dimensions of Akram's identity that had always coexisted in the past. Like Sami in Iraq, Akram suddenly feels that he has to pick between his ethnicity and his country.*

Akram's family is safe, but others are not: numerous Arabs, and many people mistaken for Arabs, are beaten, murdered, or have their stores burned in the months after 9/11. But Akram's customers reach out to the family, offering support—except for one local man, Walter, a retired African-American loiterer who starts a screaming match in the store and tries to persuade everyone around not to shop at Mike's. After a year, Walter gives up and starts shopping at the store again, but insists on starting political arguments every time he comes in. This reflects a broader rift between African-Americans like Walter, on the one hand, and West Indians and Palestinians, who have "similar kinds of postcolonial sensibilities," on the other.

As shopkeepers who interact daily with their surrounding community, Akram and his family are hyper-visible compared to many New York Arabs, which also puts them at a greater risk of attack (many of the hate crime victims Bayoumi mentions owned shops). Whereas Walter represents the American tendency to racist stereotypes, the Caribbean-Americans, themselves immigrants caught between old and new homes, understand what it is like to be defined not only by race but also by markers of foreignness like accent, citizenship, and cultural difference.

While there was no coherent popular image of Arabs or Muslims before 2001, now they play a crucial part in American racial discourse, although there is no clear sense of whether they are "white, brown, or black," or "their own novel category." In a sense, Arabs are now "more 'black' than blacks," with racial profiling refocusing on them and "flying while brown" becoming the new version of "driving while black." Arabs are being demoted to the new racial underclass, "the new niggers."

Walter's animosity toward Akram's family suggests that he sees himself as speaking on behalf of America against the Arabs and Muslims at the bottom of the new racial hierarchy. Bayoumi is not saying that African-Americans have it better in any concrete sense because of their "promotion" in the hierarchy relative to Arabs and Muslims (they are still extensively targeted by law enforcement and associated with criminality in public, popular, and media representations). But 9/11 proved terrorism a unique threat in terms of scale, urgency, and organization, which led to uniquely heightened anxieties in return.

The week after September 11, when school resumes at Edward R. Murrow, one of Akram's teachers confronts him: "where are your scarves now?" The next day, he brings five hattas to school and hands them out to friends, to make a point to the teacher—but a security guard starts yelling at him and Akram yells back, until another guard intervenes and Akram screams, "Bin Laden didn't do it!" He goes to the dean's office, fuming, until class is over. Later, he laughs that "before September 11, I had never even heard of Osama bin Laden."

Akram's teacher reacts to 9/11 with rage at Palestine, which makes little factual sense but plenty of psychological sense given that the U.S. considers Hamas a terrorist organization (though many countries don't). So does Akram's wishful, tactless defense of Osama bin Laden: though he presumably brings the hattas to school as a way of reminding his teacher that Palestinian nationalism is unrelated to al-Qaeda, he ends up replying on his teacher's own terms, insisting that Arabs are not responsible for 9/11 because his teacher sees all Arabs as the same.

In 2003, Akram is in college and goes to spend the summer taking care of his grandparents in the West Bank. He is questioned by Israeli security when he lands and, against his father's advice, jokes around with his questioner—who turns out to be from Buffalo, in upstate New York. The trip ends up being "the most spectacular, the best time I ever had." For the first time in his memory, Akram does not have work or school. He is free to walk around his grandparents' village and once goes into Ramallah, where he looks at Yasser Arafat's compound and chats with the soldiers guarding it. He notices that there are people on the roofs everywhere, preparing to suffer Israeli attacks.

Despite the palpable tension that seems to define the West Bank under Israeli occupation, Akram's trip sticks with him and helps him understand his identity because it both allows him freedoms he has rarely had and forces him to understand the place and political context that have forged his family. His encounter with the Israeli security guard from Buffalo is remarkable, like Rasha's encounter with her former jailer in reverse: while they are equals (at least in theory) in the United States, the security guard has power over Akram in Israel, and while they share the American dimensions of their identities, their ties to the Middle East are as opposite as can be.

One day, Akram goes searching for a well he remembers from his childhood, which his family has told him is now blocked by the Israeli army. Three soldiers drive up to him, their rifles drawn, and order him to turn around. His last Friday, he tries to go for prayer in Jerusalem—but his family is sure the Israelis will not let him in. He pretends not to speak Arabic and says he is visiting from America, and after some commotion, they let him inside, where he prays. On his way back, there is only one transport van at the checkpoint, and he runs over to it as the Israeli soldiers yell something he does not understand in Hebrew. The van's occupants are tense; they hear a gunshot; when they finally get through, he sees Palestinian children throwing rocks at the soldiers, who are firing at them with rifles.

Akram experiences the occupation's brutality firsthand; the widely-circulated, all-too-common stories of Israeli soldiers shooting unarmed Palestinian protestors (including children, as here) is a symbol of racist violence that fails to see the enemy as human, combined with the force of the state. It is a literal, life-or-death version of the battle over ethnicity and inclusion ongoing in the U.S. While Akram does get into the mosque, ironically he can only do so by disavowing his Palestinian identity and pretending not to speak Arabic. This is similar to what the United States requires of him: entry and sanctuary only insofar as he actively proves that his identity does not make him a threat (which in practice means disavowing it).

Akram is deeply affected by the sufferings of Palestinians: his grandfather is constantly afraid of being raided or killed by the Israelis, who have shot two of Akram's cousins. Most of all, Akram's trip shows him the value of his education, which he thinks can help him fight back against the occupation in a way violence never could.

As with Rasha's story, violence and oppression are personal and traumatic, even if their victims are often also silenced in the public sphere. Also like Rasha, Akram envisions using the privileges of his life in the U.S. to address the injustices he and his family have faced.

He returns to Brooklyn, college, and the store, which closes two hours earlier on Sundays—Akram jokes that, if it also opened two hours later, he would only have "eight hours a day [...] like a regular American job." In 2005, he talks with a veteran who taught English in Korea after the end of the Korean War, and Akram realizes he could do the same in Dubai, the city that has become "the new American dream for many Arab American youth," a virtually mythical promise of wealth and excitement in a place with Arab roots. He can learn Arabic and build the long-term relationships with the Arab world he could never have in Palestine (to which he even has trouble getting visas for a few months at a time). He is leaving resolutely, bringing his talents away from America, a country that does not accept him and leaves him miserable.

Given Akram's education and sense of disillusionment in the United States, Dubai seems like an obvious choice: it has beat the United States at its own game, at least for Arabs. But Akram's earnest decision to leave paints a troubling possibility for the future: that the United States will never stop treating Arabs as a "problem," rejecting integration and progress for the sake of a sharp boundary between "us" and "them." Akram's departure is not only a personal challenge to himself, but also a challenge to America to live up to its ideals.

Akram sometimes hangs out with his friends at unassuming shisha cafés in Bay Ridge, although he does not smoke. (Like the often Muslim-run Dunkin' Donuts shops, these cafés are one of the few "public spaces where it is comfortable to be Arab in America.") At one of these café gatherings, Bayoumi, Akram, and Akram's friends talk about their jobs and "the 'war on terror.'" The author tells them his story—they find it peculiar that both his parents have PhDs. The other young men wonder if they should join Akram in Dubai, and whether they will save enough money to get married. On the car ride home, Akram mentions they are passing "that new Arab store," drawing the interest of "a car full of shopkeeper sons." He points to Target, and everyone laughs.

Akram's friends share his sense of displacement and uncertainty, which seems only to grow when they realize that Dubai presents a legitimate alternative for them, an entire place where they can feel as comfortable as they do in a Muslim-owned Dunkin' Donuts or shisha café. Akram's final joke about Target is also a subtle reminder of the limits of Arab ambition in America, the bright line between the small community shops Arabs own and the successful mainstream ones they likely never will.

LINA

In Iraq under Saddam Hussein, "there was no ice cream." It is illegal, as the nation is "choking under sanctions" in 1996. Lina is seventeen, and has been sent back from the U.S. on a one-way ticket by her conservative parents as punishment for her truancy and American boyfriend. Most Americans see Iraq "as a blur of bad news," essentially identical with Islamic fundamentalism and extremist groups. But it also has a history and a people. After a flight to Jordan, a long bus ride, and a lecture from her mother Maisa, who demands she say nothing political, Lina ends up at her aunt's beautiful villa, surrounded by huge piles of garbage, evidence of the nation's collapsing social services under the sanctions. After a summer visiting relatives, her mother and sister leave her there.

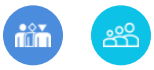
Lina's story points to the invisible struggles of life in Iraq, which Americans so often see as a political rather than human tragedy. Her lack of ice cream, while obviously insignificant compared to the major effects of sanctions and war, symbolizes her losing the way of life she has grown accustomed to in the U.S. To Lina's parents, her trip is supposed to be something like Sami's conversations with translators in Iraq or Akram's trip to Palestine—a journey of self-discovery, in which she finds a place in her identity for her heritage. But to her, it is a draconian punishment.

The sanctions imposed by the United States and United Nations effectively stop all food, medicine, and equipment from flowing into Iraq. Saddam imposes rations and "at least half a million" children die unnecessarily; the nation's infrastructure collapses. The UN's assistant secretary general even resigns in protest because he considers these sanctions equivalent to genocide. Without electricity or sugar, "ice cream became simply unsustainable." So, for good measure, the regime outlaws it. Although Lina enjoys seeing her family and grows close to one of her cousins, she can see the suffering caused by the sanctions firsthand; and she misses her boyfriend, to whom she writes letters that she cannot send because of fear and her family. Meanwhile, the UN is busy scouring Iraq for weapons of mass destruction.

Seven years before the Iraq War, the U.S. was already involved in the nation—a reminder that American interference in the Middle East (and foreign policy's residual influence on Arabs and Muslims in the United States) has a long history and did not just start after 9/11. The sanctions blocked all international trade with Iraq, punishing the Iraqi people for the errors of its government. These sanctions were initially imposed after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, but after this war was over, the United States and United Kingdom refused to let the UN lift them until Saddam was out of power (which did not happen until the Iraq War in 2003).

Bayoumi meets Lina in 2006 at a Bay Ridge café, where she smokes and smiles with a rebellious energy that reflects her private conflicts with her parents (rather than any political commitments). Her story, too eccentric to generalize, is nevertheless tinged with politics, especially because of her father's resolute opposition to Saddam.

Bayoumi carefully distinguishes Lina's personal rebellion from the rebellious political beliefs many readers might implicitly associate with young Arabs. Sespite all Americans might already know about Iraq, her story is in no way reducible to her country's. In fact, Lina's disinterest in political rebellion might itself be a way of rebelling against her dissident parents.



In 1979, Lina is born in Kuwait City; four years later, the family moves to the United States so that her father can study for his PhD. Her mother Maisa works at the Iraqi embassy and brings her father to parties where "the necessary worship of Saddam" infuriates him, and his criticisms lead to Maisa's firing in 1986. The family moves to a working-class black neighborhood in Maryland, where Maisa works at a thrift store and raises her daughters strictly. Lina's father gets a job at the National Institute of Drug Abuse and Iraq invades Kuwait, which means the family is going to stay in the United States for good. They move to a wealthier, whiter suburb and, for the first time, Lina feels judged and ostracized because of her race.

In a peculiar turn of events, Lina's parents move from Iraq to Kuwait to the United States only to watch Iraq invade Kuwait, the United States remove the Iraqis from Kuwait, and then (later) the United States invade Iraq. The family, like all the others who appear in this book, has to distinguish between the people and governments of its various countries, but the embassy, of course, cannot, and neither can the 21st-century American public that associates all Muslims with the actions of a few authoritarian governments and militant groups.

Nevertheless, Lina manages to befriend various students from different groups by the time she gets to high school. But her fashion choices frustrate Maisa, who accuses her of "turning into a black person!" Lina starts smoking and wearing makeup—but she fails to hide either from her mother, who grows stricter and stricter. Soon, "home [feels] like prison."

While Lina continues to identify with her old black community, Maisa's accusation also shows how communities of color in the United States can stereotype and antagonize one another, even if they share concrete social interests (like Walter and Akram's family).

Sophomore year, Lina gets into an argument with Maisa because she wants to go to the homecoming dance; her father agrees that she can go, and her mother even helps her buy a dress, but insists that she drive Lina both ways. During the dance, however, Lina notices Maisa lingering in the corner, watching her and her friends. They watch each other quietly and later drive home in silence.

As in Yasmin's story, school dances are an important stage for the conflict between religious beliefs and American cultural norms. Unlike Yasmin, however, Lina resolutely chooses the latter, and her parents actually do try to "control [their] daughter."

Lina starts skipping class, which is the only way to see her friends. As her grades decline, her parents decide she should go to Iraq for the summer. She is excited—she scarcely remembers the Iraqi family she talks with on the phone and finally, if ironically, gets the freedom she never had at home. When she comes back to the United States from Iraq that fall, however, she returns to her old self. She starts skipping classes with her new boyfriend, Daniel, who is half Puerto Rican and half black and neither minds that her parents are conservative nor tries to have sex with her. But when Lina's parents catch on to her evening phone calls with Daniel, she decides to run away.

There is no mention of ice cream or the misery that marked Lina's time in Iraq at the beginning of this chapter—this is an earlier trip, albeit one with the same goal of setting her straight. Lina's parents' plan doesn't exactly backfire—she does reconnect with her Iraqi family, but simply going to Iraq does not necessarily imbue her with traditional values, which suggests that it is too simple to frame strict religiosity as "tradition" (residing in the Middle East) and freewheeling secularism as "modernity" (in the U.S.). Indeed, Lina finds a compromise between teenage rebellion and her parents' values.

Lina stays at friends' houses during her runaway attempts and climbs out of her locked window when she inevitably goes back home—each time, her father gives her a drug test and sends her to the gynecologist to ensure she has not lost her virginity. Once, after a two-week stint at a friend's house, her parents find her laying on the couch with Daniel in the basement. Instead of berating her, they say they want to meet Daniel, who soon comes over for dinner. But then Lina's parents reveal they are planning to send her to stay with family friends in Virginia for a few weeks, and then back to Iraq.

Lina's rebellion never turns dangerous or lives up to her parents' deepest fears, but it does land her another corrective trip to Iraq as her parents struggle to keep her motivations in line with their own. However, their willingness to meet Daniel suggests that they are also willing to make concessions to their daughter (or, perhaps, just want more information about what, exactly, she has been up to).

In Virginia, Lina grows close to the 22-year-old Looma, the family friends' daughter, who even lets her drink. She still misses Daniel, however. One day, her father calls to inform her that Daniel is in prison for a carjacking and robbery. Lina goes to visit him and is devastated; Looma advises her to move on. Soon Lina goes to Iraq, on a ticket with no return date. She thinks about Daniel endlessly for a few months, but then abruptly forgets him and starts enjoying her freedom. She is still unhappy, though—her family manages to obtain ice cream to cheer her up, but she still breaks down one night, crying and feeling isolated, able to talk only to God. Like many people under the sanctions, she begins praying devoutly and even wearing "the entire regalia of a religious woman," to her family's surprise.

Again, Lina's punishment trip ironically gives her the freedom and time to explore away from her parents that she wanted at home the whole time. The news about Daniel is horrifying not only because it threatens their relationship but also because it violates everything Lina knows about him. Like Rasha's mother in prison and Sami on his way to war, Lina turns to religion for solace and rebels in the opposite way as in the past, even astonishing her family by becoming more traditional than they are.


After over a year, Maisa finally comes to bring Lina home from Iraq. She is shocked by her daughter's new religious clothing, though Lina soon stops wearing it. Lina is sad to disappoint her mother once again, and agrees to an engagement with her older cousin in Iraq.

Maisa's plan seems to have proven too successful, and now she and Lina reach the same impasse in opposite roles. However, Lina seems to care about her mother's judgments for the first time, and agrees to marry within her community, which suggests that she has grown more attached and committed to her Iraqi identity.


When she returns to the United States with Maisa, Lina's family is living in Colorado, where her father works for the Federal Bureau of Prisons. She bonds with her mother over wedding dress shopping but cannot stand her new town, which is "claustrophobic and small-minded," uniformly white and adamantly Christian. But her parents are getting along better, and finally "they [feel] like a family." And then, suddenly, Maisa dies from an infection while Lina's father is away. The family is devastated; Lina calls off her engagement. She graduates high school and spends the following summer "drinking hard and smoking a lot of weed" as her father falls into depression and fights endlessly with her.

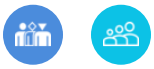
Just when Lina and her mother begin to develop a mutually understanding relationship, catastrophe strikes and, like in Iraq, Lina is suddenly completely alone in a place that seems desolate and foreign. Her decision to marry seems to have been primarily related to this improving relationship with her mother, and she again loses trust in her family.

One day, Lina goes to Denver and never comes back. She stays with the only person she knows, works at a restaurant, and meets a group of Arabs at the University of Denver. She enrolls in community college, gets a diversity grant to pay for her tuition, and finally contacts her father, who is actually very impressed and satisfied with her decisions—he even helps her pay for school and rent. Lina starts dating a Palestinian man named Zaki, who brings her gifts from Lebanon.

Desperate to leave her situation and realizing that her family can no longer provide guidance, Lina takes matters into her own hands and, for the first time, fully claims the independence she has always flirted with—and proves to her father that he has nothing to worry about. For the first time she also finds specifically Arab friends, whether because she now can in college or because of her time in Iraq.

Lina increasingly feels an itch to return to the East Coast, preferably to Maryland. When her father gets a job in Brooklyn, they move "into a drab concrete building in Bay Ridge." She takes a cross-country bus to break up with Zaki, who is cheating on her anyway, and enrolls in Kingsborough Community College. She connects with a group of Iraqis on the internet and falls for one of them, Wisam, although they remain only close friends and never date.

Yet again, Lina gets uprooted and ends up in a new, unknown place with the family from which she just ran away (but now, a place full of fellow Arabs). Her friendship with Wisam shows that, even with her mother gone, she is still interested in men from her own community and conceives it as central to her identity, more so than before she went to Iraq.



In mid-2001, Lina's father hastily marries a woman from a family of dissidents-turned-refugees torn apart by Saddam's regime. Lina is confused and sad, but eventually grows close to her new family in Brooklyn and even agrees with their suggestion she marry one of her new stepmother's older brothers, Laith. But he is dating an American woman, and in her confusion and frustration, Lina joins the army to be an operating-room specialist, seeking a sense of purpose and clarity of mind. Her father is incensed, but his neighbors and coworkers in the prison system change his mind. Wisam's sister Rana, the daughter of an Iraqi diplomat, is clearly disappointed. Lina goes to Virginia for training and quickly starts feeling better, gaining a sense of discipline and focusing her goals. Having achieved what she sought from the military, she decides to quit. Back home, she briefly rekindles her friendship with Rana.

Again, events outside of Lina's control transform the foundations of her life and the structure of her family. Her decision to join the army is another way of running away, an attempt to take back the control that she lacks but needs in order to decide what is next for herself. When the military gives her that control, though, she quits. Her military story is nearly the opposite of Sami's—while they both joined because they felt lost, he remained lost and served five full years. Noticeably, this all happens around the time of 9/11, which does not seem to profoundly change Lina's view of her place in the world—perhaps because Iraq had already been fighting with the United States, militarily and then diplomatically, for more than a decade.

One Friday in 2003, the FBI comes to Lina's house and politely interrogates her about Rana, Wisam, and their other brother Ra'ed, who is apparently a spy—one of his friends is planning to kill a member of Lina's stepmother's family. This means that Wisam, too, is secretly working for Saddam, and Lina is devastated to learn that "her closest friend and so much more" has been using her.

Although Lina has spent most of her life avoiding politics, it finally catches up to her; like Sade in the Preface, she realizes that she cannot necessarily even trust those in her own community. The effects of American foreign policy on Muslim and Arab life are pernicious, psychological, and not limited to those whom the American government (or, in this case, the Iraqi government) directly targets.

Rana and the family's other brother are deported, but "Wisam and Ra'ed were not so lucky." Lina remembers having been stopped for more than 20 minutes by the police when she was with Ra'ed a few days before; now, it all makes sense. She even remembers Ra'ed bringing the assassin, nicknamed "the scorpion," over to her house. This man, supposedly visiting to ask Lina's father about a rash, was "rough and imposing." Wisam and Ra'ed are arrested in March 2003, right after the beginning of the Iraq War, and charged with acting as Iraqi intelligence agents, although some evidence suggests they were FBI informants, but the judge "determine[s] that the brothers posed no threat to national security."

Lina is forced to retrospectively question her entire relationship with Wisam, which to her was genuine and meaningful, but for him was a mere cover, a way of getting closer to his assassination target. In the immediate leadup to the Iraq War, Lina watches the conflict play out in microcosm through her family; because of her position at the juncture of American and Iraqi communities, she is manipulated by both sides, seen as an enemy by both the police who pull her over and the Iraqi government.

Lina moves to Virginia, where she continues working at a restaurant and going to community college. Her relationship with Laith eventually "turn[s] into real love," but, by the end of 2004, things are rocky again and Lina returns to Brooklyn to work at a short-lived Arab American newspaper. In January 2005, Ra'ed and Wisam are convicted and sentenced to six months' incarceration for working as foreign spies, but have already spent two years in prison and are deported to Jordan, the only country that agrees to take them. Lina visits Wisam about a dozen times, but his sense of disconnection leads her to believe he is guilty and was probably acting as a double agent, working for both the FBI and Saddam.

After Wisam and Ra'ed's arrests, Lina again flees the tensions—before, cultural, and now, political—between her American and Iraqi sides. In jail, Wisam is a completely different person than the man she used to know—but she also never learns where his true loyalties lay, with the United States or Iraq (his deportation might suggest the latter, but could also suggest that his work for the FBI was compromised, and it is curious that Iraq would not take him back).

In July of 2006, Lina and Laith finally marry, and she moves to be with him in Virginia. Their marriage gives Lina both "something to hold on to" emotionally and a source of cultural pride. As of 2007, she is pregnant, and during Bayoumi's visit, they celebrate at an Arabic restaurant and club in the area, then go to Laith's brother's Denny's restaurant, which is full of a broad mosaic of Americans.

Lina's story about personal, religious, cultural, and familial confusion has been one long search for "something to hold on to," a way to define her own identity. The fact that she takes Bayoumi to both an Arabic restaurant and a multicultural Denny's suggests that she has found a way to claim both her identity as an Iraqi and her identity as an American immigrant.

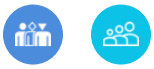
While the desire to return home is often seen as central to the experience of exile, this is not so for Lina, who "simply no longer recognizes the [Iraqi] nation she sees on television," with its internal divisions and economic hardships. She especially laments the sanctions. The vast majority of her family has left Iraq and is now living in Syria and Jordan. Like so many immigrant Americans, Lina is trying to "build [her] own destiny from [her] American home while keeping one eye open to that which has been lost," living in a geographical in-between space of sorts, starting a family but lamenting alongside her husband Laith that "there is no Iraq anymore."

While Lina's immediate family left Iraq for the United States, now her extended family is leaving because of the United States. For Lina and Laith, home is a memory and idea rather than a place in itself. If Palestine for people like Akram is a nation to come, a project of creating a country, then Iraq to Lina and Laith is a nation that has already gone, which they can only carry on in diaspora through cultural tradition.

OMAR

In 2006, 22-year-old Omar is stuck in his job search. Despite his experience, industry connections, and nearly a thousand applications, Omar only has offers "from shady online marketers." He needs a job so he can be with Nadine, another Palestinian student at Hunter College, where his parents also met. He wants to have a traditional Palestinian wedding with her: "since we have no country [...] the only thing we have is our identity."

Clearly, Omar is facing some barrier in his job search—but he is also in the dark about it. Like Lina with Laith, Omar sees marrying Nadine as a way of carrying on cultural tradition from afar, since their culture relies on the idea *of a nation rather than an actually existing one.*



At a Bay Ridge shisha café, Omar tells Bayoumi how the engagement would go: his grandfather would call Nadine's father to propose the marriage; Nadine's family would then spend a week or so researching Omar's, before inviting them over. They would have tea and discuss arrangements, until Nadine would "walk down the stairs like an old-time movie star." Later, they would make the engagement official by publicly reciting the first chapter of the Qur'an. But if he does not find a job, there is no chance Nadine's family will approve the engagement. And he is running out of time.

Omar has a specific vision of the path he wants to follow, but he can do little more than he already is in order to translate that vision into a reality. He is stuck in the present, with no way to predict when he will find the job that will get him his marriage.

Omar could not have predicted his difficulty on the job market nine months before, when he graduated with a communications degree and an internship at Al Jazeera. Now he wonders, "could it be that American media organizations won't hire him because they find an Arab American with Al Jazeera credentials too problematical?" Or perhaps the media job market is just difficult—he cannot know.

Omar's uncertainty is so demoralizing because it prevents him from knowing whether he can do anything to improve his chances (if the market is difficult) or not (if he is being discriminated against). Although it is internationally renowned, Al Jazeera is controversial in the U.S. not only because it is based in the Middle East (specifically, in the small, oil-rich country of Qatar, whose government funds the channel) but also because it has offered both sides of stories concerning U.S. interventions in the Middle East, whereas mainstream media organizations in America seldom air anything but official government narratives about them. (When there is debate on the major networks, it is usually from competing American perspectives, and almost never from the perspective of the people the U.S. is invading or fighting).

Omar's anxiety about hiring discrimination is common among Arab Americans of his age. Sade, the young man from the preface, was a successful "point clerk" on the commodities trading floor, even getting his brother a job there, but faced constant racist harassment and remembered everyone cheering "Kill those Arabs!" while watching news about the Iraq War. One day, management realized Sade's brother was born in Jerusalem and summarily fired them both. Sade was sickened, unable to sleep well for a year.

Sade's story seems like a clear-cut case of discrimination, so blatant that it sounds like it could not have possibly happened in the 21st century. Sade's coworkers' reaction reveals an unseemly truth about the war: it was psychologically satisfying for many Americans to watch soldiers kill Arabs, even people unrelated to any attacks on Americans. For Americans who see all Arabs as the same, it becomes a simplistic matter of "us versus them."

Indeed, in the year after September 11, employment discrimination complaints from Arabs and Muslims rose 400 percent; they filed one-fifth of all complaints with the Federal Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, and in studies of company responses to fictitious resumes, Muslim names were the least likely to get a call. In fact, men of Arab, Afghan, Iranian, and Pakistani descent saw a sharp decline in income between 2000 and 2002—one study found that wages declined between 9 and 11 percent by 2005.

The ambiguity of hiring decisions is precisely the reason employment discrimination is so insidious and hard to stop: no employer will ever admit to rejecting someone because of their race, which means there are no real consequences for discrimination and everyone can continue doing it. But while it is nearly impossible to prove individual instances of discrimination, in the aggregate its pervasiveness becomes abundantly clear.

Bayoumi meets Omar at the Arab Club at Hunter college. Omar is dressed in a suit after a job interview, and he talks about his work at Al-Jazeera and aspirations to work at an American media network. He is half-Chilean, half-Palestinian, and speaks fluent Spanish after spending five years in Chile. He looks the part, too; people scarcely recognize him as Arab, even at shisha cafés in Bay Ridge. This makes the discrimination he experiences all the more frustrating. It was also part of why he loved working at Al-Jazeera, which is a sort of credential for his identity.

Omar's identity is complex and composite: he is more than just an ethnic Arab, which makes it all the more frustrating that his prospective employers seem only to see that facet of his identity. He also shows how Arabs can be more than just one thing: to assume that Arab identity excludes other identities (Chilean, American, or whatever else) or that the Arab community is a definable, self-segregating entity is to misunderstand how identity works.

Omar gets into media in 2003, after a friend brings him to anti-Iraq War protests and he gets an internship at Downtown Community Television. There, the legendary, Emmy-winning director John Alpert assigns Omar to research a documentary for HBO and gives him the opportunity to take video and film production classes. Although the documentary never materializes, Omar reinvests in his "childhood job fantasy of working as a war correspondent," like Alpert did during the First Gulf War—his coverage of the destruction wreaked by American bombs got him fired from NBC, in fact, because it conflicted with the government's official narrative.

Omar is inspired by the chance to address an injustice in representation: the fact that only pro-American viewpoints get represented, even though the U.S. prides itself on having a free press that can tell both sides of the story (while, in reality, there are always more than two sides, and the two sides chosen tend to be two American political parties). Alpert's story already shows the risks of being a contrarian in the media—a risk that Omar would be happy to accept if it meant getting the truth out there. Or perhaps, in his stalling job search, he is already facing the same penalty as Alpert.

Omar recounts his family's tradition of political resistance: after fighting the Israeli occupation and "frequently landing in jail," Omar's father brings his family to New York and works his way up to buying a building in Park Slope. His mother is the daughter of a Chilean physician targeted for assassination by the United States-backed dictator Pinochet, and follows her family to New York as well. His parents meet in 1980, marry in 1983, and have Omar in 1984. When Omar is eight, Pinochet is out of power and Omar's family moves back to Chile—his father is frightened after getting shot in a random attack in his New York gas station, so he hopes to stay in Chile for good. He contacts the large Palestinian community in Santiago but realizes they are mostly Pinochet-supporting merchants. The family moves back to Brooklyn the day before Omar's twelfth birthday—he barely remembers English or gets along with American kids.

Omar's parents' journey exemplifies the American paradox: they were both fleeing American-backed repressive governments (Israel's and Pinochet's) but also found safety and community in the United States. Omar's own Americanness is, in classic Brooklyn fashion, most of all about his never being merely American: although he is born and initially raised in New York, he spends a whole phase of his life identifying most strongly with his Chilean side—and now with his Palestinian side, which inspires his plans for the future (his wedding).

Then, at the age of fourteen, Omar's parents send him to Palestine, where "everything [is] alien to him." When he returns to New York, however, he begins identifying strongly with his Arab side, hanging out with other Arab kids and learning Palestinian customs. On September 11, he is shocked when his teacher announces the attacks; he worries about his aunt who lives downstairs and works at the World Trade Center. Fortunately, she makes it home—she was getting coffee during the crash and walked all the way back to Park Slope over the Brooklyn Bridge. As Arab kids feel increasingly threatened, Omar gets even more connected to—or trapped in—his identity. He starts going to a discussion group in Bay Ridge, led by a relatable imam who emphasizes Muslims' "public relations problem." This makes Omar all the more excited to work in the media.

Like Akram, Omar connects to Palestine most of all after seeing it firsthand as a teenager, which radically reorients his identity only two years after he returns to New York speaking mostly Spanish. On 9/11, like a mix of Sami and Akram, he worries from both directions: that he will lose someone in the attacks, and that others will treat him as responsible for them. Of course, the latter is a product of the "public relations problem," and the imam's theory clearly connects with Omar's interest in media as a form of civic education (which is part of Bayoumi's purpose, too).

In early 2005, Omar interviews for a job with Al Jazeera's office in the UN. He is immediately impressed by the main correspondent and explains that he wants to work there because it is the closest thing to an objective news source—his father gets a call with the internship offer before Omar returns home. He throws "himself into the work," researching crises and learning to cover UN press conferences. He is even mistaken for a correspondent and given responsibility to co-produce a documentary about international students' decreasing enrollment in American colleges and universities. He researches the issue and its implications, then sets up interviews with university administrators and students, which culminates in a trip back to the Hunter College Arab Club. Abderrahim Foukara, Al Jazeera's main correspondent, even introduces him to Secretary-General Kofi Annan and tells him he has been the network's best intern ever.

Omar finds himself at his role, doing exactly the kind of work he wanted and getting clear signals about his talent and potential. The UN office is perfect because it allows Omar to pursue the broad, international perspective that he feels is missing from American media and, due to his background, he is particularly poised to offer. But his failed job search also looks even more tragic now, since there is clearly a deep disconnect between people's perceptions of Al Jazeera and the reality of Omar's work there.

For the next few months, Omar focuses on school and helps a *New York Times* reporter navigate the Arab American community in Brooklyn. He soon lands a job at a nonprofit housing organization run by a family acquaintance, who tells him that his time at Al Jazeera "could work against [him] in the future." Soon thereafter, his supervisor calls it "a terrorist channel" and Omar jumps to its defense. Eventually, in his search for a long-term job, he deletes the words "Al Jazeera" from his résumé.

Omar realizes the frustrating part about fighting systematic misinformation: it is impossible to show people the truth if they refuse to believe you precisely because of the misinformation you are trying to fight. Although he envisioned a career in the media as an opportunity to take a moral stand, Omar ends up doing the opposite: hiding his morals in order to find a platform to speak from in the first place.

At the shisha café Meena House, Omar and a number of his friends talk with Bayoumi about work and the FBI. One of the young men says the FBI visited his school, al-Noor, the largest Muslim private school in New York. It was not investigating students—it wanted to recruit them. Of course, it was relatively unsuccessful. The FBI's goal is clearly to get Arabic speakers—translation jobs in law enforcement are growing, especially in New York, and there are barely any Arabic speakers in the FBI. Fewer than 300 out of 12,000 agents have any proficiency, and only six are "fluent enough to appear on Arabic television." These few officers also face harassment and discrimination; many have filed complaints reporting offensive slurs from their superiors.

Ironically, the FBI needs to hire Arabic speakers to target Arabic speakers, but this makes finding people to hire particularly hard. At the same time, when discrimination against Arabic-speakers is rampant everywhere else, the FBI is the one employer looking for them. Much like Sami in Iraq, FBI Arabic translators simultaneously must spy on their communities, be seen as valuable assets for being able to do so, and be derided at work for belonging to those communities. This logic is both circular and contradictory—circular because it starts and ends with the conflation of Arab and "enemy," and contradictory because it is impossible to spy on "enemies" without cooperation from some of them.

In fact, Omar has even applied for a job at the FBI—he is that desperate—and at the DEA, which wants to send him somewhere like Afghanistan or Colombia. All the men insist they would have no qualms about working for the FBI, even though they understand that Arabs face discrimination and persecution. One of them says that "everybody gets their turn" to be the target of racism. The men see the potential for a lucrative career and do not think about changing the FBI's culture. While Omar knows a law enforcement job would inevitably entail "spying on his own community" and says he would never do so, he is still thinking about pursuing one.

Omar and his friend also end up with contradictory ideas: they want a job they know they could never do with a clean conscience. Omar seems to face enough employment discrimination that his only job opportunity could be perpetuating discrimination against his own community. They recognize the injustice in and historical precedent for racism but, unlike Rasha, Yasmin, and Omar himself a few months before, they now feel they are powerless to change anything.

A few weeks later, Omar tells Bayoumi about meeting Nadine at the Arab Club; although they seldom spend time together, they clearly like one another, and Omar's father has promised that he will agree to pursue the marriage as soon as Omar gets a job. Omar agrees with Bayoumi that his trouble finding work at a major network involves discrimination—not necessarily against his Arab identity, but there is definitely suspicion of Al Jazeera. His friends and cousins with "much more Arabic-sounding names" all have jobs already. Omar's father, however, just blames the recession. Like many others, Omar is stuck in "a place where you just don't know how much power to attribute to contemporary prejudice." He does not know if he is being paranoid; it feels like swatting a mosquito in bed, not knowing if it is even there, and being unable to sleep regardless.

Omar's story does not reach a neat resolution: he remains confused by his lack of success, motivated but roadblocked, with what feels like his whole future relying on a job that is completely outside of his control. The same thing he wanted to fight through working in media—a falsehood with more credibility than the truth—seems to be preventing him from getting a media job in the first place, and this ethnically-tinged suspicion of Al Jazeera is also getting in the way of the marriage that, at least in large part, symbolizes Omar's ethnic pride.

RAMI

On a night in July 2006, with Israel and Lebanon at war, Bayoumi sits with Rami and Ezzat, his friend, in a Bay Ridge Dunkin' Donuts. Rami is 19, thoughtful, and muscular; Ezzat, 21, is talkative and just as imposing. Rami recites a verse from the Qur'an—both are devout, and both their fathers are elsewhere: Rami's in a New Jersey detention center, Ezzat's back in Lebanon, where he has all but given up Islam. Each generation, they agree, gets more pious, "but it's still not enough."

Faith is clearly central to Rami and Ezzat's views of the world: without their fathers, they envision community in terms of a collective devotion to shared moral values and are obviously much more religious than their parents, not less (as many assume immigrants' children in the U.S. to inevitably be). Their moral mission is something like Rasha's, Yasmin's, or Omar's when he wants to work in the media—they want to create a world around better values—but they couch this in terms of religion rather than politics.

Born in Jordan to Palestinian parents, Rami grows up in Brooklyn, spending his nights with his father at the grocery stores where he works, usually talking about wrestling. An exemplary athlete and student, Rami ends up playing football at one of New York City's elite Specialized High Schools. Like Islam, football is "a total way of life." His family is not very religious, so he first learns to pray and study the Qur'an from his uncle. Rami's father manages to buy his own store, which summarily burns down. He tries opening one after another, but eventually ends up distributing illegal out-of-state cigarettes to groceries around the city.

While football and Islam might both require "total" dedication, the similarities more or less stop there—but this also attests to Rami's great versatility of character and identity, which continues to defy the simplistic distinction between tradition and modernity, East and West. His father's bad luck leads him into illegal but understandable and relatively harmless work, but it remains to be seen how this squares with Rami's religiosity.

After 9/11, law enforcement begins investigating Arab groceries (which they believe fund terrorism) and plants an informant in Rami's father's circles. When the man offers to sell them weapons, they realize his identity, but they are all arrested anyway—in fact, they arrest Rami's mother first and make her call her husband, telling him to surrender himself in exchange for her freedom. When she gets home, she is shaking and frightened; Rami is 15 and confused, and he loses his ability to focus in school as his mother grows increasingly distraught and withdrawn. They cannot afford their legal fees and end up living on credit.

This story seems like a series of improbable exaggerations on the part of the police: not only is it unlikely that small, single-family businesses run by working-class immigrants could meaningfully support terrorism (as opposed to, say, oil money), but Rami's father is treated like a flight threat and violent terrorist despite refusing to participate in the police informant's set-up. The police take extreme measures to ensure Rami's father gets a minor punishment for a minor crime—his mother even gets arrested and traumatized despite having nothing to do with her husband's actions.

Rami turns to the Qur'an for solace, listening to a famous reciter on the internet while he follows along with an English translation. He feels calm and concentrated, so he turns this into a nightly routine and even starts praying five times a day. He develops a "foundation in the religious life" and improves his Arabic.

Like Rasha's mom in prison or Lina in Iraq, after his father's incarceration Rami finds his missing sense of purpose through faith, which offers him a focus on the spiritual realm rather than his material suffering, a routine to build his days around, and a set of beliefs that allow him to make sense of his pain.

After five months, Rami's father is released from jail on probation, but set to be deported. Their lives return to normal and, with the school year restarting, Rami refocuses on football—his mother is an enthusiastic fan, even if she does not know the game's rules.

As soon as the family heals, Rami turns back to football. At first, his religious phase looks as temporary as Lina's.

Rami's father is arrested again, abruptly, because a man with a similar name has cashed fraudulent checks. (Rami now has "just blank spots" in his memory from this time.) He again becomes more devout and starts attending discussion groups after mosque. The faith he gains at these groups on Fridays inevitably gets him through the weekend. He learns about "the fundamentals of Islamic history and the essentials of moral conduct" and feels his values slowly transforming. He starts visiting his father in prison and the two grow very close, talking about family, the future, prison, and Islam. Rami's father is also becoming more devout, especially since his prison has a large Muslim population.

Interestingly, perhaps because it occupies a "blank spot," Rami scarcely talks about his pain in conection with his father's imprisonment on false charges, which seems to still be related to the government's fear that he is funding terrorists. Instead of talking about his pain, Rami talks about the solution he found to that pain: mosque and discussion group on Friday (the Islamic holy day). And given his own isolation, desperation, and abundant time to think, it is unsurprising that Rami's father has a parallel religious awakening.

Unable to focus, Rami does worse than expected on his SATs but still wins a partial scholarship to a nearby private university; his extended family works tirelessly to pay the rest of his tuition. Rami's father is transferred to a new jail, where there are more restricted visiting hours and fewer Muslim inmates. In college, Rami decides to accelerate his graduation and grows close to other Arab and Muslim students, meeting the knowledgeable and argumentative Ezzat at the Muslim Student Association.

Rami's family is not the only one to suffer from his father's (unjust) imprisonment: Rami's future nearly derails; his immediate family suffers deep psychological wounds; and his extended family is forced to help fill the financial gap Rami's father has left. This is an important lesson about the snowball effects of incarceration, which is often both an effect and a cause of poverty and social isolation. Rami makes Islam part of his public identity at school, too, finding a Muslim community just as his father loses one in the new prison.

One night, during an argument about marriage and children, Ezzat asks why Rami is Muslim and how he knows his religion is the right one, how he knows that Allah wrote the Qur'an—Rami is speechless, and when they switch roles, he is astonished at Ezzat's brilliant explanations of his beliefs, which illuminate everything for him. Rami is thrilled; on the car ride home, he asks about terrorism, and Ezzat insists that "that concept isn't part of Islam." It is unjustified and immoral. Now, religion "appealed to [Rami's] rationalist side, and he began seeing it through the lens of knowledge acquisition."

Rami has thought about Islam as a received code of behavior and beliefs, not as a process of inquiry, interpretation, or understanding. Of course, it inevitably involves both knowledge and practice, but while these both vary from person to person, the former also depends on individual judgment and interpretation, so creates more space for free thought and a process of continually improving oneself and one's knowledge.

After a few weeks, Rami joins Ezzat's Islamic study group in Queens, talking about how to model their lives on the prophet and his immediate descendants' virtue, how to "revive the religion as it once had been." They read classical Islamic scholars and condemn the contemporary power of dictators in the Middle East. They do not blame the West or advocate violence; rather, they focus on teaching morality through the Qur'an, and Rami begins seeking to propagate his knowledge, a practice called da'wa. He takes a prominent role in the Muslim Students' Association, whose students recognize their one-dimensional portrayal in the popular eye. Rami seeks to stop focusing on material success, banish envy, keep a distance from women, and marry a Muslim.

While Rami and Ezzat's talk about reviving Islam might remind readers of fundamentalist views on the surface, they are talking about reviving a harmonious religious community in which people look out for one another and live with the same classical virtues he pledges, not seizing political power. In fact, Rami's view of religion is intensely personal and local, based primarily in self-improvement, and much more like any normal adherent of any other major religion than like the extremists with whom he is so often conflated.

After his sophomore year, Rami goes to visit family in the Jordanian capital Amman and is thrilled to receive "a hero's welcome." He is also fascinated to see that his relatives share his parents' mannerisms. Most of all, he and his family are all surprised to learn that Rami is far more religious than his cousins, with the exception of Jaafar, who takes him around Amman's mosques, accompanies him during an off-season pilgrimage to Mecca, and attends religious discussions with him. Rami fantasizes about returning to Amman as soon as he gets back to New York.

As many of the book's characters have seen, family in the Middle East is not necessarily more strict, religious, or traditional than family in the United States, which is good reason to reject the assumption that the immigrant experience is always defined by a conflict between (Eastern, old) tradition and (Western, new) modernity. Like with Akram, Omar, and Lina, a trip to his parents' country of birth does influence and inspire Rami, but it is not the initial impetus for his connection to his culture—which, like Yasmin, he primarily conceives as religious, not ethnic.

During their meeting at Dunkin' Donuts, three more of Rami's friends join him, Bayoumi, and Ezzat. They continue to talk about politics, namely Israel's bombing of Lebanon. The men are hopeless, sure that Arab leaders will sit idly by and sacrifice their people's interests while Israel and the United States wage war in Lebanon. Another Lebanese friend joins; they go to a Lebanese sandwich restaurant and watch the Lebanese news into the night.

The conflict in question, the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon, ended after approximately a month in a relative stalemate. But the almost constant series of conflicts in the Middle East, complicated by the region's extensive network of alliances among state governments, political parties, and paramilitary organizations, almost always involves the United States, especially on Israel's side whenever it is involved. Accordingly, the men understandably feel that their country is at war with their people, while Americans assume that Arabs have it out for them—each side sees the other as the aggressor.

A few weeks later, Rami and Bayoumi go to Friday prayer, where Rami's friend and Bayoumi's student Mohammad, an outstanding young Islamic scholar, is leading prayer. Rami has grown a beard, and Mohammad explains that Rami's family has started worrying about his religious activities, not wanting him "to fall into any trap with the government" like his father. Mohammad, too, has a beard and always wears religious garb—his mother will only let him go to Egypt if he shaves, but they both insist that outwardly displaying their religion gives them strength and helps in their da'wa. Bayoumi remembers an article about French Muslim women wearing the **hijab** or worshipping in public to "mark and claim a presence in the public sphere." Similarly, da'wa has become an urgent "struggle to represent Islam positively to non-Muslims."

Rami and Mohammad are trying to fix what Omar's imam called Muslims' "public relations problem." Their choice to wear religious garb—which is certainly unusual for men of their age in New York—symbolizes both their own moral vows and their desire to change the public face of Islam. It is not a protest against racism, but simply an attempt to reach out to both Muslims (for whom they hope to model serious moral commitment) and non-Muslims (whom they hope to show what Islam really means). They are trying to perfect the Muslim community (which has lost sight of morality) and the American community (which has lost sight of acceptance) alike. Like Yasmin with her hijab, it takes a certain fearlessness for Rami and Mohammad to go out in their garb, but it makes them an asset to the community for the same reason as it makes them a target for hate and law enforcement.

Bayoumi accompanies Rami and Mohammad for their da'wa work, sending free Qur'ans to anyone who requests them from a tiny office in Staten Island—about 3,000 per month, and more whenever Muslims get bad publicity. The office is full of Qur'ans in various languages, which Rami starts mailing out while Mohammad shows Bayoumi the questionnaire he sends to new converts and the emails he receives from them—one woman learns about the Qur'an on TV and another, a preacher's daughter in Mississippi, converts after making a Muslim friend. Mohammad then pulls out the hate mail—one message calls for the mass murder of all Muslims. Bayoumi notices that many requests are from prisons and law enforcement offices, and Rami realizes he can send Qur'ans to his father's new prison.

This da'wa work is, so far, the most concrete manifestation of Rami and Mohammad's quest to improve Muslims' representation. And it is clearly working: reaching at least 30,000 people is astonishing for two teenagers in a cramped office, but their hate mail proves how extraordinarily much room there is for progress. Their interest from law enforcement officers is a reminder that, even if there are severe structural biases in the American system, individual agents are not necessarily prejudiced and can even become gateways for Muslims to dispel myths, at least through indirect rumor, among the broader American community. Beyond hoping to get his father reinvested in religion, Rami seems to hope he can help create or support a Muslim community in the prison.

Bayoumi spends numerous Fridays with Rami and Mohammad, working a few hours in the office before following Mohammad to a prayer session he leads, talking about theology or successful conversions on the car ride over. One day, they pick up and chat with another man named Mohammad, a recent immigrant from Egypt; once, they talk about Qur'anic recitation and imagine preaching in Mecca, then notice the police searching a car nearby and mention their fear of being targeted by law enforcement.

Rami and Mohammad dedicate their entire Fridays to religion—this means not only spending their time on religious activities but also fixating their minds on it, as shown by their conversations with each other and the other Mohammad; Islam truly is all-consuming for them, and it fills their day with an air of serenity, gratitude, and optimism.

Another Friday, after his sermon, Mohammad goes to speak with his old high school's Muslim Students Association. The students revere him as he insists on their right to practice Islam as it was intended, dressing conservatively and praying even at school. They will look "strange," but so were the first Muslims, and so was he in high school, like when he could not let the cheerleaders kiss him on the cheek before basketball games. Their community is essential for their strength, he implores. He also jokes, "don't ask me about Osama bin Laden […] I've never met the man." On the subway ride home, a missionary hands Bayoumi a pamphlet about Jesus Christ.

Mohammad argues for a relatively conservative version of Islam, but one still fundamentally based in American civil liberties—the freedom to practice one's religion. This is, of course, not only about following what he considers proper codes of behavior, but also making a claim about Islam's right to be included in American society and visible in American institutions. Yet Mohammad also recognizes and pre-empts the possible association between his conservative vision and bin Laden's extremist, violent vision, using humor to suggest that people would have to seriously misinterpret his own beliefs to equivocate them with bin Laden's (or to even make him explicitly disavow bin Laden, like the FBI agents meeting with religious leaders in the Preface).

Bayoumi also meets Rami several times at his local Muslim youth center, which used to be an Italian banquet hall. Rami is full of "joy and purpose" whenever he talks about the last year of his life, during which "he has finally found himself" through Islam. The only thing that could improve his life, he says, would be marriage.

Resolutely on Rasha and Yasmin's side, Rami has clearly figured out his purpose in life: to spread goodwill through religion. Although adjusting to his father's absence was a traumatic process, it also showed Rami the power of religion, which he both latches onto for himself and wants to bring to others who might not see the depth, coherence, and beauty he does in Islam and the Qur'an.

Rami's other future plans are changing, however. His family cannot afford for him to go to medical school, so he is thinking about becoming a teacher or lab assistant; his father is getting out of prison soon, but is likely to be deported; his family might move to California, but he will stay in New York. He might spend a few years in Saudi Arabia and hopes his eventual wife will work, so he can dedicate his life to Islam—he sees da'wa as more important than the usual accouterments of success. But, for now, he hopes simply to spend more time at home with his family. He also loves mentoring children at the Muslim youth center—he feels like something of a father toward them.

With his newfound spiritual grounding, Rami seems poised to tackle his future challenges with both confidence and flexibility; he clearly looks forward to the future, despite knowing that it will bring challenges in the near term. Even though he expects to leave his family, it is clearly his central value, despite (or because of) his family's fragmentation by his father's incarceration. And he is clearly excited to start his own family—he already plays out surrogate father roles at the youth center and, contrary to stereotypes of Muslim gender roles, wants his wife to be the breadwinner.

A few weeks later, Bayoumi meets Rami in a "bleak, working-class neighborhood" on Church Avenue, where now Rami is going to lead prayer. Bayoumi watches from an overflow room downstairs; Rami talks, eloquently but a bit nervously, about coping with death and dying "with the Qur'an in your heart." Muslims should rebuild the Islamic world for themselves by "purify[ing] your hearts," he insists. At lunch later, he realizes that he "forgot a good ending!" He says that "you come into the world crying while everyone around you is laughing […] but when you leave this world for the next life, and everyone else is crying, you should be laughing."

Leading prayer is an important next step along Rami's pathway to becoming a religious leader; his manner shows that he is giddy to be living out his dream (if anxious to be speaking in front of so many people). The ending he forgot means both that people should try to live without regrets by focusing on what truly matters and that people should act virtuously so as to guarantee their place in the next life, so they have plenty to look forward to.

AFTERWORD

Bayoumi asks why Arabs and Muslims can never have the "breezy self-indulgences and creative self-inventions" so many Americans want for their children's youth; the War on Terror hangs constantly over their heads, embroiling their process of self-discovery in an atmosphere of "fear, suspicion, curiosity, and misunderstanding." Discrimination and violence threaten their families, careers, and day-to-day wellbeing; politics becomes personal, and Arab Americans are struggling to find a place in American society as well as shape the future of that society.

Bayoumi turns back to the general social trends his stories embody: for the most part, politics choose his subjects, rather than vice-versa. They are deemed threats and enemies to the world of normal, apolitical everyday life in the United States that they desperately want to join—but the early struggles they have not asked for also lead them to develop the wisdom, vision, and interest in the common good that Bayoumi sees as necessary to reverse the nation's increasingly exclusionary and paranoid model of citizenship.

It is unclear whether American society can accommodate Arabs and Muslims as equals—the public increasingly understands Islam and pursues a spirit of inclusion, but many continue to see them "as enemies living among us," including, most dangerously, politicians and law enforcement officials. Arab Americans' fate, like that of African-Americans a century ago, is (in W.E.B. Du Bois's words) "a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic."

Bayoumi insists that Americans hold themselves to the highest moral values of their "great republic" and measure its success by how it treats the most ostracized; the challenge is not believing in liberty, justice, and equality in the abstract, but extending those values concretely to those seen as enemies and outsiders.

There is a much longer history of Islam in the United States than most realize: many West African slaves were Muslim, and Arabs have been migrating to the United States for centuries. Recalling this history, Bayoumi notes that Manhattan's Washington Street becomes "Little Syria" in the late 19th century; its inhabitants are mostly merchants, but they face discrimination and racism, like many other ethnic groups.

Americans' limited understanding of Arab and Muslim American history prevents them from seeing the diversity of people and stories that fit under those labels; during these earliest migrations, being Arab or Muslim scarcely made a difference (people were still enslaved because they were black or excluded from normal New York society because they were non-European, but "Arab" and "Muslim" were not the central identities determining inclusion or exclusion).

The "second phase" of Arab and Muslim history in the United States lasts from roughly 1909 to 1944. The central question for the Arab American community is citizenship, which is reserved for "free white persons"—after a series of court cases, Arabs win the right to be considered "white." In 1942, a Yemeni loses his case for citizenship because he is Muslim, but in 1944, a judge overturns this precedent based on the notion that the United States needs friendly relations with the Arab world "so as to fulfill the promise that we shall treat all men as created equal." Of course, this really means that the United States wants to secure access to Saudi Arabia's oil, and for the first time "the exigencies of international politics changed the supposedly immutable facts of the Arab 'race.'" But, since few Arabs are still entering the country at the time, the decision has little effect.

This "second phase" demonstrates the extent to which American racism was explicit in previous citizenship policy, but also how the concept of race is and remains a flexible political tool: here, as judges debate whether Muslims can be "white" (which is as much about culture and history as skin color), they ultimately decide that the definition should revolve around American foreign policy interests. This, of course, has been the determining factor in Arab and Muslim immigration ever since, and discrimination and racism continue more quietly even if explicitly racist language has been taken out of the law.

Immigration laws loosen in 1965, abandoning the old quota system that gave more spots to Europeans. With the civil rights movement growing and the United States increasingly involved in Middle Eastern politics, American foreign policy truly becomes the most important factor determining "the parameters of Arab American life." In 1972, an Arab American civil rights attorney realizes that his communications are being monitored and sues the FBI. This also reveals that the government is doing a security check on every prospective immigrant with an Arabic name and spying extensively on the Arab American community. By the 1980s, the INS develops a plan to register and detain Middle Eastern nationals in the event of a war. The government also arrests eight student activists in Los Angeles, seven of them Palestinians, even though they have never broken the law and their activities are protected by the First Amendment.

While during the period of citizenship cases the United States used domestic policy changes to try and improve its foreign relations, during this period the directionality switches and the domestic surveillance of immigrants effectively becomes a branch of foreign policy. Bayoumi emphasizes that the security measures employed against Arab and Muslims after 9/11 were not in any way new; rather, they were applied in different ways and noticed more closely, especially because of the accompanying atmosphere of informal, popular racism.

In the 1990s, immigration courts begin using "secret evidence" in deportation cases, which (like the eight students' arrests) is unconstitutional to do to American citizens. All the immigrants faced with "secret evidence" are Arab or Muslim, a result of the interests of American foreign policy. While the United States declares that it is worried about Arab nationalism, it is really more interested in suppressing dissent about the American role in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

"Secret evidence" is unconstitutional because the Sixth Amendment protects, among other things, a defendant's right to know the nature of the charges, witnesses, and evidence against them. But citizenship becomes a bottleneck for whether one can claim the right to legal protections at all, the line between those who get equality and those who do not (which undermines the very principle of equality), because the government has decided that many of these constitutional principles intended to ensure fair trials only apply to citizens.

For the first time, after September 11, all Arabs and Muslims, "immigrant and citizen, activist and spectator," become subject to the same surveillance and loss of their rights, based solely on their group identity. Arab and Muslim Americans gradually lose civil rights thereafter: more than 5,000 people are detained immediately after September 11, including Rasha's family, and over 170,000 people are subjected to "Special Registration" in the following years, with nearly a tenth of them ultimately deported. Notably, "none of these policies produced a single terrorism conviction." The government has shut down "at least five major Muslim charities" despite no evidence of ties to terrorism; spying, indefinite detention, and "secret evidence" are now commonplace.

Bayoumi sees the unique danger of the post-9/11 American security apparatus as its rejection of the line between citizens and noncitizens (not that Bayoumi defends this line, either). The government determines whether people have fundamental rights based on race, ethnicity, and religion, which means that in effect nobody has fundamental *rights because anyone's can be revoked if the new "enemy" happens to share their background. Of course, Muslims have been the particular targets of this new general form, but their experience may be representative of what others can expect in the future, as constitutional protections and the presumption of innocence increasingly become flexible and revocable and the government continues treating people as guilty because it insists on their* potential *guilt (as the remarkable figure of* zero *terrorism convictions shows).*

American involvement in the Middle East has accelerated since 1967. The United States has backed numerous dictators, tried to seize the region's natural resources, and turned countries into "client states amenable to U.S. interests," sacrificing opportunity and self-determination for the masses. Palestinian self-determination is still the central issue at stake in Middle Eastern politics and the American involvement in the region. "Things have taken a decidedly imperial turn" since 2001, leading the United States to occupy nations much like European colonial powers once did.

Bayoumi sees a parallel shift in American foreign policy: although in the past it pursued power for itself (and threw all moral considerations out the window) by simply meddling in other countries' political processes, elections, and wars; now, the United States simply cooks up an excuse and unilaterally invades countries it does not like. Sovereignty, like citizenship, is no longer holy. This is the same principle—might makes right—on which the Israeli occupation of Palestine is based.

In her landmark book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, political philosopher Hannah Arendt writes about "the 'boomerang effects' of imperialism," the way that empire pollutes domestic politics. The treatment of Muslim and Arab Americans since 2001 is a version of this—not only in terms of, say, Americans' widespread acceptance of torture, but also with the legal codification of indefinite detention (even for American citizens) and "secret evidence," the growth of wiretapping, and the spread of racism in official and unofficial realms alike. This "menaces the foundations of American society." But this book is largely about young people's insistence on preserving their freedom, their communities based on fairness and compassion, and the values of equality and intergroup harmony. This reminds Bayoumi of a multiethnic Brooklyn block party, "of everyone for everyone and by everyone."

In citing Hannah Arendt, Bayoumi is not mincing his words: with its newfound disregard for the civil rights it theoretically protects, the Untied States is on the path to (at least potentially) becoming an authoritarian, militarized state of the same sort it has so virulently and publicly opposed since Nazi Germany (but, when convenient, also supported in Latin America). And yet, against the creeping threat that American racism begins to dominate American inclusivity, Bayoumi closes by reminding the reader that the government is only part of the equation: there are also the people themselves, both inside and outside the state, both inside and outside this book, who value and fight for what is being lost. He ends with an image of the United States' promise, the coexistence of diverse communities that is already a reality in Brooklyn, but now increasingly a reality under siege.

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