

Chapter 30. Beyond the Headlines: A Muslim Professor in the USA

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As a Muslim teacher, I tend to bring as much of my identity and positionality as it is necessary to clear any misconceptions or misunderstandings about Muslims. In first year composition courses, teachers generally leave a room for students to choose a movie of their own interest to watch and review. I chose a movie called *The Citizen*. This movie narrates the story of an immigration-lottery-winning Lebanese immigrant who arrived in New York on the eve of the infamous event of 9/11. Ibrahim, the protagonist, goes through a cascade of hardships and troubles. He was arrested as a suspect of 9/11 terroristic event, thrown into jail, toughly interrogated, but was, several months later, released; however, he had hard time finding a job after seeing stores owned by Muslims being vandalized and seeing Muslims changing their names in order to be able to get hired. In his long quest to attain citizenship, Ibrahim was stereotyped for his brown skin-color, ‘accent’ in English, and religion as a Muslim. Eventually, Ibrahim was successfully able to take the oath of allegiance and became a citizen of the United States of America.

I challenged my students to review this movie critically and to reflect on their own—probably invisible—biases, understanding, and perception of immigration, people of color, religious diversity, and discrimination. To my surprise, most of my students, who were at the time freshmen, liked the assignment and liked how they were challenged. However, some of them walked to me and said, “I don’t know what I can write.” Some others questioned the meaning of “critical” in such a review. When I started reading students’ submissions, I got to know much of their own personal life stories: Some were immigrants, some from immigrant parents, some had a Muslim relative, and some were even Muslims but told nobody in class. They only revealed in the assignment. Other students talked about their own “ignorance—” as they named it—or biases or practices that might be harming others.

Reflecting on my own positionality, I realize that my identity as a Muslim teacher profoundly influences my approach to teaching. Having personally experienced anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiment, I understand the importance of addressing and challenging such biases in the classroom. My decision to select *The Citizen* was not merely an academic choice but a reflection of my own journey and the struggles I have witnessed within my community. By sharing this part of myself with my students, I aim to create a learning environment where diversity is acknowledged and respected.

It is my Muslim identity that fuels my passion for such transformative educational practices. By integrating my personal experiences and perspectives into my teaching, I hope to inspire my students to become more aware, compassionate, and socially responsible individuals.