

# re.act

## A LOVE SUPREME

CONFRONTING ISLAMOPHOBIA AND  
CREATING SPACE FOR ALLYSHIP



POST-CONVERSATION  
TRANSCRIPT

**COMMUNITY**  
**CONVERSATIONS**

AN OMA/CPGC COLLABORATION

# A Love Supreme

## Confronting Islamophobia and Creating Space for Allyship

*re.act: Community Conversation Series*

*Sponsored by the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and Center for Peace and Global Citizenship (CPGC)*

Monday, Feb. 13, 2017

CPGC Cafe, Stokes 104

### SESSION OVERVIEW

Have you heard Islamophobic rhetoric in class, at the dorms, or with family? Are you often unsure how to respond? Join Prof. Sofia Fenner as we learn more about Islam and strategies for standing up in the current political moment. Allies and Muslim voices are welcome.

### [re]CC COMMITTEE

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### COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

- Prof. Sophia Brenner, *Political Science, BMC* FACILITATOR

### GUIDING QUESTION(S)

- What are the ways Islamophobia shows up when we are with friends and family?
- How can we engage those in our own circles to acknowledge and address our collective Islamophobic habits?

## SESSION NOTES

### WHAT ACTUAL QUESTIONS DO WE HAVE ABOUT ISLAM? (Group Writing Activity)

- What are important things to know about the unique muslim community(ies) in Philly?
- Why is there a perception that women are not equal to men? What would be the best way to address this?
- Why is it controversial for women to wear veils/burkas in Europe and the United States? What does wearing one mean? Are there different meanings and contexts?
- What is the history of Islam in the US? How did the US mainstream think of Muslims (in America & abroad) before 9/11?
- Are there more or less marginalized forms of Islam?
- For Muslims who emigrated to the US, how has your identity been impacted/changed since moving here?
- What is Sharia Law?
- Is wearing a niqab vs. hijab based on different Muslim legal schools, interpretations or customs?
- How might other faiths help in the understanding of Islam?
- What is the difference between the Nation of Islam and Islam?
- What is your favorite part about being Muslim? What makes you proud to be Muslim?
- What kind of exegetical arguments do Imams have about the Q'uran? Do practicing Muslims (non-scholars) have access/interest in that discussion?
- People often think I'm Muslim and greet me as such. How do I respond without being disrespectful? - I don't identify as Muslim.
- How do I talk about Islamophobia at the dinner table?
- What is the leadership structure of Islam? (e.g. clergy or centralized role)
- *There are different forms of Islam, with different clerical hierarchies or lack thereof. You can change your school of thought throughout your life. There are scholarly arguments in each school of thought, but also power for those who are less educated to make their own decisions and make decisions based on their context (Sharia law).*

## WHAT CATEGORIES MIGHT WE USE TO HELP UNDERSTAND HOW TO CONFRONT ISLAMOPHOBIA AND OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION?

- *Empathy*
  - ACTIVITY: Pick a picture of a Muslim woman from the screen and write about how you think that person is, from their personality to their identity
    - The pictures are of three women from Kuwait's parliament
      - Iranian street style--Amina Wadud, author of a feminist interpretation of the Koran
      - Woman dressed in Niqab--identifies as a communist protesting against the Muslim brotherhood
      - Zahra Nemati, Iranian Olympic athlete
- *Empowering Ourselves with Information*
  - It can be hard to navigate getting factual information when you want to be an ally to the community.
    - How do you know the right time or the right person to ask?
    - How do you know the information is correct?
- *Narrative Approach to Countering Islamophobia*
  - One way to change minds is to tell a different story
  - Battle of the Story for Islamophobia (Worksheet)
    - Brainstorm what you hear
    - Organize your thoughts
      - How does it tell a status quo story?
      - How can you tell a new story with conflict, characters, imagery, envisioning the future, and assumptions?
    - Distill
      - How do you make it into a short story for everyday conversations?
    - Practice
      - Roll play an intervention

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- *Battle of the Story for Islamophobia* (Worksheet)
- Concrete Strategies to Promote Xenophilia in Xenophobic Times (Worksheet)



**Battle of the Story for Islamophobia**  
(adapted from a widely circulating template)

When we counter Islamophobic rhetoric (or any other kind of inaccurate, hateful, or problematic thinking), we are countering not just facts (or “facts”) but narratives: entire stories about how the world works and why. In order to be persuasive, we need to replace one narrative with another. “The Battle of the Story” is one way to work toward that goal.

While we will not be able to tell everyone our entire new story, we can use it as a resource for developing shorter messages consistent with our overall aims.

1. **Brainstorm:** What have you heard people say or watched people do in public space that you see as Islamophobic? Were there particular instances in which you wanted to intervene but didn't know what to say or do?

2. **Organize your thoughts:** How do those specific instances derive from a status quo narrative about Muslims? What could a counternarrative look like?

<b>ELEMENTS OF STORY</b>	<b>STATUS QUO (ISLAMOPHOBIC) STORY</b>	<b>NEW STORY</b>
<p><b>Conflict</b> How is the problem being framed? Who or what is the conflict between? Are there “good guys” and “bad guys?” What’s at stake?</p>		
<p><b>Characters</b> Who are the characters in this story? Are there aggressors? Victims? Who are the messengers that tell this story? Do they get to speak for themselves or is someone speaking on their behalf?</p>		
<p><b>Imagery/Show, Don’t Tell</b> What powerful images does the story provide? Are there relevant symbols or specific examples that embody the story?</p>		
<p><b>Envisioning the Future</b> How does each story show us the future? What is the vision of what the world will be like if we resolve the conflict successfully? What if we fail to resolve the conflict?</p>		
<p><b>Assumptions</b> What are the story’s unstated assumptions? What does someone have to believe to accept the story as true? What values are reflected in the story?</p>		

3. **Distill:** How might elements of your counternarrative be distilled into shorter messages or incorporated into everyday conversations?

4. **Practice:** Role=play an intervention with a partner! Stay in character for as long as you can, then break character and debrief afterwards. How did you feel? How did your partner feel? What would you do differently next time?



## Concrete Strategies to Promote Xenophilia in Xenophobic Times

- ❖ Consider **donating time or money** to immigrant rights, refugee relief, and legal aid organizations. Look for *local* organizations in your region – the national ACLU has already received millions of dollars since the inauguration. In Philadelphia, consider the New Sanctuary Movement, HIAS, and the local branch of CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations). MSF (Doctors without Borders) is always a great international choice.
- ❖ Learn about the infrastructure of **immigration law enforcement** in your area. Are there detention centers nearby? Have Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) been active recently in your area? Be alert for breaking news and opportunities for rapid response actions. Learn what immigrants' rights are in case of an ICE raid.
- ❖ **Find out who your neighbors are!** What major immigrant or refugee groups have settled in your community over the years? What have their past experiences been? What led them to choose your community? What struggles did they face in their home countries, and what struggles are they facing here?
- ❖ Work to **open channels of communication** with immigrant communities in your area. Start by looking medical, social service, and charitable organizations that work with those communities. Your connections may be indirect at first. Work to make them more direct over time.
- ❖ Many mosques, Sikh temples, and other religious institutions that cater to immigrant communities will do **tours** on request or meet with curious people (look on their websites). These are brave offers – take advantage of them! Be friendly! Ask what kind of support they need. In some cases, mosques dealing with security threats welcome non-Muslim volunteers to sit outside at night or prayer times. These gatherings can be fun ways to get to know Muslims and allies in your community.

- ❖ **Learn the histories** of the seven countries singled out by the new Executive Order: Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Libya, and Sudan. Be able to find them on a map. Know the history and legacy of American intervention in their politics. Learn the names and stories of their poets, dissidents, artists, and scientists. Listen to music and read literature from these parts of the world. Share this information whenever you can.
- ❖ **Support people here on student visas.** Many colleges and universities have community organizations to support and welcome international students. Get involved with one. Have students over for dinner.
- ❖ If you or someone in your family is an immigrant, please **tell people you trust when you need help.** Give us a chance to fight alongside you.
- ❖ **Learn about the history of nationalism** and the nation-state, dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia. Learn to recognize nationalism and nationalistic assumptions even in their subtler guises. Work to release your advocacy from those assumptions.
- ❖ **Be alert in public space.** Look out for your fellow humans on subway platforms, stairwells, and street corners. Be vigilant. Intervene or speak up if you see someone being harassed, bullied, or intimidated. Share the burden of staying safe. You can get trained in intervention by a program like Green Dot. <https://www.livethegreendot.com/>
- ❖ If you **speak another language** and have some privilege to protect you, speak that language in public. Call your Polish grandmother at the airport, or speak Greek to your dad on the train. Fill public space with languages other than English. Make it normal. Cover for people who may not have another option.