"WHERE ARE THE MODERATE MUSLIMS?": FRAUGHT MUSLIM
POSITIONALITIES IN POST-9/11 NEW YORK

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how the ongoing repercussions of the September 11, 2001 attacks on The World Trade Center ("9/11"), and the haunting legacy of the Twin Towers' collapse, have affected the religious subjectivities, identity positionings and spatial perceptions of American Muslims living in New York City. Anti-Muslim conservatives continue to perceive Islam as an inherently extremist political system and cynically ask, "Where are the moderate Muslims?" In this framing, Muslim Americans are often de-Americanized and treated as outsiders in the United States—a narrative that was exacerbated during Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Based on 24 months of fieldwork, my dissertation analyzes, first, how Muslim New Yorkers navigate the suggestion that religious moderation among Muslims is a rarity and that Islam is antithetical to liberal democratic values. I show that while some reject the use of "moderate" in Islamophobic discourses, others position themselves as moderate and progressive Muslims using particular religious interpretations and practices (especially those emphasizing gender egalitarianism and LGBT inclusion), as well as civic engagement, public events, and other forms of political action. My analysis also pays attention to the spatial dimension of Muslim New Yorkers' senses of self, first in relation to ongoing surveillance by the NYPD, and secondly, in relation to the World Trade Center. Using examples such as the highly controversial "Ground Zero Mosque," it shows how Muslim subjectivities are embodied and spatialized through affective relationships with certain places.

Lay summary

This dissertation examines how the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on The World Trade Center has affected the identity positionings of Muslims in New York City. Anti-Muslim conservatives perceive Islam as an inherently extremist political system and cynically ask, "Where are the moderate Muslims?" Here, I analyze how Muslim New Yorkers navigate the suggestion that religious moderation among them is a rarity and that Islam is antithetical to liberal democratic values. I show that while some reject the use of "moderate" in Islamophobic discourses, others position themselves as moderate and progressive using particular religious interpretations and practices, as well as civic engagement and other political action. I also analyze the spatial dimension of Muslim New Yorkers' positionalities in relation to NYPD surveillance as well as the World Trade Center. Using examples such as the controversial "Ground Zero Mosque," I show how their senses of self are closely linked to their senses of place.

Preface

This dissertation is original work by the author. The research presented here was conducted by the author independently, with approval by the University of British Columbia's Research Ethics Board (#H12-00576).

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Acknowledgements

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Dedication

To my parents, my husband, Aedd and Nye.

Introduction

On November 8th, 2016, Donald Trump was elected president of the United States. His election was the culmination of a long presidential campaign that derided Muslims, Mexicans and other minority groups. After two hours of what was an otherwise sleepless night, I was awakened by a text message from a friend, who asked, "How are you doing?" This question was clearly about my being Muslim under a Trump presidency. Similar messages followed by phone, email and social media throughout the day. It was as if someone if my family had died and people felt compelled to offer me condolences.

Two of my Muslim friends, including Sonya (Chapters 2 & 5), took a sick day from their jobs so that they could cry all day. Sonya described the previous night as "the longest panic attack I've ever had." At work, a quarter of my students were absent from class. Among those who were present was a mix of apathy, contentment and long-faced despair. In Seattle, Portland, New York City and other urban centers, young people took to the street in protest, burning American flags and effigies of Trump.

The rest of the day, I vacillated between avoiding media and turning to it for any clues about how we might empower ourselves in a situation where it was not just Trump who won, but also many of his xenophobic, homophobic and misogynistic supporters. But not everyone shared the anxiety I felt as a Muslim. Some of my peers on social media described living under the new leadership as a mere inconvenience that paled in comparison to the plight of people who had for years lived under drone strikes in Muslim countries. They regarded Hillary Clinton as a war hawk, mocked her throughout the day about her loss, and reveled in schadenfreude. Meanwhile, others began sharing horror stories of minorities and women being attacked by bigots who presumably felt validated and emboldened by Trump's winning.

Shaun King, a reporter for the *New York Daily News,* spent every minute of his evening sharing such accounts under the title, "Donald Trump. Day 1." At a high school in Central Florida, a bathroom wall read, "Y'all black people better start picking your slave numbers. KKK 4 Life. Go Trump." Swastikas appeared on the window of a Philadelphia store with the words "Seig Heil, Trump." In Queens, a group of white, high school girls embarking a bus and asked their Hispanic peer, "Aren't you supposed to be sitting in the back of the bus now? Like Trump is president!" Of course, there were stories involving Muslims also. For instance, a University of Mexico Student whose classmate pulled her *hijab* and joked about her throwing grenades at him (Quintana 2016).

To say the mood was frightening would be an understatement. Trump's win buttressed the voices and perspectives of dangerous racists and homophobes. For many people, the dread surrounding the election had as much to do with losing faith in their fellow citizens as it did with having an unqualified bigot in the nation's highest office.

Shocking as it felt to have Trump win the presidency, his victory in November 2016 was, in part, the culmination of a long process of growing Islamophobia in the United States, which has gained intensity since September 11, 2001. While Republicans are seen as the primary architects of the War on Terror and related Islamophobic policies, the precedents established by President Bush between 2001 and 2008 were held up and expanded under Barack Obama's presidency.

It was in fact almost seven years earlier, in the beginning of the Obama administration, that I first felt the Islamophobia that eventually helped propel Trump to power[1]. In February

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[1] A 2016 Reuters/IPSOS poll looking at broad views on Islam found that 58 percent of Trump supporters held unfavourable views on Islam (See Reuter's July 2016 article, "Republicans, Democrats sharply divided over Muslims in America."). Another poll, conducted by the Texas Politics Project suggested that 76 percent of

of 2010, on a flight from Kansas City, Missouri, to Seattle Washington, I was physically

attacked by a man who (correctly) assumed that I was a Muslim. Sitting next to me, he felt

provoked by my writing a letter to my grandmother in Urdu, a South Asian language that

closely resembles Arabic. "I don't want you near me," he said in a cool, disdainful monotone.

I was taken aback. He kicked my leg away from him, and slapped my hand off our shared

armrest; he grabbed me by the arm and shoved me against the airplane's window. The other

passengers squirmed in their seats, slack-jawed but otherwise unresponsive. After my

protesting and a tepid intervention from a stewardess, the man stopped. He then opened the

novel he had been reading to a moment in the plot that depicted Muslims as anti-American

ingrates who did not appreciate President George W. Bush's gestures of tolerance toward

them. Holding the page at an odd angle toward me, he "read" it for a bizarrely long time in

what was quite obviously an attempt to send me a message about Muslims. Months later, I

would recognize the novel, *Vale of Tears,* as one written by Congressman Peter King, who

was head of the Homeland Security Committee and the infamous "Homegrown Terror"

hearings (Chapter 1).

When I disembarked in Seattle, my mind was clouded with emotions I could not

articulate. A constellation of bruises had developed on my arm. I lacked the common sense to

call airport security, and did absolutely nothing to help myself. I simply wanted to go home. I

spent the next two days with a tight sensation around my chest—rage—fantasizing about

having punched the man when I had the chance, but not knowing how to practically rectify

the situation or hold him accountable. I wrote an angry letter to the airline. Clarity was slow to

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Republicans supported Trump's proposed ban on Muslims entering the US (See its June 2016 report "Banning
Muslims from Entering U.S."). An August 2016 poll by the Pew Research Center found that 65 percent of
Republicans considered terrorism a "very big problem," which likely drove anti-Muslim views among Trump
supporters (See the Pew Research Center's "Clinton, Trump Supporters Have Starkly Different Views of a
Changing Nation").

creep in, but it did. I knew that the man's actions rose out of political affects; that there was "something in the air," as I explained to my friends, which compelled him to behave as he had. What, exactly, was in the air? When and how did it get so big, so ugly? How were other Muslims dealing with such madness? I knew I had to deconstruct, write about and address the currents of Islamophobia galvanizing people in the United States and other parts of the world, which reached beyond my personal life and impacted many others', and which remain a matter of serious concern. This dissertation is a product of that realization.

Here, I examine the effect of Islamophobic policies and discourses on the everyday lives and spatial perceptions of American Muslims living in the place that has epitomized the origins of the War on Terror: New York City. During my fieldwork between 2012 and 2016, it was clear that September 11[th,] 2001 attacks ("9/11"), in which Al Qaeda terrorists flew three airplanes into the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan and the Pentagon in Washington DC, continue to haunt and affect people living in New York. Those most traumatized are certainly those who lost loved ones in the attack or who were near the collapsed towers.

Talat Hamdani is a woman from Queens, New York, whose son died in the World Trade Center. She remained so shaken that she never discussed many details about the day with me. I also met those who did not lose a loved one but were nonetheless deeply affected by the event. One woman, who addressed LaGuardia Community College students during a 13th anniversary commemoration of the attacks, blinked back tears. She wanted to impart the seriousness of the event to the students, who were toddlers in 2001 and learned of 9/11 mainly through family stories and mainstream media. "Everybody remembers something about that

day. For me it's the paper," she said, describing the unsettling image of countless pieces of office paper coming down from the World Trade Center and floating into the Hudson River.

Yet I also met or saw many people who drew on the affective impact of the attacks to generate expressions of hatred against Muslims. During the 15th anniversary of the attacks, for instance, I witnessed how one pilgrim to Ground Zero held up an American flag and passionately spouted opinions against Hillary Clinton. He specifically claimed that she would grant Syrian refugees asylum in the United States and thus invite more terror attacks. He was a middle aged, white man, who wore a vest covered in patches that displayed his political leanings. "TRUMP 2016" read one. Another was Special Forces patch that said, "Kill 'em all and let God sort 'em out," harkening back to the Vietnam War and now presumably referring to those perceived as enemies today.

Fig. 1: The pilgrim at Ground Zero, 9/11/2016.

While anti-Muslim sentiment certainly predates 9/11, American citizens of Muslim backgrounds have since drawn exceptional suspicion and anger from many of their non-Muslim counterparts. As in the case of the man at Ground Zero, many Americans view Islam as an inherently extremist political system[2]. One of the most important outcomes of this discourse is that the very idea of a "moderate Muslim" is seen as an impossibility or a contradiction in terms. This is why conservatives often ask ironically, "Where are the moderate Muslims?", implying that moderation in Islam is a rarity. The question is this dissertation's title because it so often haunts American Muslims in New York, who increasingly position themselves as moderates, or more commonly, "progressive." In so doing, they seek to deflect the suspicions projected onto them while also favouring egalitarian interpretations of Islamic texts that challenge patriarchal and homophobic norms and, in turn, thwart reductive views of Muslims as misogynistic, violent, or otherwise backward. Yet, as I show, the concept of "moderate Muslim" has also exacerbated xenophobic trends and their capacity to further stigmatize some American Muslims.

Because senses of self and place are inseparable from each other, in this dissertation, I also analyze how Muslim New Yorkers navigated the city, how particular places (such as the area surrounding the 9/11 Memorial or the "Ground Zero Mosque") were perceived by them, and how they navigated the mainstream perception that these places were associated with "Islamic fundamentalism." As I will show later, there are several places in the city in which Muslims continue to be haunted by 9/11 memory and the Islamophobia that manifests in its name.

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[2] Rather than viewing it as a religious system open to the interpretation of Muslim actors, many Americans speak of Islam as a living entity with an autonomous will to command and control—when they insist that "Islam says" this or that, for example. But as Islamic Studies scholar Hussein Rashid notes, Islam is not a person; it is a tradition constituted of believers, or Muslims, who are continuously engaged in discussions about what Islam is about. For more on this, see Rashid's 2015 piece in *Sacred Matters,* "'Islam' is not a Person."

Field Sites and Methodology

As of 2015, there were 600,000-1,000,000 Muslims and at least 285 mosques in New York City, according to Journey Data Center (2015), a nonprofit organization that documents religious traditions throughout the city. The number of New York mosques and associated communities are staggering—far too many to adequately cover here.[3] The thing to note is that the proliferation of Muslim populations throughout the city has translated into the emergence of diverse theologies, religious interpretations, practices and lifestyles. These variances challenge oversimplifications about Muslims that depict them as homogenous and Islam as uniquely backward and violent. They also complicate the prevalent ideal of *ummah,* that is, a global Muslim community that unites across racial and ethnic difference (Karim 2009). In reality, Muslim New Yorkers come from various ethnic, economic, sectarian backgrounds, which are reflected in a spectrum of religious and political beliefs.

For instance, during preliminary fieldwork I conducted in the summer of 2012, I found that Harlem's 125th Street was lined with Nation of Islam vendors selling a brand of Islam entwined with Black pride rhetoric. Per their religious beliefs, these (male) vendors generally did not look female patrons in the eye. Just a few blocks away stood the now-closed Aqsa

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[3] In this dissertation, my focus is on the ethnographic present. For a thorough picture of American Muslims past and present, see Kambiz GhaneaBassiri's *A History of Islam in America* (2010) and Yvonne Haddad's (ed) *The Muslims of America* (1991). Because the oldest Muslim population in the US is rooted in the transatlantic slave trade, and because black Muslims now make up the largest demographic of American Muslims, the importance of understanding African American Muslim history cannot be understated. See Sylvaine Diouf's *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (2013), Richard Turner's *Islam in the African-American Experience* (2003), Aminah McCloud's *African American Islam* (1996), *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), and Jonathan Burns' 2016 article, "Investigating Muslim ethnicity on Pennsylvania's Colonial Frontier," to name a few.

Mosque, which was regarded as conservative due to its demographic of new immigrants and their patriarchal practices. In Brooklyn, at Masjid at-Taqwa, the popular Imam Siraj Wahhaj's teachings could also be characterized as conservative, for instance, reflected in his belief that women and men should not shake hands unless married.

Around the city, there were clusters of Muslims who deprioritized particular religious rules and rituals, and emphasized an "essence of faith" approach instead (Chapter 2). Park51's prayer space, for instance, drew on the Quran to promote the idea that, "there is no compulsion in religion"[4]; that "it is much better to do one pious deed a day with love for God than prescribed rituals several times a day out of mere obligation" (personal observation). In addition, there were mosques and neighbourhoods that hosted Muslims of various religious persuasions, with some being more or less conservative than others. Such examples certainly challenged essentialized views of U.S. Muslims as monolithic, but unfortunately, did little to stop them.

I conducted fieldwork in New York City on an ongoing basis between the summers of 2012 and 2016, with a full year between 2013 and 2014, for a total of 24 months. The subjects of my research were worshippers, visitors, staff and board members involved in various mosques, Muslim community centers and non-governmental organizations in the city, such as the Park51 Community Center, the Council on American Islamic Relations' New York City chapter (CAIR-NY), the Cordoba Initiative, Muslims for Progressive Values-New York, and the New York City Progressive Muslims Meetup Group.

My main field site was the Park51 Community Center, which is the focus of Chapter 3. Famously named the "Ground Zero Mosque" by right-wing political commentator Pamela

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[4] See *Quran* 2:256

Geller, it was an Islamic community center located two blocks from the World Trade Center site on Park Place and Church Street. In 2009, it was named Cordoba House by cofounders Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and real estate developer Sharif El-Gamal, to invoke the model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims, Christians and Jews in 8th century Cordoba, Spain. However, the name offended conservatives who thought it referenced the Muslim conquest of Spain, and the center was renamed as Park51. Park51 became the topic of an intense and belaboured 2010 debate about the right of Muslims to build so close to the site of the 9/11 attacks. It provided a landmark moment in the history of Muslims in the United States, provoking important considerations about whether Muslims should feel collective responsibility or guilt in relation to 9/11, and issues of space and hallowed ground. The imam eventually removed himself from the project because of disagreements with El-Gamal, and the building was demolished in 2015. Today, the organization continues its vision to build a center in downtown Manhattan, while existing in a series of "floating spaces": that is, it runs its programs at various locations, such as mosques, churches, hotels and universities.

As I show in Chapter 3, Park51 responded to the backlash aimed at it by positioning itself explicitly as a "moderate" Muslim place. Its developers provided media statements explaining their anti-extremist stance as well as their desire to cultivate moderate Islam. They began community outreach through interfaith alliances, and hired a staff of interns and volunteers to run a public relations campaign on social media. I volunteered with the organization in the summer of 2012. Each week, staff members searched news, blogs and other media coverage related to Islam and Muslims. From these, we picked stories that showed Muslims were everyday Americans, and promoted them through Park51's social media pages. We included web campaigns such as "My Faith My Voice," in which American Muslims with a range of

ethnic backgrounds, accents, and attire were shown stating that they rejected extremism. The set of images ended with the tagline, "I am American. And I am Muslim." A print ad with a similar message showed a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf, juggling her duties as a busy attorney, wife and mother, obviously modeled after the image of modern, mainstream, and middle-class American women (Alsultany 2007).

The role of such media has been crucial in the emergence of an ecumenical, "moderate" Muslim positionality in the U.S., which includes Muslims with diverse theological stances and from all sectarian and ethnic backgrounds. Based on the efforts of Park51 and the groups I introduce next, the desire for an Americanized, mainstream form of Islam was obvious, and so was a distinct imaginary of an inherently moderate Islam as being key to the religious reformation sought by many American Muslims.

Another organization crucial to my research was the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), one of the leading Muslim advocacy groups in the United States. In addition to providing civil rights and legal support, one of its main goals is to make Islam familiar, and de-stigmatize Muslims, to the American public (for instance, on its website's "About Islam" page, the faith is framed through similarities with Biblical traditions). The organization has chapters throughout the country, which organize civic engagement events, such as the Muslim Day at the Capitol discussed in Chapter 1, as well as annual banquets featuring prominent Muslim American speakers, press conferences to address incidents of terrorism and Islamophobic hate crimes, and other occasions geared at politically mobilizing American Muslims. Until 2014, the New York City chapter of CAIR was located in an affluent area along Riverside Park in Manhattan's Upper West Side. There, it rented a humble office inside an interfaith building on Columbia University's campus.

The organization is sometimes represented as a "terrorist group" by far right figures. These charges are rooted in the 2007 Holy Land Foundation[5] trial, during which CAIR and 300 other Muslim organizations and individuals were labeled as unindicted co-conspirators. While this particular issue was settled by the U.S. Court of Appeals and Department of Justice in CAIR's favour,[6] figures such as Pamela Geller continued to stigmatize the organization as a "terrorist front" representing "Hamas in the US."[7] In 2014, the United Arab Emirates released a list of 80 organizations it considered terrorist groups. For reasons still unclear, CAIR was blacklisted alongside the likes of extremist groups Boko Haram and Al Qaeda, as well as other ordinary advocacy organizations, such as Islamic Relief and the Islamic Society of Denmark, raising questions about the scope and purpose of the list. Outside of right-wing circles such as Geller's, however, rumours of CAIRs links to terrorism have largely been put to rest.

I observed and volunteered with CAIR's New York City chapter (CAIR-NY) between 2013 and 2015. The chapter was run by a single, paid employee—a Bangladeshi-American woman in her twenties who wore her passion for helping Muslims on her sleeve—and numerous interns and volunteers who worked under her guidance. At the office, the team could be found composing blogs or public statements, dealing with event logistics, doing the

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[5] The Holy Land Foundation, which collected humanitarian aid for Palestinians, was once the largest Muslim charity in the United States. The organization was shut down in 2001 by an executive order. Its directors, now known as the Holy Land Five, were accused of helping Hamas win the hearts and minds of Palestinians, and were convicted on charges of material support for terrorism. The treatment of the Holy Land Five is widely regarded as unjust by activists and civil liberties groups (Lennard 2012; Elashi 2012).

[6] The prosecutor in the Holy Land Foundation (HLF) trial admitted that the labeling was simply a "legal tactic" intended to allow the government to introduce hearsay evidence against the HLF later at trial (ACLU). The court also ruled that CAIR's inclusion on the list of co-conspirators was "simply an untested allegation of the Government made in anticipation of a possible evidentiary dispute that never came to pass" (2010, US Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit). In other words, it was a tactic of pre-trial maneuvering rather than an implication of guilt (CAIR website).

[7] For instance, one of Geller's infamous subway ads appearing New York City subway stations in 2012 concluded, "Hamas is CAIR in America."

tedious task of stuffing envelopes for donation mailers, or carrying out any number of other duties. Most of these young assistants were Muslim themselves, from African American, Afghan, French Moroccan, South Asian, Bosnian and other backgrounds. The CAIR-NY staff often acted as a tight-knit group of friends. They did not just share professional roles, but also had similar political priorities and viewpoints. They were personally invested in the social and political outcomes affecting Muslims, and felt a genuine connection to the organization's mission.

There were times when the office closed for safety reasons. These instances usually followed a high profile incident of Muslim extremism, such as the 2014 beheading of journalist James Foley by ISIS.[8] Death threats poured in through the telephone lines. I watched as the chapter director answered her phone, listened quietly for a moment, and then hung up. "Another one. Who are these people?" She grew exasperated and her family worried for her wellbeing. Working for CAIR was a demanding job that required representing New York's entire Muslim community, creating nation-wide political alliances, and organizing to publicly tackle each major incident of Islamophobia that takes place in the city.[9]

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[8] The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), The Islamic State, and Daesh (based on its Arabic acronym), is a multi-national terrorist organization that follows militant doctrine. It began with allegiance to Al-Qaeda, participating in the Iraq insurgency following the 2003 invasion of the country by the US. It gained infamy in 2014 after taking control of Mosul, advancing its claim of being an international caliphate, destroying Middle Eastern heritage sites, and publicizing gory images of executions and other brutality. Today, ISIS exists well beyond Iraq and Syria, and counts countries such as Nigeria, Pakistan, Libya, and Egypt among its provinces (see *The New York Times'* piece entitled, "Where ISIS Has Directed and Inspired Attacks Around the World).

[9] In just the period between August and September 2016 an imam and his assistant were murdered in Queens, a Bangladeshi woman was stabbed to death in Queens, two Muslim women walking with their children were physically attacked in Brooklyn, and a Muslim woman shopping in Manhattan was set on fire. With the exception of the case involving women with children, none of these incidents were treated as hate crimes by the NYPD, but were nevertheless suspected of being so by many Muslims I observed.

I also spent significant time with the Cordoba Initiative, a New York based Muslim organization founded in 2004. It is headed by "rock star imam"[10] Feisal Abdul Rauf, who gained popularity, first, after publishing the book *What's Right With Islam: A New Vision for Muslims in the West* (2004), in which his main argument is that Islamic values are not at odds with "the West," but fundamentally support the core principles of pluralistic and free society. Then, in 2009-10, he gained national notoriety as one of the planners of Park51, mentioned above. Rauf has Kuwaiti and Egyptian origins, as well as roots in New York City's Muslim community. His father, Muhammad Abdul Rauf, helped found the Islamic Cultural Center of New York, the first[11] mosque to be built in the city. The Cordoba Initiative's main goal was to improve "Muslim-West relations" and to act as a "leading voice on moderation" in Islamic practices (Cordoba Initiative website). These were causes that Imam Rauf felt would decrease both Islamophobia as well as extremism among Muslims; he passionately addressed them in books, lectures, op-eds and other publications. Rauf is important to my work not only as one of the Park51 planners, but as a major figurehead in conversations about moderate Islam.

I was introduced to Rauf in the spring of 2014, and met him shortly thereafter at his office, which was located in the same building and next door to CAIR's. A soft-spoken figure in his 60s, he had the face of a gentle grandfather and the demeanor of a politician. He was a busy man, juggling appointments and deadlines, delegating tasks to his assistant. He was also very cautious; he required that our interview be recorded by his staff, and guarded himself behind a wall of formalities. I understood his apprehension. After all, the Park51 controversy had been disastrous, and Islamophobes such as Geller had dragged his name through the mud. They

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[10] Rock star imams are those who have gained celebrity status outside their own congregations and localities, often attaining national fame. Imams Feisal Abdul Rauf, Khalid Latif, Shamsi Ali and Suheib Webb are a few such examples discussed in this dissertation.

[11] Mosques predating the Islamic Cultural Center were not originally built as mosques, but existing buildings that were acquired to function as religious places.

looked for every opportunity to disparage him and sent informants to his Friday sermons with the hope of catching him preaching something controversial that might provide fodder for a sensational blog or news story. This continued for at least as long as the media would allow Rauf to be remembered as the "Ground Zero Mosque Imam."[12] Having just met me, the imam limited his responses to stances he had already taken publicly, essentially repeating the points made in his books. He explained how he worked with a group of like-minded Muslim scholars from around the world to come up with moderate forms of Islamic governance. He also shared how he had created the Shariah Index Project, which ranked different Muslim nations' compliance with Cordoba's standard of religious moderation.

When I met him, Rauf was focused on "creating an American-Muslim identity," which, he told me, would be "wholly American and wholly Muslim." He imagined this as an inevitably "moderate Muslim identity." While not without merit, such an imagining of what constitutes "American" or "moderate" Islam nevertheless ignores the reality of a highly diverse American Muslim population, and erases its heterogeneity. While correctly observing that many second generation youth felt isolated in their neighourhood mosques, which usually reflected the cultural norms and values of the first generation, the Imam's vision of American mosques marginalized new immigrants; it was unclear how it would ever accommodate the constant flow of newcomers from Muslim countries, whose cultural particularities coloured their religious practice in ways that were not commensurate with Cordoba's vision of "American Islam." Furthermore, the Cordoba Initiative positioned "Muslims" in a problematic dichotomy with "the West," and inadvertently reproduced the troubling

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[12] This reference to Rauf was used by right wing and conservative websites.

expectation that Muslims[13] could not be fully American unless they adopted a particular form of religious practice deemed acceptable by Western standards.[14] Cordoba Initiative and Imam Rauf's ideas about moderate Muslims are discussed further in Chapter 2.

In addition to the organizations mentioned so far, I frequented the Islamic Center of New York University (ICNYU or "The IC"), a religious center for Muslims living in the New York City area. Despite its location in New York University, its congregation was comprised not only of the university's students but also of a great number of non-students that simply identified themselves as "Community Member" when signing in to the building. Its membership was comprised overwhelmingly of middle-class South Asians and Arabs, but its mission was to advance Islam and a sense of community in a way that accommodated people from all cultural backgrounds and at every stage of spiritual development. It did this not only though religious services such as Friday prayers or Ramadan worship, but also through weekend hikes, running clubs and other social activities.

During my fieldwork, Khalid Latif, a Pakistani American in his early 30s and another rock star imam, headed the center. Known for his friendly and charismatic style, his majority-youth congregation related to him not only as their mentor but also as a peer. Additionally, he served as the Muslim chaplain for the NYPD. Outside his religious roles, he was an entrepreneur who owned a local restaurant and gift delivery shops. He also served as a member of Mayor Bill de Blasio's Task Force to Combat Hate, which dealt with Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, and anti-Sikh sentiment and crimes. Like Imam Rauf, whose

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[13] Catholics and Jews in the United States were historically subjected to similar suspicions, in which their loyalty to the country was constantly questioned. For the most part, such rhetoric has faded with time. For more, see Peter Gottschalk's *American Heretic: Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and the History of Religious Intolerance* (2013).
[14] Rosemary Corbett discusses some of these issues in her book, *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service and the "Ground Zero Mosque" Controversy* (2016), in which she argues that Rauf inadvertently reproduced the age old pressures on American religious minorities to comply with dominant (specifically Protestant) frameworks.

involvement with the U.S. government is discussed in Chapter 2, Latif has also served as a consultant to the State Department.

Latif was not merely a religious leader but a political one, too, who used religious discourses about Islam's tradition of social justice to keep his followers involved in the American political process. For instance, he took part in the October 2016 campaign, My Muslim Vote National Khutbah Day,[15] in which Muslim leaders across the nation dedicated their Friday *khutbahs* (sermons) to the importance of voting in the 2016 elections. In addition to mobilizing local Muslims toward civic engagement, Latif regularly addressed social issues and ills within the community, such as domestic violence and other forms of patriarchy. As I discuss further in Chapter 2, these positions complemented expectations of what constituted a moderate religious practice. The Islamic Center had a clinical psychologist on staff, who, like Latif, was there to help Muslims struggling with all kinds of issues: tensions between second generation youth and their parents over interfaith marriage, or dating and other taboos, for instance. Latif and the ICNYU are discussed further in Chapter 2.

Progressive Muslims shared many of the values and positions of other moderate and liberal Muslims. In New York City, I maintained a close relationship with two groups whose members identified as progressive. The first was Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV). MPV was founded in 2007 to provide "tolerant understandings of Islam" (MPV website), which denounced patriarchy, homophobia and other forms of inequality and exclusion. This, it believed, would challenge Islamophobic stereotypes of Muslims as resistant to liberal ideals, while also addressing injustice and extremism among Muslims. The organization

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[15] The campaign was led by MPowerChange, a grassroots, digital coalition of Muslim activists and their allies "working together to build social, spiritual, racial, and economic justice for all people" (MPowerChange website). Its projects usually focus on Islamophobia, particularly in the spheres of media, politics and governance.

created what it called "judgment-free" meeting spaces for Muslims who felt uncomfortable or unwelcome in mosque settings, which were frequently places of gender separation in which an individual's clothing, religious practice, ways of life, or other characteristics might be policed by community members. MPV's mission statement described it as, "a faith-based, grassroots, human rights organization that embodies and advocates for the Qur'an-based values of social justice and equality for all, for the 21st Century."[16] MPV frequently used passages from the Quran to make the same point as Imam Rauf: that Islam is inherently egalitarian and progressive.

The group formed after the disbanding of the Progressive Muslim Union (PMU), a liberal organization with a similar mission, comprised of both secular[17] and religious Muslims. MPV was founded by two former PMU members, Ani Zonneveld and Pamela Taylor. Zonneveld, a Malaysian-American woman who has found a relative amount of success in both progressive Muslim circles as well as liberal politics, now heads the group alone. I met her during the group's annual retreats in 2012 and 2014, as well as a two of its New York City chapter (MPV-NY) meetings. When I first heard her speak at the 2012 retreat, she framed MPV as an effort to both destigmatize Muslims after 9/11 and also to reform Islam to be more egalitarian and inclusive of all people.

At the retreat, Zonneveld outlined the groups principles, which were: (1) collective identity, that is, accepting all who identify as Muslim as such; 2) including a wide range of people in conversations about equality, that is, affirming the equal worth of all people

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[16] This is an interesting statement, for while the Quran certainly is geared toward social justice—helping the orphan, fighting against injustice, etcetera—it also excludes certain groups from the banner of equality: women and prisoners of war, for instance. It may be for this reason that MPV, a group that views the Quran as a divine but also historical text, added "for the 21st Century" as a qualifier.
[17] Individuals who identify as Muslim due to ancestral and cultural ties, but who are agnostic, atheist or indifferent to religion.

regardless of race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.; (3) separation of religious and state authorities; (4) freedom of speech; (5) universal human rights; (6) gender equality; (7) LGBTQI inclusion; (8) critical analysis and interpretation of religious texts; (9) compassion, and (10) diversity. Zonneveld viewed these principles as being firmly grounded in the Quran, which indeed supports them in some places, though it also contradicts them in others.

MPV did the important work of explicitly spelling out principles of humanity, equality and inclusion. Through these, it created places in which many Muslims—particularly younger generations—felt free to be themselves. For instance, at chapter meetings and prayer services, women were not required to cover their hair and could cover as much or as little of their bodies as they pleased, without being chided by others; LGBT members could be open about their sexual orientation without fear of judgment; Muslims could feel free to bring along their non-Muslim partners without being separated from them, as they often were in mosques requiring gender separation, or having their union scrutinized or condemned by fellow Muslims.

While MPV was constructive in these ways, it was restrictive in others. Zonneveld perpetuated troubling ideas about what constituted a progressive Muslim, which, for instance, excluded those Muslims who looked and sounded foreign. These neo-orientalist views attracted like-minded individuals and trickled down to group members, who often espoused them during monthly meetings.[18] Chapter 2 details the fieldwork I conducted with MPV-NY—the group's New York City chapter, which is comprised mainly of highly educated, middle-class South Asian youth. In that chapter, I show that, like the "moderate" category,

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[18] While Zonneveld was publicly engaged with roles in the UN and as a contributor on popular websites such as the *Huffington Post*, MPV's New York City chapter was mainly a small discussion group in which topics such as gender inclusion and LGBT acceptance in mosques were considered.

"progressive" is also a fraught concept burdened with ideas about assimilation, inclusion and exclusion.

The second group of progressives that I developed a relationship with was the New York City Progressive Muslim Meetup. This is an online group on Meetup.com, through which Muslims organized, registered for, and attended events over the course of my fieldwork. When I first attended one of its gatherings in 2013, the group had already existed for several years and had seen several changes in leadership. The main organizer, Abby, was a white convert in her early thirties who was well connected in local Muslim circles and participated in high profile events, such as Mayor Bill de Blasio's *iftar* (Ramadan dinner) and Pope Francis' 2015 talk at the World Trade Center. She was also close to Khalid Latif and was an active participant at the ICNYU, where she helped organize and host many events.

Abby estimated that the Meetup Group had been formed sometime around 2004-2005, and told me that it was mainly a discussion group inspired by the Progressive Muslim Union mentioned above. She explained that it had "transformed over the years" since she joined it in 2008, and that it "used to be more civically engaged but now it's more about finding that home… like a support group" for like-minded Muslims. When asked what she meant by "like-minded" and "support group," she told me,

> …the group functioned in a way as a supplement… outside of what was going on in a mosque. Where you could have conversations about politics—about tantalizing topics—without feeling admonished, and without feeling like you couldn't be heard. There were several people who would bring up these conversations about women's rights or women being allowed in the mosque, and they would get shut down by their families. So it was an open forum for

people to be able to express their opinions freely. Now… there are a lot of

groups [like it] that have come out, like Mipsters.[19]

It was clear that the Meetup group's mission overlapped with that of the city's only other

progressive Muslim group, MPV-NY. In fact, their membership overlapped too. The Meetup

group was much better established and far larger than the fledgling MPV chapter. It had 1,400

online members compared to MPV-NY's 620 Facebook members, and approximately 20-30

regulars who frequently showed up for events, compared to MPV-NY's handful of regular

attendees. Almost all of MPV-NY's core members had attended a Meetup event at some

point, if not regularly. Yet there were distinctions between the two groups, and even tensions,

particularly when it came to strategies for creating inclusive spaces for women and LGBT

Muslims, and their approaches to mixed gender prayer. These differences will be discussed in

Chapter 5.

The Meetup group hosted many social gatherings, such as poetry readings, potlucks and

discussions on social justice topics, such as charity in Islam and what it means to be

progressive. It also sponsored a weekly Quran discussion, which focused on progressive

interpretations of certain verses, a topic I discuss in Chapter 2. Finally, it organized religious

services, such as Eid holiday prayers and Ramadan dinners.

In addition to observing and spending time with the groups described above, which had

relatively high profiles, I also habitually attended services at mosques in Manhattan (Harlem

and Midtown), Queens (Astoria) and Brooklyn (Bedford-Stuyvesant or "BedStuy"). More

often than not, these were small places that catered to members of the neighbourhoods in

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[19] Mipsters is short for "Muslim hipsters," and is a vast group of Muslim millennials who, like progressive groups, foster critical conversations about religion, politics and culture. These conversations take place through email listervs, in-person gatherings and social media. Mipsters gained notoriety in 2013 when a small group of them released a controversial video, "Somewhere in America," which focused on young fashionistas in hijab.

which they were located, with Harlem and Bed Stuy mosques predominantly catering to African-American members, mosques near Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue to Arab immigrants, Queens mosques to working class South Asian immigrants, and so on. Some of the better-known houses of worship that I visited were the Islamic Cultural Center of New York City and Masjid Malcolm Shabazz in Harlem, Masjid at-Taqwa in Brooklyn, and Masjid Usman in Midtown Manhattan.

I met most of my research participants through the places I have just described, and invited them to share their thoughts and ideas with me. I collected 10 life histories in order to gain a deep understanding of the their experiences of being Muslim in America. To gather these, I used open-ended interviews with men and women of different ages and cultural backgrounds, as well as participant observations of everyday practices and collective events. The majority of participants (6 of 10) were young, American-born Muslims in their 20s and 30s, who were more active in moderate and progressive Muslim circles than were older Muslims or first generation immigrants. I explored how they were affected by changes in mainstream attitudes toward Muslims since 9/11.

In addition to long-term research participants and others with whom I had arranged formal interviews, I learned enormously simply by navigating the city. I lived in Manhattan's Upper East Side, just north of the 59th Street Bridge that connected it to Queens. It was an area that included major transit hubs and tourist attractions, which resulted in a constant flow of people. Being a pedestrian, I gleaned knowledge through my daily movements, walking about my neighbourhood, standing on a subway platform, or sitting on a train, picking up tidbits of conversation, seeing political ads, graffiti, and so on. I also had countless everyday, chance encounters with Muslim New Yorkers: the Bangladeshi "uncle" who sold fruit on my street,

the Pakistani taxi driver who drove me to my wedding, the West African street vendor who sold seasonal items in the Upper East Side, and many, many others. My own Muslim and South Asian background greatly facilitated my rapport with them as well as with research participants. It also allowed me to participate regularly in communal events such as Friday prayers and Ramadan dinners. I am a native speaker of Hindi and Urdu, and have conversational fluency in Punjabi, languages that are spoken by a significant portion of diasporic Muslims in New York City. Although most of the people I met were fluent in English, my fieldwork was nevertheless made easier by my linguistic background.

My interviews and observations focused, first, on what people thought of the distinctions between "moderate" and "fundamentalist" Muslim groups, what they meant by these categories, and what they thought of the trajectory toward a "moderate" public face for American Islam. The interviews[20] explored these questions by asking how participants viewed the 9/11 attacks as well as events such as the War on Terror, the attempted bans on Sharia in the U.S., or the widespread NYPD surveillance of Muslim places throughout New York City. I also explored the contention between groups of Muslims on topics such as religious rituals and gender separation in mosques. Regarding uses and views of space, I examined what people thought of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, how they felt navigating different areas of the city, and whether they felt that in some areas they are subjected to more forms of discrimination or racial-ethnic profiling than in others. I also examined the production of religious places by Muslims as sites where ideals of egalitarianism and religious moderation were embodied. Finally, I analyzed political initiatives, protests, parades, interfaith alliances,

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[20] Once I transcribed the interview and observation data, I used the NVivo program to identify common themes that could be analyzed or linked. An examination of the relationship between these themes was used to give direction to my work.

and other forms of action that pushed for a non-threatening or moderate group image, or otherwise attempted to change the dominant, Islamophobic narrative about Muslims.

I conducted participant observation in informal, personal spaces as well as collective settings. I developed close relationships with several people I interviewed for life histories,[21] and visited them at their homes and workplaces, attended religious services and political events with them, and otherwise socialized. I observed as individuals went about their everyday routines of family and social life, work, and worship. To observe larger groups, I attended public events, which included functions such as the MPV-NY summer retreat, Ramadan dinners at various mosques, monthly vigils that were held at the city jail in support of Muslim men in solitary confinement, and the annual Muslim Day Parade. During my observations, I paid close attention to the bodily uses of space and to the ways in which particular ideas, values and interpretations of Islam were deployed in different places, and also to the ways in which 9/11 memory affected people's demeanors and actions.

Additionally, I remained aware of dominant media messages, which continually unfolded and played a large role in the dissemination of Islamophobic messages, and subsequently, in shaping American perceptions of "moderate" and "fundamentalist" Muslims. To illuminate this connection, I begin each chapter with a relevant instance of media discourse pertaining to 9/11, Islam and Muslims. Finally, I conducted research on the history of Muslims in New York City through mosque archives and through initiatives such as the Muslims in New York City project at Columbia University.

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[21] Participants chose their own pseudonyms for inclusion in this dissertation.

Theoretical approach

This dissertation examines rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States by integrating questions of religious identity, citizenship, belonging, and place. My research draws from Edward Said's (1978) groundbreaking work on Orientalism, which he examines as a political discourse about "the Orient" that compartmentalizes the world into two halves which are defined in opposition to each other: the Orient/East and the Occident/West. The Orient is positioned as a distant other in relation to the West, and is rendered familiar through discursive enactments that stand as symbols for the entire region (Said 1978). Through this system of representation, Said has shown how Orientalism as a discursive technology creates the Orient as inherently violent, over (or under) sexualized, timeless, and backward. Such Orientalist demonizations go back to the French and British conquest of the Middle East in the 1800s but are reproduced through the writings of are currently represented by influential authors such as Samuel Huntington (1996) and Bernard Lewis (1990), who have framed Muslims as being inherently incompatible with the West.[22]

I also draw from an important body of work that, influenced by Said, has been critical of such orientalist vilifications of Islam. Mahmood Mamdani (2005), for instance, has critically dissected the mainstream dichotomy between "good" and "bad" Muslim, in which the latter are seen as resistant to modernity and possessing a near innate capacity for destruction and violence (Mamdani 2005, 17). Events like 9/11 are taken as a mere consequence of that violent essence. "Good" Muslims, on the other hand, are perceived as Americanized, secular, and removed from "hard-core" Islamic values. "Hard-core," "conservative," "orthodox" or

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[22] Huntington and Lewis' ideas are repeated in the work of contemporary anti-Muslim conservatives. Any number of books by Pamela Geller and her partner Robert Spencer's, such as *Not Peace But a Sword: The Great Chasm Between Christianity and Islam* (Spencer 2013), rely on essentializing differences between "Islam" and "the West."

"traditional" are concepts used loosely and interchangeably to describe Islam and Muslims. They are deployed by political commentators as well as by Muslims themselves (such as the MPV members mentioned above), and primarily refer to a patriarchal and homophobic theology, coupled with a steadfast practice of religious rituals and high levels of piety. Following Said (2002), Mamdani (2005) and Lila Abu-Lughod (2002), among others, have highlighted that a "good" Muslim-"bad" Muslim dichotomy does not account for the complex, shifting subjectivity of Muslim experiences, and the fact that secularism is indeed strong in many Muslim societies. I draw from these authors to think about how these Orientalist perceptions have shaped religious orientations among Muslims in the U.S., and particularly in New York City.

My study of the religious positionings of Muslims in New York City also builds on the work of scholars who examine collective forms of subjectivities, subject-positions and senses of self as open-ended, contested and contingent upon shifting historical experiences and fields of power (Anthias 2002; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Butler 1990, 2005; Hafen 2009). Judith Butler describes the messiness inherent in giving narratives of oneself, for one's sense of self is dependent on much larger and ever-shifting social contexts, which are fleeting and impossible to fully apprehend. Butler states that, "There is no 'I' that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence" and that the self is "already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration…" (2005, 7). This means that while individuals and groups may articulate their subjectivities as essentialized "identities," such identifications are tangled and complex, and are produced through daily performances and practices. Furthermore, they are political statements containing the assumptions and intentions of the people who make them (Boonzaier and Sharp 1988).

The concept of "identity" was commonly deployed as a concept by the participants in my research, showing that it remained a socially meaningful concept for them. However, as an analytical category, it risks minimizing the heterogeneity of research participants and overlooking the complexities of their senses of self. Floya Anthias (2002) makes a strong case for "positionality" as a heuristic device that better interrogates the layers of politics that encode identities. She succinctly defines positionality as referring to a "placement within a set of relations and practices that implicate identification and 'performativity' or action"; as a category of analysis that does not simplify processes of identification but considers "the lived practices in which identification is practised/performed as well as the intersubjective, organizational and representational conditions for their existence" (2002, 501-502). Along these lines, I view this dissertation as an inquiry not about a bounded "post-9/11 Muslim identity" but about the positionalities of diverse individuals who identify as Muslims in different and often diverging ways. It is an examination of the efforts, practices, relationships, assumptions, perceptions and feelings of Muslim Americans, of whom an increasing number have become invested in vociferously identifying as "moderate," and similarly, "progressive," while others have actively resisted such categorizations.

Since the issue of "moderation" in Islam is closely tied to ideas about secularism, I also draw from Saba Mahmood's examination of secularism's place in religious identity formation (2006, 2009). Mahmood has detailed efforts by the US government to "reform" Islam on a global scale through its War on Terror as well as the $1.3 billion Muslim Outreach Program (discussed further in chapter 2). These rely on a "secular" versus "fundamentalist" rhetoric, which is also used to reconfigure the sensibilities of everyday American Muslims suspected of leaning towards fundamentalist interpretations of Islam and posing a homegrown threat.

Those categorized as "moderate", she shows, were seen by the Bush administration as being most receptive to a "Western vision of civilization, political order and society" (Mahmood 2006, 342). What these Muslims and the U.S. government have in common is an interpretation of Islam as an abstract system of symbols and the Quran as a historical, not divine, text. These reformists aim, therefore, to put a critical distance between the text and the world (2006, 343). Mahmood contends that rather than promoting religious tolerance and separation of religion and state, Western secularism serves mainly to reshape Muslim subjectivities into a form that is commensurate with Western standards of liberalism and democracy, as well as the interests of the U.S. empire. Elsewhere, both Mahmood (2004) and Talal Asad (2003) show that this brand of secularism often leads to forms of exclusion that take away from our understanding of Muslims and render them "abstract citizens."

This also means that the very idea of Islamic "moderation," along with "progressivism" and "fundamentalism," is necessarily fraught, controversial, and open-ended. Many Muslims I met took issue with the fixed, mainstream image of "moderate Islam", which was based on highly contested religious and moral principles, such as not taking the Quran literally, understanding the *hijab* (a form of female veiling) as optional, or allowing the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslim men. As a result, I use terms such as "moderate Muslim," "progressive Muslim," "orthodox" and even "Muslim American" with trepidation. Like any other categorizations of Muslims, they tend to oversimplify the religious, cultural and political diversity found among Muslims in the U.S., as well as their ethnic, social, and economic variances. In this dissertation, then, I interrogate these concepts rather than taking them for granted.

Other recurring concepts in my research were those of citizenship and belonging, which, as Hall and Held (1989) point out, are key to articulating different political positions. This has certainly been when non-Muslim Americans challenge the place of Muslims in the U.S. on the grounds of their alleged foreign status, as well as when Muslims assert their place and rights as American citizens. In her 2009 ethnographic study, Louis Cainkar (2009) analyzes how the vilification of American Arabs and Muslims as pre-modern, fanatical, and associated with the 9/11 attacks has lead to a dominant perception of them as a cultural threat that de-Americanizes them. This perception has become institutionalized as the government itself violates fundamental laws to target Muslims in the U.S., expanding its power over them in the guise of public necessity. The most prominent example of this is the ongoing NYPD surveillance of Muslims in mosques, student associations, and other spaces (discussed in Chapters 1 and 5), which has taken place for years despite prohibitions against the investigation of political and religious groups without court authorization. In such an environment, many American Muslims live outside the boundaries of citizenship, in an area of indistinction that Agamben has called "the state of exception" (Agamben 2008). In this zone, 9/11 is treated as having forced an ongoing state of emergency during which any laws protecting them may be suspended in the name of national security.

My fieldwork found that Muslims in New York have responded to these conditions, in part, through coalition work and increased civic engagement. Cainkar and others, such as Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009), emphasize how the formation of partnerships among Muslim immigrants that challenges forms of exclusion has thrust them into previously unprecedented levels of civic engagement as citizens. This political participation allowed the Arabs and Muslims overall in their studies to realize U.S. citizenship in an active and personal

way, beyond mere legal rights defined on paper, and buttressed their assertions of belonging in the U.S.

Brettell and Reed-Danahay (2011) also address the role of political participation in cementing immigrants' sense of belonging. They note that citizenship is linked to an idea of belonging to a polity or civil community, and view civic engagement[23] as a form of "participatory citizenship" with formal and informal dimensions. In other words, belonging relies not only on formal participation in the political process—voting for example—but also on casual involvement in actions such as candlelight vigils, organizing press conferences, protests and so on. Participatory citizenship involves knowledge of how to take part in the public sphere and cultivates affiliation that motivates further participation. Through both formal political activities (citizenship in a strict sense) and everyday vernacular forms (citizenship in a broad sense), it helps immigrants move from periphery to center. However, the authors argue that it is through everyday life and practices, rather than through formal political ideals such as naturalization, that belonging is cemented. Citizenship is therefore not limited to the bounded terms defined by nation states, but understood, expressed and enacted in various ways (Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2008).

This dissertation focuses primarily on the informal citizenship practices of Muslim New Yorkers, such as Khalid Latif's campaign to encourage young Muslims toward political participation. It develops what belonging as Americans looks like and means to those who, like Latif, organize, build partnerships, deploy liberal ideals, and use the language of patriotism to demand inclusion. Particularly in chapters 1, 2 and 3, I show how "moderate" and "progressive" positionalities are used to articulate subjectivities and produce places that

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[23] The authors define civic engagement as the process through which people enter into and act in civic spaces to address public concerns (2011, 2).

straddle the perceived paradoxical positions of being Muslim and being American.

Muslims, like most Americans, are affected by the haunting legacies of the Twin Towers' collapse. 9/11 occurred over a decade and a half ago, and the World Trade Center site has since been paved over and rebuilt. Yet, as the dictum to "Never Forget" suggests, the attacks cannot be relegated entirely to the past. They continue a life through state policies and a carefully curated master narrative that depicts Muslims as outsiders and enemies. Informed by these narratives, 9/11 abides through individual and collective memories and affects. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) define affect as visceral forces beneath, alongside or other than conscious knowing, that drive us toward movement, thought and extension. They are pre-discursive sensations that can happen through passing and seemingly insignificant events, rise and fall through the rhythms of our encounters and sensibilities, and are linked to the body's potential to affect or be affected.

In his discussion of the Park51 controversy, Donovan Shaefer (2015) suggests that Islamophobia is not the well-reasoned discourse those on the right make it out to be. Rather, it is built on a cluster of affects, or "compulsions that guide bodies" (15) into inscribing and acting upon racialized religious boundaries. Put another way, it is a form of racialized hate with an affective dimension.

Islamophobes tap into and extend the emotional valence of 9/11 through anti-Muslim discourse, to perpetuate even more anti-Muslim discourse. Many Muslims in the U.S. are obviously affected by the torrent of slurs, microaggressions, racial profiling, and other tensions. As Shaefer notes, "racism is not just an abstract set of ideological propositions: it is a space where bodies grind against each other feeling the friction of the other bodies" (127).

He points out that, "Affects coassemble with ideological forms on every level: there would be no political sphere without he socializing affective twists of bodies" (128).

Islamophobia also has a spatial dimension in the city. Because orientalist tropes in New York City are strongly spatialized, around the former World Trade Center site, for instance, I draw on literature that has examined the social construction of space and the production of particular "senses of place" (Basso 1988, 1996; Casey 1996; Duff 2010; Gordillo 2004; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Lefebvre 1991). Space is relevant for my study because, first, media representations about the threat posed by Islamic "fundamentalism" are deeply grounded in particular places. As I show in Chapter 3, the World Trade Center site was imbued with new meanings immediately after its destruction, which positioned Arabs and Muslim New Yorkers overall as antagonists rather than constituents with equal rights to carry on their lives, including ritual practices, in the area.

Since the space of New York City has become strongly linked to memories of 9/11, this spatial dimension influences how Muslim Americans negotiate their religious positioning, and how they are seen by others in the city. Several research participants knew that the places they frequented, such as mosques, were under permanent NYPD surveillance and public scrutiny. Examining how people operated in and related to these places, and how they felt navigating different places in the city, was important in learning about their senses of self as Muslim Americans. Drawing on authors such as Lefebvre, I conceive of space as a material reality that is produced and reproduced through an intricate web of relationships, particular values and meanings, and people's practices, perceptions and positionalities in those places. In other words, space is more than physical; it is a thought concept, a feeling, an experience (Lefebvre 1991). Spaces are social products that "serve as a tool for thought and action" of both

individual and collective subjects. In particular spaces and places, these subjects "develop, give expression to themselves, and encounter prohibitions" (Lefebvre 1991, 33).

My perspective also sees places as immersed in "memories and expectations, old things and new things, the familiar and the strange…" (Casey 1996, 24). Places are processes that are "riddled with tension" (Gordillo 2004, 3) and they can be haunting. Avery Gordon describes haunting as a way of knowing that is more about feeling than seeing; "a practice of being attuned to the echoes and murmurs of that which has been lost but which is still present among us in the form of intimations, hints, suggestions and portents" (2008, x); "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely" (xv). According to Gordon, haunting is "tied to historical and social effects" (190) and is "a constituent element of modern social life" (7). It renders home unfamiliar, and is a frightening experience because it registers the harm done in the past or present. Peter Collins describes haunting as a "peculiar play of absence and presence," (2005, 99). Ground Zero is the most obvious example of a haunted space, for it is where enduring 9/11 narratives continuously invoke the absent Twin Towers and the lives lost with their collapse. Practically every sight and sound in the area is a potential mnemonic device that triggers memories of the attacks. The haunting sensation imposed on people at Ground Zero helps them mediate and locate themselves in the world, whether as Americans, as Muslims, as Christians, or what have you.

The other places I analyze in this dissertation, such as community centers, mosques and subway platforms, are also deeply shaped by memories and by social tensions, which include Islamophobic discourses and the constant scrutiny of Muslims by the police and the public. These places, historically made through "practice, fields of power and struggle, and networks

of social relations" (Gordillo 2004, 4), become locations where the terror of the 9/11 attacks is enmeshed with memories of anti-Muslim suspicion and backlash, and fear of state sponsored civil rights violations. Here, Islamophobia haunts its targets. This was evident in the way Muslims moved, spoke or otherwise behaved in certain places, where their social memories and bodily dispositions became inseparable. For example, I met those who felt the presence of the state surveillance even when they could not see any security apparatuses around, and modified their behaviours accordingly (discussing their politics only in whispers inside mosques, for example). I saw how memories can leave a mark on a subject's habitus (an acquired set of sensibilities and dispositions) that remains long after remembrance of the originating experience is gone (Gordillo 2004, 8). Rather than the sacred or secure havens they are intended to be, I examine mosques and other places around the city as fraught and potentially alienating for many of the people who visit them.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduces the rise of Islamophobia in the United States and the backdrop against which the various religious and political positionalities of New York City Muslims are formed. Using works by Deepa Kumar (2012) and Stephen Sheehi (2011), the first half of the chapter discusses Islamophobia as an ideological formation sustained by a multi million-dollar industry. It also explains the affective dimensions of Islamophobia, specifically, how this economy of hate produces insider/outsider distinctions (Ahmed 2004; Shaefer 2015) to marginalize Muslims. The second half of the chapter provides an ethnographic account of the ways in which New York City Muslims mobilized to confront anti-Muslim bigotry in the years after 9/11, but particularly from 2012-2016. Some of their methods included protesting

the incarceration of Muslim men held without charge in solitary confinement prisons, interfaith alliances, and an attempt to "change the [Islamophobic] narrative" about Muslims by publicly sharing their own experiences, and other civic engagement efforts.

The second chapter examines the religious positionalities of various Muslim New Yorkers. It begins with an analysis of public discourse surrounding "moderate Muslims," as well as the role of the U.S. government in perpetuating the concept as one that complements liberal democratic values and aids foreign policy agendas. It also discusses how research participants conceptualized and felt about the term. I also analyze self-identified progressive Muslims, and explore their perceptions of those they deem "traditional" or "conservative." The chapter elucidates not only how non-Muslims and state powers view Islam and Muslims, but also the reasoning and conflicts underlying in-group conversations about religiosity and how to best practice Islam.

Chapter 3 details the Park51 controversy and explores the lesser-known Little Syria district, which once extended into the area now known as the World Trade Center. It explains the cultural mediation of Ground Zero and shows how New York City's Muslim and Arab groups have asserted their belonging by claiming a space—the "sacred space" of Ground Zero—from which they are socially excluded. Chapter 4 continues the Ground Zero theme to discuss how the 9/11 master narrative has been sustained by the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, and how it has impacted Muslim New Yorkers' perceptions of, and relationship with, the World Trade Center space.

Chapter 5 examines the emotional geography of New York and reveals how many participants sensed a range of "safe" and "unsafe" places to be Muslim in the city. "Safe" was a place in which one felt free to look, act and speak as Muslim (using routine Islamic

expressions, such as "Inshallah" for "God willing"). On the other hand, an uneasy or "unsafe" place was where one felt self-conscious of one's status as Muslim. While the actual, physical freedom to move about the city was obviously granted by law, the sense of freedom was hampered in certain places, for instance, in the area surrounding the World Trade Center during the Park51 controversy. There, some people delivered stares and, less frequently, hostile remarks to Muslim passersby, feeling licensed to do so by the site's status as a "hallowed ground" that needed to be protected from perceived enemies. Chapter 5 also discusses how Pamela Geller's AFDI transit ads turned entire subway routes into lightning rods for Islamophobia. The campaigns not only triggered memories of 9/11 but, for Muslims in New York, were a persistent reminder of the hostile environment in which they lived. I end this dissertation with some final thoughts about Islamophobia, American Muslims and directions for future research.

In the years that I spent researching and writing this dissertation, there was a significant boom in scholarship on Islam and Muslims in the United States, including the concept of "moderate Muslims." What sets my work apart is its explicit focus on space and place-making, for as I show, Islamophobia has a haunting presence that is felt in particular places, and ideas about being "moderate" or "progressive" are not just discursive but highly spatialized.

I recognize that this work adds to critiques of moderate and progressive Muslims, as well as conservative Muslims who subscribe to patriarchal norms and are already vulnerable to being stereotyped as premodern and dangerous. Muslims of various persuasions acted as research participants and shared their time, homes and lives with me, and I remain grateful to them. My purpose is not to question the sincerity of their faith or to cast harsh judgment upon

anyone, but simply to present an account in which I neither cleanse the male-dominated paradigms of many Muslims, nor uncritically accept the supposedly liberal alternatives. I personally understand that the lives of Muslims in the United States are increasingly coloured, directly or vicariously, by Islamophobic experiences, and I empathize with diverse efforts to strive for inclusion and acceptance.

Chapter 1
"This, too, will pass": Muslim New Yorkers in Islamophobic Times

The damage and devastation that can be inflicted by Islamic radicals has been over and over –

at the World Trade Center, at an office party in San Bernardino, at the Boston Marathon, and

a military recruiting center in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Only weeks ago, in Orlando, Florida,

49 wonderful Americans were savagely murdered by an Islamic terrorist… we must

immediately suspend immigration from any nation that has been compromised by terrorism

until such time as proven vetting mechanisms have been put in place.

> --Donald Trump, 2016 Republican National Convention

Sarkar Haque stood with a black eye and a trifold American flag in his hands. An

assailant had viciously beaten the Queens shopkeeper in his store while claiming to "want to

kill Muslims." Now tearful, the Bangladeshi Haque deployed patriotic ideals of inclusion, and

emphasized to press cameras that, "This is America," and people's ethnic backgrounds should

never make them targets of hate. Haque's assault was one of the 19 serious hate crimes

against Muslims committed across the US between December 7 and 14, 2015, following

Donald Trump's comments about banning Muslims from the US (discussed later in this

section). In another New York City attack of the same time period, a sixth grader was

assaulted in school, and her *hijab* torn off, by boys who referred to her as "ISIS." Across the

country, in Seattle, Washington, 16-year-old Somali youth, Hamza Warsame, was dead. It

initially appeared that he had been beaten and thrown off the sixth story of a building near the

Seattle Central campus where he was an advanced student, and where I taught. Although his

death was eventually ruled an accident, the student body and faculty, like many people across the country, continued to suspect that Hamza was yet another collateral of Islamophobia.

The first half of this chapter outlines Islamophobia in the United States, particularly in recent years as fears of terrorism remain salient in the American collective consciousness. The fervor against Muslims in the United States is now so pervasive and erupts so frequently, that there were countless examples to draw from for this dissertation. The second half of this chapter provides an ethnographic account of Muslim New Yorkers who, like Sarkar Haque, often rely on patriotic discourse to challenge Islamophobia. Specifically, it discusses four ways in which they have responded to Islamphobia: Civic engagement, interfaith and other partnerships, changing the narrative, and reforming and propagating Islam.

Anti-Muslim hysteria in the U.S. once again erupted in November 2015, when the anger about Daesh attacks in Paris rippled across the Atlantic. French colours were projected onto skyscrapers across the nation in solidarity with the Western ally, and millions of American social media users applied a French flag to their Facebook profile pictures. Before they had the chance to move on to the next meme, the New York Post released its December 3, 2015 issue with the headline, "MUSLIM KILLERS" accompanying a photograph of victims from a shooting rampage committed by a Muslim couple in San Bernardino, California. The image circulated around social media in a viral fashion and continued more than a decade of concern about Muslim Americans' capacity for violence.

A week later, leading GOP Presidential Candidate, Donald Trump, claimed that Muslims in the United States should be made to carry special identification and proposed a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" (Trump Campaign, 2015), including American citizens and residents who traveled abroad. To justify such

exceptional treatment, Trump went on to say that the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II was a similar necessity. Many Americans immediately condemned his remarks, particularly Japanese[24] and Jewish Americans[25], for whom such talk harkened back to their own horrific wartime histories of being targeted, imprisoned and killed by state powers. Nevertheless, many citizens agreed with Trump that the United States is exceptionally vulnerable since 9/11 and, more recently, since the rise of Daesh in 2014. It was in the wake of Trump's remarks that Sarkar Haque, Hamza Warsame and other Muslims around the nation were attacked. Trump's supporters continue to believe that desperate times call for desperate measures.

Completely ignored in the commotion surrounding Trump's proposal was its impracticality, for identifying Muslim Americans to round up is no easy task. After all, what does a Muslim look like? If there is one recurring theme in this dissertation, it is the dizzying diversity of Muslims, who represent many ethnicities, belief systems and ways of life. Increasing numbers of African American, white, Latino[26] and Native American converts to Islam[27] especially complicate the idea that Muslims are phenotypically identifiable as Arabs and South Asians. Nevertheless, Trump's comments, which were echoed in the blatant Islamophobia of his Republican contenders, gained traction and provided license for a nearly unprecedented, public display of hatred toward Muslims.

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[24] See, for example, Kimberly Veklerov's 2015 article, "Formerly interned Japanese Americans stand up against Muslim hate." The most prominent criticism came from Japanese-American actor, George Takei, who had lived in a Japanese internment camp as a child, and described Trump's suggestion as "chilling" on his Facebook page.
[25] In a March, 2016 letter, Rabbi Marc Schneier of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (discussed later on in this chapter) wrote a letter to members denouncing Trump's proposed ban.
[26] See Patrick Bowen's U.S. Latina/o Muslims Since 1920: From "Moors" to "Latino Muslims" (2012) in *Journal of Religious History.*
[27] See the section on converts to Islam in Jane I. Smith's book, *Islam in America* (2010), pp. 66-75.

Islamophobia: Muslims as Enemies

The term "Islamophobia" is not new, as it can be located in public parlance as far back as 1910.[28] However, it has gained new popularity since a surge in anti-Muslim sentiment following 9/11. In the most basic terms, Islamophobia refers to a prejudice against Islam and Muslims, and particularly to fears of Islam as a political force. Some scholars[29] of Islamophobia have taken issue with this narrow definition, as it tends to explain anti-Muslim feeling primarily as a concern about Islam, rather than as the result of a long political relationship between the United States and Muslim majority nations. To paraphrase this argument, religion may provide vocabulary for the justification of terror, but global politics remain the driving force behind Muslim extremists' decisions to commit violence.

Islamophobia is frequently leveraged for political gain, and its capacity to permeate multiple layers of American society–government procedures and policies, media, citizenry– makes it much more powerful than an everyday fear. Rather than having a crippling effect on people as fears often do, Islamophobia enables and empowers those who benefit from it politically and socially (Kumar 2012). It is not a phobia in the ordinary sense of the word; rather, it is a deliberate, systemic, and profitable phenomenon.

In her book, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (2012)*,* media and Middle Eastern studies scholar, Deepa Kumar demonstrates that Islamophobia is a phenomenon that is consciously produced and deployed by ruling elites at specific moments. Along similar lines, Arab culture scholar Stephen Sheehi appropriately defines Islamophobia as an ideological formation:

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[28] See the April 2015 article, "Define 'Islamophobia:' The Right Word for a Real Problem," by Georgetown University's Bridge Initiative Team.
[29] For instance, see Robin Richardson's piece, "The Demonisation of Islam and Muslims: Concepts, Terms and Distinctions" in *Pointing the Finger: Islam and Muslims in the British Media* (2011, One world Publications).

Islamophobia is something… substantive, abstract, sustained, ingrained and

prevalent… an ideological formation…created by a culture that deploys

particular tropes, analysis and beliefs as facts upon which government policies

and social beliefs are framed. (Sheehi 2011, 31)

Sheehi's argument was substantiated by a 2013 report published by the Council on

American Islamic Relations (CAIR), which showed the inner workings of Islamophobia in the

United States. The report found that Islamophobia is a lucrative industry, produced and

sustained by 37 key groups whose main purpose is anti-Muslim campaigning. This cluster is

referred to as the "inner core" of the Islamophobia network. The list is lengthy, but some of

the more prominent groups include the Center for Security Policy, The American Freedom

Law Center, ACT! for America, American Freedom Defense Initiative, Middle East Forum,

Investigative Project on Terrorism, Jihad Watch and Atlas Shrugs.[30]

CAIR also reported that an additional 32 groups, whose primary objective is not to

create anti-Muslim sentiment, but which nevertheless reproduce Islamophobic rhetoric, form

the "outer core" of the network. These include Fox News, American Islamic Leadership

Coalition, the Christian Broadcasting Network—particularly Reverend Pat Robertson, who

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[30] It is noteworthy that the inner core groups overlap in funding and leadership figures. For instance, the Middle East Forum (led by writer and activist Daniel Pipes, who is discussed further in Chapter 2) provided over $1.2 million in funding for the Investigative Project on Terrorism; Pamela Geller and her partner Robert Spencer, who is another key figure in the "counter jihad" movement, run multiple projects, such as the blog Atlas Shrugs and the groups American Freedom Defense Initiative and Jihad Watch; and The Center for Security Policy's Frank Gaffney has actively promoted the American Freedom Law Center, which is responsible for the anti-Sharia movement discussed later on in this section (CAIR 2013). Gaffney, once a member of the Reagan administration, is an anti-Muslim conspiracy theorist who believes that a crescent moon on the Department of Defense's logo is proof of "official U.S. submission to Islam" (CAIR 2013). Instead of being marginalized for his outlandish views, Gaffney is well respected by many mainstream politicians. In March 2016, Republican presidential candidate, Ted Cruz, named Gaffney his foreign policy advisor. In November 2016, after Donald Trump won the election, Gaffney was briefly rumored to be a choice for the post of National Security Advisor.

endorsed Donald Trump for president. Also included are the Rush Limbaugh Show, and the *Washington Times* newspaper. Through tax documents, CAIR calculated that the inner core of the Islamophobia network generated well over $119 million from its work between 2008 and 2011, much of it doled out as large salaries to key Islamophobes who encourage the American public to fear Islam and Muslims.

CAIR's report shows that Islamophobia is not a phenomenon comprised of individual acts committed by fringe bigots. Rather, like many other forms of prejudice, anti-Muslim views are disseminated strategically and systemically. Through the work of both the inner and outer cores of the network, Islamophobia is put into lay terms and mainstreamed into the public as a common sense philosophy (Kundnani, undated). It is presented as a reasonable response to the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. In this paradigm, "fundamentalism" is an elusive umbrella concept representing "bad" Muslims. As Mahmood Mamdani has articulated, "bad" Muslims are conceptualized as potential terrorists due to their literal understanding of Islam. They are juxtaposed with "good" Muslims, who treat Islam as metaphorical and symbolic, and are therefore considered better suited to civic life. In this binary, "fundamentalist" becomes a category that lumps everyday, non-violent, conservative Muslims with the few who actually do tend toward political violence (Mamdani 2005). This view of fundamentalism echoes the "radicalization theory" of local and federal governments, which explains terrorism by correlating increased religiosity among Muslims with their politicization and capacity for violence.

For instance, ACT! For America's founder, Bridgette Gabriel, has claimed that, "Every practicing Muslim is a radical Muslim" and that "…a practicing Muslim who believes…the Koran...who abides by Islam, who goes to mosque and prays every Friday…

this practicing Muslim… cannot be a loyal citizen to the United States of America."[31] To offer another example, Air Force Research Laboratories revised a 2011 policy paper offering theories about Muslim radicalization (2015). One chapter in the report, "A Strategic Plan to Defeat Radical Islam" by author and political commenter Tawfik Hamid,[32] goes particularly far in conflating Muslim religiosity with a threat. While he distinguishes between violent and nonviolent Muslims, he refers to both as terrorists. The violent ones are simply called "active terrorists" as opposed to "passive terrorists," who are described as "moderate" Muslims that "decline to speak against or actively resist terrorism" (2015, 72). Moreover, Hamid identifies wearing a *hijab* as "contributing to the idea of passive terrorism" (72). He goes as far as to place "*Hijab"* alongside "Indoctrination Tactics" and "Anti-Western Propaganda" in a flow chart entitled, "The Islamist Terrorism Cycle." Together, these three categories flow into "Passive Terrorists," which in turn flows into "Active Terrorists" (73). Offering little more than anecdotal evidence, he concludes that, "Weakening the *hijab* phenomenon is pivotal to stopping the growth of Islamism at the ideological level" (74). Hamid then turns his attention to Muslim men, claiming that their "sexual deprivation" factors into their becoming suicide bombers (74). Such "Muslim fundamentalist" tropes are deployed routinely by Islamophobes to explain terrorism, excuse the marginalization of Muslim Americans, and justify violence against Muslim populations abroad.

While the major players in CAIR's report have right wing and conservative leanings, it is well established among scholars and activists who study Islamophobia that the phenomenon is not limited to any single political group, philosophy, media outlet, etc.

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[31] See the Southern Poverty Law Center's article, "Extremists to Address Anti-Muslim Act! For America Conference Next Week, dated September 3, 2015.

[32] Tawfik Hamid describes himself as a former member of an Islamic militant group, and a religious reformer. Using his "insider" status as a Muslim, he often buttresses Islamophobes. For example, see his support of presidential candidate Ben Carson's view that a Muslim should not be president (Hamid 2015).

Rather, Islamophobia in the United States is bipartisan and "an ideological phenomenon which exists to promote political and economic goals" (Sheehi 2011, 32). Anti-Muslim tropes are institutionalized to maintain state hegemony and are deployed equally by Democrats and Republicans, albeit in different discursive tones. Whereas prominent figures and ordinary citizens on the Right openly attack Muslims as "rag heads"[33] who subscribe to a "wicked"[34] faith, for instance, those on the Left[35] tend to reproduce the same demeaning tropes through a liberal veneer of critiquing Islamic fundamentalism as a threat to liberal values. Self-proclaimed "9/11 liberal" talk show host Bill Maher's Islamophobic comments, and the Obama administration's drone assassination program, are some examples of Islamophobia among American liberals that will be discussed further along in this section.

Islamophobia as we know it today is built upon classic Orientalist tropes described in the introduction (Said 1978), through which Arabs and Muslims are understood as pre-modern others in relation to the West. It is also built on the related history of politically charged anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment that long predates 9/11. That history, as Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg (2008) note, is "as old as Islam itself." According to the authors, it begins with Christian Europe's encounter with the Middle East in what is represented as a tidy battle between the two over resources, power and religious sites, but what in actuality involved much in-fighting among coreligionists who never stood as a unified Europe or Middle East. Throughout the conflict, Europeans, "came to negatively portray

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[33] For example, see the 2015 case of Maria Valdez, a French teacher in Florida, who used the term "raghead Taliban" to refer to her fourteen-year-old Arab student. She also had a history of calling him "The Taliban" and "Terrorista." (*The Express Tribune* 2015) "Teacher suspended in US for calling Muslim student a 'raghead Taliban.'")

[34] "Franklin Graham: 'Islam is a religion of war,'" By Ruth Gledhill, *Christian Today*, Dec. 6, 2014

[35] While the terms "Left" and "Right" are not well defined, in the American context, a "Right" leaning is identified with conservative Christian values and the Republican Party. "Left" is understood in relation to this as including various liberal values, such as those involving egalitarianism and multiculturalism, and is also used to refer to Democrats.

Muslims so effectively and so universally that the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslim' have come to inherently evoke suspicion and fear on the part of many" (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008, 4). These suspicions are perpetuated in the work of two prominent conservative scholars mention in the introduction, Samuel Huntington (1996) and Bernard Lewis (1990), who have framed Muslims as others that are in natural opposition with a more civilized West (Qureshi and Sells 2003).[36]

Arabs and Muslims in the United States have been conceptualized through particular, enduring tropes. Arabs have been racialized in contradictory ways since their arrival, with their status vacillating in and out of whiteness. Sociologist Louise Cainkar defines racialization as "the social processes by which groups of people are racially formed, that is, how they are constructed and understood collectively and positionally by the pairing of a set of imputed shared characteristics and associated phenotypic (or biological) traits" (2009, 65). In the late 19th Century, Arabs in the United States were labeled as "white", a category of identification still used by many Arab Americans today. This racial classification was assigned largely due to their ability to vote, own property and their socio-economic status in the U.S. However, a steady rise in nativist attitudes in the 20th century resulted in a perception of them as being "not quite white" (Cainkar, 2009, 74) and brought their right to become naturalized citizens into question. Arab and Muslim experiences with "race" have, therefore, been shifting and complex, but a history of their racialization is useful in showing how they came to be viewed negatively as a group; how these unfavourable perceptions, which have

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[36] These theories continue to penetrate American politics. For instance, 2016 Republican presidential candidate, Marco Rubio, rehashed Huntington's famous "Clash of Civilizations" thesis as an explanation of the Paris attacks. He claimed that the attacks were "…not a geopolitical issue" but a cultural one, fueled by Islamists "hatred" for Western freedoms and their desire to replace these freedoms with their faith. (Marco Rubio YouTube Channel)

become common sense, have been consistently linked to categories such as geographic location, hair type and colour, language, skin tone, and so on (Cainkar 2009, 67).

Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments have been closely linked with the history of US interventions in the Middle-East. A key moment in this history was the 1953 CIA-orchestrated coup in Iran. In 1951, Iranian premier Mossadeq was adamant that true independence could only be gained by abolishing British domination over the oil industry, which he sought to nationalize by "control over extraction, production and distribution" of oil (Abrahamian 2001). Britain turned to the U.S. for help. The U.S., fearing that Iran might fall behind the Soviet Union's Iron Curtain, organized the coup against Mossadeq and this led to the beginning of the pro-US Shah regime. The Shah's dictatorship was corrupt and unpopular and its presence brought an end to the nation's more secular parties and led to the rise of anti-US sentiments (Abrahamian 2001). This eventually led to the 1979 Iranian Revolution,[37] headed by religious leader Ruhollah Khomeini, who had acquired the title of Ayatollah (literally "evidence of Allah", a Shi'a Muslim rank given to experts of Islamic tradition) and went on to become the nation's Supreme Leader. Khomeini ushered in the rebirth of Iran as an Islamic Republic and believed that an Islamic revival across Muslim nations was a goal of the revolution - a unified Islamic bloc that was neither Eastern nor Western. In Iran, bans were placed on particular markers of Western culture, such as attire, film, and literature. This volatile period is also tied to the widely reported Iran hostage crisis, during which Khomeini supporters, protesting the Shah's entry into the U.S. for cancer treatment, held fifty-two American hostages for four hundred and forty-four days. The Ayatollah, with his robes, turban and signature scowl, was seen in the United States as the epitome of traditionalism and

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[37] The Revolution led to a wave of Iranian immigration to the United States and Canada, as described concisely by Bozorghmehr and Sabagh in their 1988 article, "High Status Immigrants: A Statistical Profile of Iranians in the United States."

Islamic fundamentalism; his image came to symbolize Islam, and all that should be feared and distrusted about it, in Western popular culture (Nasr 2006).

The Israeli-Arab Wars of 1967 and 1973 were also important events contributing to the rise of negative views of Arabs and Muslims, given the United States' support of Israel in its occupation of Syria, Egypt, the West Bank, Gaza and other territories. American media coverage of these wars repeatedly celebrated Israel's military gains, presenting Israel as a western, civilized nation fighting pre-modern and violent Arabs. The coverage created a "growing political and ethnic awareness in the Arab American community" about their increasingly stigmatized status (Cainkar, 2009, 84).

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the resulting conflicts continues to play a lasting role in sustaining anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States. Deepa Kumar (citing Max Blumenthal) outlines how in the early 2000s, a coalition of groups, such as the Anti-Defamation league and AIPAC, worked to address what they saw as too much of an increase in pro-Palestinian activity on college campuses. The intellectual support to validate the notion that such acts were un-American and anti-Semitic was provided by mainstream figures such as writer Martin Kramer (a student of Bernard Lewis), policy scholar and TV personality Fareed Zakaria (a student of Samuel Huntington), Daniel Pipes, and other neo-conservatives with much stronger ties to certain officials than AIPAC did. Kumar (2011) and Sheehi (2013) show how these influential anti-Arab and anti-Muslim propagandists have been successful in controlling public opinion and play a major role in preserving what Kumar has called the War on Terror brand.

The 1990-1991 Gulf War against Iraq and the more recent 2001 and 2003 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, respectively, further added to the perception that "Muslims" are the

main enemies of the United States, an image that was galvanized by the 9/11 attacks in New York City and Washington. Yet this demonization of Islam has hidden, first, that Osama bin Laden, mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, was himself a product of the U.S. project to arm *mujahideen* against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Secondly, this has also silenced that Bin Laden repeatedly argued that the horrific World Trade Center attacks were nothing but a response to the recurring US military interventions in the Middle East. As Bin Laden reflected in a news report:

> The events that affected my soul in a direct way started in 1982 when America permitted the Israelis to invade Lebanon and the American Sixth Fleet helped them in that. This bombardment began and many were killed and injured and others were terrorized and displaced… In those difficult moments many hard-to-describe ideas bubbled in my soul, but in the end they produced an intense feeling of rejection of tyranny… And as I looked at those demolished towers in Lebanon, it entered my mind that we should punish the oppressor in kind and that we should destroy towers in America… (Bin Laden, quoted in Al Jazeera 2004)

U.S. neo-colonial presence and influence in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries has been key in shaping mainstream images about Islam and its followers, as Edward Said has analyzed (Said 1981). These interpretations, which essentialize Arabs and Muslims as a collectivity characterized by religious fanatics, terrorists and high-risk citizens (Joseph 2011),

are then institutionalized as common knowledge among the non-Muslim majority and influences how it reacts to Muslims.

Following 9/11, Orientalist tropes were used with intensified zeal in the United States. One of the main ramifications of public alarm following the attacks was Americans' desire to cast out any suspected enemies through racial profiling. Subsequently, a diversity of ethnic and religious groups -- Sikhs,[38] Hindus,[39] Arabs, South Asians, and others -- were racialized as Muslims. Boiled down into a vague "terrorist" category, they were treated accordingly by their fellow citizens, who frequently admonished them and targeted them with violence. Indeed, the first person to lose his life in a post-9/11 hate crime was not a Muslim but a Sikh. Balbir Singh Sodhi was a gas station owner from Mesa, Arizona. Four days after 9/11, Sodhi was shot while planting flowers around his gas station. His assailant was a local mechanic named Frank Roque, who had allegedly ranted to others that he was, "going to go out and shoot some towel-heads" (Walsh 2003).

Islamophobic hate crimes declined in the years following 9/11, but soared again between 2009 and 2010.[40] This significant spike came after plans to build the Muslim community center, Park51, near the World Trade Center were revealed.[41] As I show in Chapter 3, the announcement was immediately followed by an increase in highly publicized

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[38] As the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) notes in its report, *Turban Myths: The Opportunities and Challenges for Reframing Sikh American Identity in Post-9/11 America,* 70% of Americans polled could not identify a Sikh man as a Sikh; about half of those polled associated the Sikh turban with Islam and believed that Sikhism was an Islamic sect. See also the Sikh Coalition's 2009 Report *Making Our Voices Heard: A Civil Rights Agenda for New York City's Sikhs.*

[39] Hindus around the United States are also targeted by Islamophobes. See the case of Sunando Sen, discussed in Chapter 5.

[40] Southern Poverty Law Center (2012) "FBI: Dramatic Spike in Hate Crimes Targeting Muslims."

[41] As Deepa Kumar (2012, 171) shows, however, Park51 was certainly not the first mosque to be targeted for eradication. The Islamic Society of Boston, for instance, was targeted earlier by The David Project, "a Hillel-funded organization founded specifically to influence campus debates on Israel" (170), which claimed that the center was funded by the Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Wahhabis, and was therefore a potential hotbed for terror. This was a landmark incident that set the standard for Islamophobes manufacturing alarm and launching crusades against Muslim centers around the country.

rhetoric framing Islam as a threat to the West, and Park51 was turned into political fodder for the midterm election season. Throughout the nation, many Americans reacted with protests and hate crimes targeting Muslims and symbols of Islam. Park51 served as the catalyst for a new wave of long-lasting, anti-Muslim xenophobia. Following the controversy, Pamela Geller, Park51's most outspoken opponent, won a court hearing allowing the erection of anti-Muslim billboards around New York City's subway system. The first set of billboards, which went up in September 2012, read, "In any war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man. Support Israel. Defeat Jihad." The campaign implied interchangeability between "Jihadi," "Palestinian" and "Muslim," rendering the three groups, again, into a vague category of "savage." Around the same time as the erection of Geller's signs, the anti-Muslim film *Innocence of Muslims* was also released. This low-budget production featured Islam's prophet Mohammad as a womanizer and pedophile, and triggered bursts of violence across several Muslim nations – violence that, back in the U.S., served to validate Islamophobic rhetoric.

The rise of ISIS in June, 2014, and its distribution of grisly, violent images through social media, ushered in an era of American Islamophobia not seen since the Park51 controversy. The usual suspects stirred the pot. For example, Pamela Geller launched a new subway campaign, including an ad that claimed, "Jew Hatred: It's in the Quran… End All Aid to Islamic Countries." The most provocative of the ads erroneously identified a British hip-hop artist and suspected ISIS recruit as the executioner, Jihadi John. In a split screen display, one frame showed the artist in a recording studio, while another showed the real Jihadi John with the late journalist James Foley, moments before the former beheaded the latter in a shocking display of violence. The caption accompanying the two images read, "Yesterday's

moderate is today's headline." The ads were carefully placed in some of the busiest train stations in New York City, including a major transfer station on 59th Street and Lexington Avenue, near my home. During this time, I watched passersby to see how they might react to the "Jew Hatred" advertisement placed above ground, just outside the windows of a famous and busy bakery. Nobody I noticed so much as glanced in their direction. In the bustling cityscape crowded with lights and signs, people rarely stopped to look at their surroundings. Above ground at least, it seemed that Geller's message had as much potential to be missed as it had to be noticed.

Fig. 2: People walk past one of Geller's transit ads and accompanying MTA disclaimer, 2015.

Despite being ignored, staunch criticisms and MTA bans, Geller was undeterred. By 2015, she had planned a "Draw Mohammad" cartoon contest in response to the Charlie Hebdo attacks, in which the French magazine's personnel were murdered by two Al Qaeda members seeking to avenge the publication's offensive depictions of the Prophet Mohammad. The event attracted the attention of two Muslim gunmen seeking to protect the Prophet's honour

with violence.[42] This in turn put Geller back in the media, where her anti-Muslim ideas were once again given a platform on mainstream channels.

Earlier that year, in February 2015, a man in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, murdered three of his young, Muslim neighbours in their home. Cable news coverage of the event reached far and wide, causing alarm all the way in Pakistan, where I first heard the news. News outlets widely reported the killer's motive as a simple "parking dispute." Given the well-known height of Islamophobia in the United States, this theory was met with skepticism by many people, including the Pakistanis around me. Even as it was revealed that the culprit had an immense disdain for religion and religious people, media, political commenters and ordinary citizens consistently played down the potential role of Islamophobia in the killings.[43] As evident in popular media and blogs, such as Fox News, Frontpage Mag, JihadWatch and Atlas Shrugs, the mocking and dismissal of concerns about Islamophobia is a recurring theme (CAIR 2013).

In June 2015, Donald Trump announced his candidacy for the 2016 presidential election. His platform to "Make America Great Again" was built upon the insecurities of many working class Americans, particularly their anxieties about changing religious and ethnic demographics. His campaign's fixation with Muslims and national security (including criminalizing discourse about Mexican immigrants) relentlessly stoked the xenophobic hostilities of a volatile public, which had been primed with over a decade of anti-Muslim messages.

The public's anti-Muslim frenzy is linked to media representations of Muslims as misogynists and instigators of political violence. In October 2014, television host Bill Maher

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[42] The gunmen were killed by responding police.
[43] See, for example, Greenfield (2015) "Terrorism Supporters Exploit Chapel Hill Killings" in *Frontpage Mag.*

got into a heated debate with one of his guests, actor Ben Affleck, about the essence of Islam.

When Maher derided the faith as, "the only religion that acts like the Mafia that will fucking

kill you if you say the wrong thing," Affleck responded with visceral anger and disgust,

calling Maher's views "gross and racist." The acrimonious nature of the argument elevated its

appeal for viewers, who circulated it heavily on social media. This instance was one of many

which showed the Internet's capacity to multiply the force of Islamophobia. Many Americans

took Maher's message very seriously. It resonated with conservatives, but also made it more

permissible for liberals to voice their latent Islamophobia. These people's discussions

revealed that liberal discourse can lend itself to Islamophobia just as easily as the racist

rhetoric of the Right, and basically echoed Maher's position that,

> We are not bigoted people. On the contrary, we're trying to stand up for the
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> principles of liberalism! And so, y'know, I think we're just saying we need to
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> identify illiberalism wherever we find it in the world, and not forgive it
>
> because it comes from [a group] people perceive as a minority… if you're
>
> liberal, stand up for liberal principles. I'm the liberal in this debate.[44]

Posturing as a defender of liberalism,[45] Maher has made his arguments against Islam by citing

instances of extremism and oppressive Islamic theocracies, and conflating these with vague

ideas about "Muslim culture" and "The Muslim World." These conflations bolster the

convictions of those who believe that Islam is essentially intolerant and violent, and that

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[44] Maher's response when asked about the Affleck debate in an interview with Elias Isquith of Salon.com.
[45] Specifically the core principles of liberalism such as freedom of speech, press, and religion, as well as gender equality, secular government and free markets. The commitment to gender equality, especially women's rights, is an element regularly invoked to castigate Muslims.

Muslims are simply unthinking followers of such a blueprint. Unfavourable public opinion

about Muslims then lends support to particular political agendas in which the US targets

Muslims domestically and abroad in the War on Terror.

In his book *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion,*

communications scholar, Maxwell McCombs, reminds us that the media sets agenda for

public thought and discussion, and that it communicates cues about the salience of certain

topics. In other words, the placement of a story in the newspaper, the size of the print, or the

mere mention of an item on broadcast news, convey the importance of an issue to audiences.

The daily repetition of "Muslim" and "Islam" related topics, then, sends powerful messages to

American audiences about their significance. None of this is to say that the public is

comprised of automatons that are simply "programmed," so to speak, by an all-powerful

media, but it is to note that media indeed play a key role in how we construct our realities and

worldviews (McComb 2004, 7).

The link between media and public perception is clearly demonstrated by The Fox

News Effect. In a 2012 study, the Public Religion Institute found "a strong correlation

between trusting Fox News,"—a channel linked to the outer circle of Islamophobia—"and

negative views of Islam and Muslims." While most mainstream channels reproduce

problematic stereotypes of Islam and Muslims, Fox News features a circle of demagogues

whose demonization of Muslims is unsurpassed by the other outlets. One such instance is

Glenn Beck's assertion that Islam is tied to the Antichirst[46]; another is Bill O'Reilly's claim

that Islam just "doesn't stack up" to the Judeo-Christian principles of the United States[47]; still

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[46] As seen on the February 17, 2011 episode of Beck's Fox News show.
[47] As seen on the September 22nd, 2015 episode of Fox and Friends, in which O'Reilly defends Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson's statement that he would be opposed to having a Muslim president because Islam is inconsistent with the U.S. constitution.

another is Sean Hannity's claim that it would be "suicidal" to allow Muslim refugees to settle in the United States.[48] In the aforementioned study, the Public Religion Institute found that 72% of Republicans polled, whose main source of news was Fox, believed that Islam was antithetical to American values. By contrast, among Republicans who subscribed to other news sources, only 49% found Islam at odds with American values. A significant number of Fox viewers—58%—also believed the canard that Muslim Americans were trying to establish Sharia[49] as the primary legal framework of the United States.

Increasingly negative public opinion about Muslims both reflects and enables the U.S. government's policies of systemically profiling and targeting them. As Evelyn Alsultany (2013) notes, the government's war propaganda resonated with citizens who were already on edge. Even the most ardent, anti-government, right-wing citizens trusted the government's policies as proof of Muslims' suspicious character, and eagerly espoused state officials' explanations that terrorists "hate us for our freedom."[50] These attitudes have allowed many Americans to accept a variety of civil rights infringements since 9/11, such as those I outline next.

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[48] As seen on the November 15th, 2015 episode of Hannity's Fox News show.

[49] In both the US and Canada, some Muslims have indeed advocated for courts to consider Sharia in cases such as inheritance, divorce, and child custody, with the understanding that local and national laws would have ultimate authority in such cases. For instance, see the 2004 recommendation written by former Ontario attorney general Marion Boyd in favor of arbitrations using religious law. Opponents of such motions have argued that religious laws could be used for harmful purposes, such as dominance over women. However, many American conservatives simply believe that Muslims are compelled to wage war against non-Muslims by establishing Sharia as the law of the land. For instance, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who said in 2010 that "Stealth jihadis" were "seeking… to replace Western civilization with a radical imposition of Sharia," and that "Sharia is a mortal threat to the survival of freedom in the United States and in the world as we know it." Also, presidential candidate Rick Santorum, who called it, "an existential threat to America." These views are echoed by countless right-wing figures and blogs, such as Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer's, and citizens. For more, see Doug Saunders' book *The Myth of the Muslim Tide: Do Immigrants Threaten the West?* (2012) and Heather Weaver's 2011 ACLU report, "Nothing to Fear: Debunking the Mythical 'Sharia Threat' to our Judicial System."

[50] This is a facile argument, born in American exceptionalism, to which bin Laden once responded with tongue in cheek: "If so, then let him [Bush] explain to us why we do not strike Sweden, for example." For more on this, see Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou's *Understanding al Qaeda* (2011, Pluto Press).

State Policy

The US Congress and Justice Department reacted to the 9/11 attacks by authorizing new powers for the federal government to stop terrorism, including the suspension of certain constitutional rights. In October 2001, for instance, President George W. Bush signed into law the USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism), which brought about fundamental changes to the legal rights of Americans. It expanded the authority of law enforcement to conduct surveillance and wiretapping, and to detain and deport those suspected of having ties to terrorists.

Law professor David Cole (2003) shows that the pattern of Cold War policies that singled out members of particular groups are repeated in PATRIOT Act provisions, which similarly allow the targeting, surveillance and deportation of Muslims. The United States has a history of marginalizing minorities through its legal system, particularly through immigration law. But because the treatment of citizens is thought to be more favourable than that of "aliens" (Johnson 2004), the public is at ease with the application of legal double standards to non-citizens. Cole shows, however, that such acceptance allows for the extension of the same penalties to US citizens. He cites the case of Jose Padilla, an American citizen who was arrested as an "enemy combatant" rather than a Prisoner of War, in 2002. A POW status would have accorded Padilla particular rights as decided by the Geneva Convention. Instead, the government claimed that he was "closely associated with al Qaeda," and held him for three and a half years without charge in a military prison, where his rights were completely erased and he was tortured.

In September 2002, the Department of Justice, along with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), devised the National Security Entry-Exist Registration System, better known as the INS Special Registration or the "special registration" program. In an attempt to nip terror threats, the system intended to keep track of "non-immigrant aliens" and focused on citizens of Muslim-majority countries as well as North Korea. The process involved the photographing, fingerprinting and interrogations of young men between the ages of 16-23. While this practice was justified by the claim that registration was focused on citizens of Al Qaeda heavy nations, certain countries with known Al Qaeda presence, such as Germany or England, were excluded from scrutiny (Cainkar 2002).

In November 2002, The Department of Homeland Security was created. Its stated mission is to prevent terrorism, manage US borders and, since absorbing the INS, enforce immigration laws, among other tasks (Department of Homeland Security website). The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is one Homeland Security agency[51] that is well known for racial profiling. In an insightful insider piece written for *Politico* in 2014, former TSA officer Jason Edward Harrington recalls:

> …all TSA officers worked with a secret list printed on small slips of paper that
> many of us taped to the back of our TSA badges for easy reference: the
> Selectee Passport List. It consisted of 12 nations that automatically triggered
> enhanced passenger screening. The training department drilled us on the
> selectee countries so regularly that I had memorized them…

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[51] Formed in 2001 in response to 9/11, the TSA was originally a Department of Transportation agency, but was taken over by the Department of Homeland Security in 2003.

Except for Cuba and North Korea, all the blacklisted passports on Harrington's list were from Muslim-majority countries. Since both Cuban and North Korean nationals were rare visitors to the United States, most of the scrutiny fell onto Middle Eastern individuals. Says Harrington:

> Each day I had to look into the eyes of passengers in *niqabs* and *thawbs*[52] undergoing full-body pat-downs, having been guilty of nothing besides holding passports from the wrong nations… the thought nagged at me that I was enabling the same government-sanctioned bigotry my father had fought so hard to escape.[53]

These TSA guidelines, which supposedly targeted foreign nationals, also had significant implications for Muslim citizens of the United States. For any Muslim American who maintained transnational ties with the blacklisted countries, a routine family visit or pilgrimage to Mecca meant potentially being subject to extensive security checks.

The increased national security procedures scrutinizing Muslims have given way to notable witch hunts, such as the 2011 "Homegrown Terror" hearings held by New York Congressman Peter King. King, who served as the chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, claimed that "80-85%" of American mosques were "controlled by Islamic fundamentalists," and that American Muslim leaders had "failed to cooperate with law enforcement officials in the effort to disrupt terrorist plots" (Goodstein 2011). Although counterterrorism experts refuted these statements, King nevertheless began formal

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[52] A long, robe-like, Arab garment.
[53] Harrington's father is an African American man who was born in the Jim Crow South.

congressional hearings to address the threat he believed Muslim Americans posed to national security. In a routine display of post-9/11 security theatre, King held not one but three meetings throughout the year.[54]

The New York Police Department's (NYPD) Zone Assessment Unit (formerly known as the Demographics Unit) was another alarming instance of institutionalized Islamophobia, and an obvious example of radicalization theory being put to use. In the fall of 2011, the Associated Press revealed that the NYPD pressured Muslims who had arrest records to serve as informants in its operation to spy on local Muslims. The unit performed secret surveillance in Muslim religious and social spaces throughout New York City and even into New Jersey. In the Associated Press report, 19-year-old Shamiur Rahman detailed how he complied in exchange for a modest $1000 a month income and, more importantly, goodwill from the police after a few minor marijuana arrests. In what the NYPD called a "create and capture" strategy, Rahman was tasked with creating conversations about jihad and terrorism with fellow Muslims, baiting them into saying incriminating things, and then reporting those responses to the police. On its behalf, he also collected photographs of mosques, and the names of completely innocent people who attended Quran study groups (Goldman and Apuzzo 2012). The surveillance project, which operated with CIA assistance and ran for six years before the Associated Press uncovered it, never generated a single lead for a terrorism related investigation.

The Obama administration has continually supported surveillance and other practices that systemically target Muslims domestically as well as globally.[55] Many Muslim activists I met

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[54] King is not the first to call Congressional hearings about homegrown terror. Senator Joseph Lieberman (an Independent) held 14 such hearings between 2006 and 2009, and Congresswoman Jane Harman (a Democrat) held 6. See David Fahrenthold and Michelle Boorstein's 2011 *Washington Post* piece, "Rep. Peter King's Muslim hearings: A key moment in an angry conversation."

in New York maintained that the Left cultivated Islamophobia just as the right did. They pointed to the Guantanamo Bay detention center as a clear example of how anti-Muslim policies flourished under Obama. These individuals, who often spoke at the jailhouse vigils discussed later in this chapter, called attention to the fact that Muslims will have been held in Guantanamo Bay for longer under Obama than under Bush. Well over 700 Muslim men have been imprisoned and tortured in the center since it opened in 2002. Over the course of 14 years, only 10 of the 700 plus men were charged with a crime and the same number died under questionable circumstances while in custody. According to the organization Human Rights First, there were 103 men still living in Guantanamo Bay in December 2015. Of these, 44 had been cleared for release but still remained imprisoned (some for as long as seven or eight years since they received clearance), while some 40 had not been cleared but were nevertheless being held without charge.

In 2009, Barack Obama requested a shut down of the Guantanamo detention center within the year (Whitehouse.gov). Democrats and Left leaning citizens celebrated the announcement. Obscured by all the praise was the fact that the center's closing would not necessarily mean freedom for the men stewing there without due process. Rather, according to the president's proposal, many of the captives would simply be transferred to prisons within the US. Such a transfer would mean that at least some of the 49 men being held without charge in Guantanamo would simply continue their captivity behind a different set of bars. In essence, then, rather than actually closing the prison, Obama's proposal would simply move Guantanamo Bay to new zip codes.

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[55] For instance, drone attacks in Muslim countries have increased significantly under Obama. Pakistan, for instance, was bombed many times over by the Obama administration, compared to the Bush administration.

The detention center at Guantanamo Bay was far from the only example of Muslims being targeted under Democratic leadership. In April 2010, the Obama administration placed U.S. citizen Anwar al-Awlaki on a kill list of individuals allegedly engaged in terrorist activities. In September of the same year, al-Awlaki and his sixteen-year-old son, also an American citizen, were killed in Yemen by the administration's drone assassination program. Although the killings took place without due process, the U.S. Department of Justice justified the deaths as a lawful act of war. This case was made largely by playing down al-Awlaki's status as a U.S. citizen, and defining him as an outsider who was "part of the forces of an enemy" (Lauter and Phelps 2014). The public's response to the assassinations of two fellow Americans was generally one of passive acceptance or downright approval. Lawyer and journalist Glenn Greenwald has argued convincingly that the perception of Muslims as "something other than 'real Americans'" is what ultimately made the al-Awlaki deaths permissible to a public that otherwise opposed drone assassinations of U.S. citizens (2013).

In an environment of government entrapment and prosecution procedures, and indefinite detention or assasination without due process, Muslim Americans live outside the boundaries of citizenship. They exist in an area of indistinction that can be called a "state of exception" (Agamben 1995; 2008) where 9/11 is treated as an ongoing state of emergency[56] during which any laws protecting them may be suspended in the name of national security. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben identifies the state of exception as the dominant paradigm of contemporary politics, in which provisional or exceptional measures are routinely transformed into government techniques (2008, 3). Once exception becomes the rule, it begins to coincide with political concepts of inclusion and exclusion, and blurs the distinction between inside

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[56] For more about how the state of emergency was institutionalized post-9/11 see Kevin Rozario's *Culture of Calamity* (2007, University of Chicago Press).

and outside (Agamben 1995). Like David Cole, Agamben points out how foreigners apprehended in George W. Bush's War on Terror were not only denied Prisoner of War status but also refused the status of people charged with a crime according to American laws. Instead, they continued to be defined outsiders, as "aliens" and "detainees," confined to an indefinite detention that is removed from law and judicial oversight (2008, 4). The same principle applies in the Obama administration's drone assasination program, where citizens like Anwar al-Awlaki are consistently conceptualized in ways that strip them of any status that might protect them.

The anti-Sharia movement is another important instance of the law's exclusion of Muslim Americans. In 2010, over a dozen American states introduced measures that sought to restrict judges from considering Sharia—loosely described as "Islamic Law" —in cases involving Muslims. Oklahoma and Tenessee were among the first to vote in iterations of such laws. This was the result of a carefully orchestrated project of David Yerushalmi, a major figure in the anti-Muslim circuit. Yerushalmi is a 56-year old attorney with no formal training in Islamic law, but a long record of disturbing statements about race, immigration and Islam.[57] In 2006, he formed the Society of Americans for National Existence, an organization for opposing Sharia, which proposed adherence to it as a felony punishable by 20 years in prison. Then, working with conservative military and intelligence officials, as well as public policy institutes such as Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy, he drafted a model legislation that became the basis of anti-Sharia proposals throughout the country (Elliott 2011). Between 2011 and 2012, 78 anti-Sharia bills or amendments were introduced into 29 state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. Sixty-two of these extracted Islamophobic language from Yerushalmi's model (CAIR 2013). The movement gained momentum with the rise of the Tea

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[57] See, for instance, Yerushalmi's 2006 essay, "On Race: A Tentative Discussion."

Party and was celebrated as an endeavor of everyday Americans. However, this particular manifestation of Islamophobia, like Islamophobia itself, was the mindful project of an elite political network seeking power. As Andrea Elliott of the *New York Times* notes, "the campaign's air of grass-roots spontaneity…shrouds its more deliberate origins" (2011).[58]

The state of exception that many Muslim Americans find themselves in illustrates the well established point that citizenship rights are used not only to include but also to exclude particular people and groups (Bloch 2013; Gordillo 2006; Kymlicka 1998; Wallerstein 2003; Young 1989). This isolation is tangible to many Muslim Americans, who have redoubled their efforts to assert their American status through various forms of action. In the next section, I will discuss four such modes: civil rights activism and civic engagement, the dissemination of positive narratives about Muslims, religious interpretation and practice, and interfaith alliances.

Muslim New Yorkers Respond to Hate

Civil Rights Activism and Civic Engagement

It was a clear January night, the temperature well below freezing, and I could no longer feel my fingers. I held out my tape recorder to capture the words of Muslim Americans and their allies, holding vigil outside the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC) in Manhattan. They had joined a coalition called No Separate Justice, which was comprised of community groups, academics, family members and human rights and civil liberties organizations. On the first Monday of each month, no matter how harsh the elements, the coalition met outside the

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[58] Canada has seen similar anxieties about sharia, for instance, the controversy which erupted after the report, *Dispute Resolution in Family Law: Protecting Choice, Promoting Inclusion* (2004), recommended allowing Muslim religious laws in Ontario arbitrations. In 2006, the province banned arbitration under any law except provincial.

prison to call attention to human rights and civil liberties violations resulting from War on Terror cases in the U.S. Each month, they shed light on a new case, usually involving a Muslim man being held in maximum-security facilities without due process. Some detainees were held in the most draconian parts of prisons, which are known as Communications Management Units (CMUs). CMUs are essentially solitary confinement areas in which prisoners are allowed but 15 minutes per week to speak to their family members by phone, and two, two-hour visits per month (which are separated by glass and telephone). The most harrowing CMU case I heard was that of Farooque Ahmed, who was groomed for several years by an informant he had come to regard as his closest friend. His wife spoke of how her young son had yet to know his father outside prison glass.

On this frigid night, Sameera, a young woman who worked for the prominent social services organization, the Arab-American Association of New York, was speaking. Sameera recalled how her own father was incarcerated for three and a half years and then deported. "We were the lucky ones," she said. "Our father, he was in (a prison in) New Jersey, and he was there for three and a half years and we got to see him. But we met several other (Muslim) families whose fathers and mothers were sent to Tennessee, or sent to Texas, or sometimes, they didn't even know where they were. And this happened to our community!"

I had seen family members of detainees break down at the monthly vigils. There were moments when language failed them and their unadulterated grief did all the talking. By contrast, Sameera held herself together remarkably. She spoke of Islamophobia as the persisting condition of post-9/11 Muslims, which she personally endured. She drew an enormous amount of strength from her family's experience, transforming despair into purpose. Using the Holy Land Five as an example, she linked her father's predicament to the

broader struggle of Muslim Americans who face the risk of being criminalized through trumped up charges. The Holy Land Five case, she said,

> taught us as a community that no one was untouchable. That every single person could be affected by Islamophobia and by the targeting of our community…. Most of our community organizations… still fear advocating for community rights because instead we constantly have to apologize (for terrorism) out of fear that something might happen to us if we didn't.

Sameera refused to apologize for the actions of terrorists who had no association with her. Instead, she devoted herself to anti-Islamophobia activism and publicly confronted anti-Muslim laws and practices.

Fig. 3: Protesters gather outside the jail carrying the name of a prisoner in solitary confinement.

Like Sameera and others present at the vigil, many Muslim New Yorkers have taken action to stem the tide of Islamophobia. My fieldwork revealed that the various ways in which certain groups reacted to increasingly common anti-Muslim campaigns depended on their own, layered positionalities. On one hand, they used the language of community, as Sameera did, to transcend socioeconomic, ethnic and sectarian differences between Muslims, and mobilize effectively. On the other hand, there were deep disagreements between groups about how to most effectivley combat Islamophobia, and as I will show in following chapters, even how to best practice Islam. These tensions showed that "The Muslim Community" was anything but a unified front. When it came to dealing with their de-Americanization by fellow citizens, many Muslims emphasized civic engagement. Others remained skeptical of engaging in political processes that, in their opinion, reproduced state hegemony and supported the very parties that targeted Muslims domestically and abroad.

Azim, a twenty-nine year old, black, Puerto Rican convert to Islam, was one such critic. Following his conversion from Catholicism at twenty-two, he abandoned the Republican party and became heavily involved in anti-war activism. He traveled to Palestine to deliver emergency supplies and, there, witnessed a desperate mother pleading with aid workers to take her infant away for a better life. This was a highly emotional and formative experience for him, after which he vehemently denounced the United States' support of Israel, as well as its War on Terror projects. He was acutely aware of the connections between the two, and rejected all political parties that supported Israel, no matter how promising their general platforms. For instance, while many Muslim Americans supported Bernie Sanders for president in 2016, and while Azim was optimistic about Sanders' proposals to make domestic

improvements, he would not vote for Sanders due to his record of supporting Israeli attacks in Palestine and Lebanon.[59]

At an event hosted by the Muslim Democratic Club of New York, Azim repeatedly rolled his eyes at Muslim speakers who encouraged youth to combat Islamophobia by registering as Democrats and voting for liberal candidates. He was especially uncomfortable with their invoking Malcolm X as a recruitment strategy. Although Malcolm X is a Muslim icon from whose forceful confrontation of racism young Muslims draw inspiration, Azim knew that many Democratic policies actually contradicted X's human rights philosophies. "Why should we [Muslims] settle for Democrats?," he wondered. "The Democratic party's history is marked with atrocities from Hiroshima to Palestine! Why should we ever aim to identify with that or be proud of that party?"

My fieldwork showed that individuals like Azim were outnumbered. Among other Muslim New Yorkers I encountered, there was overwhelming consensus that involvement in the political process was crucial for legitimizing onself as an American citizen, and for thwarting institutionalized Islamophobia. Efforts to politically mobilize the city's Muslims followed a larger pattern of civic engagement among American Muslims (Bilici 2012; Cainkar 2009; Detroit Arab American Study Team 2009) and were led by a few key figures. Linda Sarsour of the Arab American Association of New York was one such leadership figure. Sarsour is a Muslim American activist of Palestinian descent. She is well known across the country as a pundit against Islamophobia, and as an outspoken critic of domestic and foreign policies that target Muslims, including what she calls the Israeli apartheid and the United States' complacency in Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestine. Among Muslims in

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[59] For a discussion of Bernie Sanders' mixed positions on Israel, see Nicolas Sawaya's 2016 article "Bernie Sanders' record on Palestine" in the online news publication, *Mondoweiss.*

New York, she is a beloved grassroots icon, a "Brooklyn Homegirl in a Hijab" (Feuer 2015), admired for her quintessentially "New York" disposition: loud, unabashed, and formidable. In January 2017, she gained widespread noteriety[60] as a co-organizer of the historic Women's March in Washington DC, which drew record breaking crowds around the nation in protest of the Trump administration's various proposals affecting women and minorities.

Fueled by a desire for Muslim Americans to shape their own fates, and to see progress on critical issues such as immigration reform and surveillance, Sarsour organized voter registration drives and "meet the candidates" events for local politicians, and mobilized people to back particular candidates who promised reform. Mayor Bill de Blasio's successful 2013 campaign was one such endeavor. Groups to which Sarsour was linked, such as the aforementioned Muslim Democratic Club and the Arab-American Association of New York, endorsed de Blasio and convinced countless Muslim New Yorkers to campaign and vote for him. De Blasio had promised to reform NYPD procedures by ending the notorious stop-and-frisk program, which disproportionately targeted people of colour, and also by ending the surveillance of Muslims.

Under Sarsour's leadership during the 2013 mayoral election, Muslims organized phone banks and door-to-door canvassing routes in support of de Blasio. They took photographs with the candidate while holding massive "MUSLIMS FOR DE BLASIO" banners, and held a press conference under the same title. For a moment after his election, when the NYPD's Zone Assessment Unit was finally disbanded, it seemed de Blasio had made good on his promise. However, any resulting jubilation about the fact was short lived, as citizens quickly

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[60] During this time, Sarsour also gained infamy among right wing conservatives, who tried to invalidate the Women's March through a widespread smear campaign alleging that she wished to establish Sharia and have Muslim domination in the United States. The attacks were so derisive and relentless that they resulted in the supportive hashtag #IMarchWithLinda, which trended on social media for several days and perpetuated Sarsour's notoriety among people to whom she was previously unknown.

realized that the NYPD's surveillance of Muslims would continue through other units, such as the Citywide Debriefing Team, which scoured local jails to recruit Muslim prisoners as informants (Goldstien 2014). Like the Zone Assessment Unit, the debriefing unit was accused of pressuring vulnerable Muslims, who were being held for misdemeanors, with consequences of having their green cards revoked or other legal troubles.

Many Muslims I interacted with eventually developed the same political fatigue with de Blasio that they did with Barack Obama. They expressed that, "nothing has changed," and chalked de Blasio's botched promises up to his being just another politician. Others took the good with the bad. "Bill de Blasio has been good for us [Muslims]," the director of CAIR-NY told me. Indeed, prior to his election, de Blasio had supported Linda Sarsour and Muslim organizations in their efforts to introduce two major Muslim holidays, *Eid al Fitr* and *Eid al Adha*, into the public school calendar. After nearly a decade of organizing and de Blasio's election, New York City schools finally closed for the holidays. This was a significant moment for Muslim New Yorkers, as Muslim children comprised nearly 10 percent of the New York public school student population. Sarsour explained the achievement's significance. "It is a blueprint for how we can build power from the ground up, and it is proof that if we mobilize, we can win. It feels like we've finally entered the major leagues" (Akbar, 2015).

CAIR's New York chapter, like Sarsour with whom it worked closely, was also a major player in the fight against Islamophobia. It, too, led noteworthy campaigns to boost civic engagement. One of these was Muslim Day at the Capitol, a nationwide CAIR event intended to connect local Muslims with lawmakers. On a winter morning in 2014, I boarded a bus headed to the state's capitol, in Albany, with two dozen other Muslims. On any other day, one

might have heard complaints about meeting at an ungodly hour of morning in bone chilling weather, but on this day, the group was focused only on the task ahead. The passengers were of various ages and backgrounds: Arab high schoolers wearing "Brooklyn" hoodies over their suits and ties, young South Asian professionals, and African American youth and elders, to name a few. As the bus began slogging through rush hour, an African American elder moved to the front of the vehicle and picked up a microphone. "Welcome to the Muslim civil rights freedom bus ride," he announced over the PA, deliberately invoking the famous 1961 Freedom Rides in which mixed-race groups rode interstate buses to challenge segregation ordinances in the South. Although the experience of non-black Muslim Americans pales in comparison to the brutality, dehumanization and exclusion historically suffered by African Americans, the elder consciously analogized the two events to highlight that we were living in an important political moment for Muslim Americans, who were regarded as second class citizens in American society. He emphasized that political mobilization was necessary in any struggle for equal rights and representation. He thanked God for CAIR, for "the Muslim community," and for the opportunity to organize. He then recited *al-Fatiha*,[61] and prayed for our safe journey north.

After picking up another group of people from Westchester County, we arrived in Albany and broke into small groups. Each group met with 5 New York State lawmakers to "advocate for bills that impact our community," just as the chapter director had explained. We lobbied for halal meal options in various school districts, and for the Eid holidays to be put on public university calendars. My particular group argued that, apart from the practical benefits, these

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[61] *Al-Fatiha* is the first chapter of the Quran, a short prayer for guidance and mercy.

provisions would facilitate inclusion by representing Muslims as full constituents of New York; that they would raise invaluable awareness about Muslim beliefs and practices.

The most significant item on the agenda, however, dealt with hate crimes. In September 2013, a Sikh professor from Columbia University was attacked by a group of men who beat him to the ground while calling him "Osama" and "terrorist." Addressing a trend in which such violent acts intending to target Muslims were accompanied with anti-Muslim hate speech, our groups also lobbied for a bill to amend existing penal codes regarding hate crimes. While hate langauge in the form of graffiti--"Muslims Go Home" scrawled on a mosque, for example--was admissible as evidence of a hate crime, speech acts were not. To assist swift prosecution and to better ensure justice for victims of Islamophobic violence, Muslim New Yorkers at the capitol sought to have well-known slurs included in New York's penal code as presumtive evidence of a hate crime.

"Know Your Rights" workshops were another event that CAIR-NY regularly promoted. These involved presentations by civil rights attorneys that taught Muslims, Arabs and members of other affected minority groups, how to manage being targeted by law enforcement. In July 2013, I attended one such workshop at New York University, where a panel of lawyers addressed a small room of mostly Muslim college students. They were specifically educating Muslim youth and other youth of colour, who were likely to be targets of surveillance and stop-and-frisk procedures, about what to do if ever they were approached by local police or federal agents. "You have a right not to talk to law enforcement, it's your fifth ammendment right," advised one attorney. "You never know the context of a law enforcement investigation or what information they have on you, what information will incriminate you and others." Noting that, "This is really what happens," another attorney

warned that she had yet to come across a case on her desk that was free of police fabrications. She continued with stern instructions: Should agents show up at one's home, ask for their identities and any search warrants – tell them to slide the items under the door. Speak to them through the door, and unless a warrant has been issued, do not open the door under any circumstances. Always remain calm and cooperative but politely insist on having an attorney present. If the agents force a search anyway, either in a home or on the street, repeat, "I do not consent to this search" as often as possible, but never become agitated or confrontational. "This is for your own safety," she reminded us.

The particular workshop I have described was hosted by attorneys who served on CAIR-NY's board of directors. However, CAIR-NY often sponsored similar workshops run by the City University of New York's Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility (CUNY CLEAR), which was another group that played an important role making Muslim New Yorkers aware of their civil rights. All the workshops emphasized the ability of law enforcement agents to lie in order to secure a charge against their targets. CUNY CLEAR additionally provided civil rights education for other law enforcement scenarios, such as how to deal with the TSA when "Flying While Muslim."[62] Through coalition building with groups like CUNY CLEAR, CAIR-NY boasted an extensive network of interfaith and community groups with which it worked to further its social justice goals. In addition to an array of mosques, these groups included Jews against Islamophobia, the Arab American Association of New York, the Sikh Coalition, and the No Separate Justice coalition, to name a few.

In particular, the work done by CAIR, CUNY CLEAR, and the No Separate Justice campaign highlights three areas of civil rights abuses that profoundly affect Muslim

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[62] An analogy of "Driving While Black," which refers to the racial profiling of black drivers by traffic police.

Americans today. The first is a violation of First Amendment rights in that participating in political activism is often enough to put Muslim Americans on law enforcement's radar for scrutiny and worse. The second is the enforcement of cruel and unusual punishments, mainly in the form of solitary confinement in CMUs. The third is the lack of due process in an overwhelming number of terror-related cases, which has resulted in years of pre-trial confinement for several Muslims.

The 2006-2010 case of Fahad Hashmi illustrates all three abuses. Hashmi was a religious, well-liked and politically active student. A New Yorker attending graduate school in the United Kingdom, he was arrested in London for conspiring to provide material support to Al-Qaeda. These charges stemmed from him having allowed a friend, who was suspected of being associated with Al Qaeda, to stay in his apartment for two weeks.[63] Hashmi was held in pre-trial solitary confinement for three years, where he was denied group prayers, media access, or interaction with others, until he eventually plead guilty to the charges. He accepted a plea bargain deal for a fifteen year sentence, which he is serving in a federal prison in Florida.

In April 2014, I attended an event about state sanctioned Islamophobia and civil rights infringements organized by Muslim students at Columbia University. There, one of Fahad Hashmi's undergraduate professors divulged that the FBI had pressured faculty who were close with Hashmi "not to say anything" about him. In other words, they were instructed to remain silent about Hashmi and the case, rather than do anything in his defense. Like others who knew and cared about Hashmi, the professor was saddled with feelings of guilt and

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[63] The associate, Junaid Babar, was accused of supplying Al Qaeda with "military gear," which was ultimately discovered as consisting of socks and rain ponchos. Babar was turned into an informant against Hashmi in what is widely assumed to be an attempt to get his own sentence reduced. For more details surrounding the case and how one of Hashmi's professors has worked tirelessly in his defense, see Amitava Kumar's *Huffington Post* article, "Kidnapped by the State," dated 4/10/2010.

helplessness for having been unable to help him, even as he was thoroughly demoralized in solitary confinement. "It was part of a larger message, not to say anything," said the visibly shaken faculty member, alluding to the overall quashing and criminalization of dissent by the state.

Muslim New Yorkers concerned about state hegemony and oppression frequently joined forces with and supported social justice and anti-racist movements, such as Black Lives Matter, which was especially relevant as African Americans constitute the largest demographic of US Muslims. They built bridges through transactional politics—in other words, they supported the causes of other groups not only because of their overlapping experiences, but also with the hope that members of those groups would reciprocate. By organizing together to alleviate shared experiences of being racially profiled, criminalized, and victimized in hate crimes, all parties' voices were amplified.[64] In addition to African Americans, Latinos, and other ethnic minorities whose immediate concerns about law enforcement intersected with theirs, Muslims also built alliances with different faith institutions.

Interfaith Parnterships

Interfaith efforts played an important part in Muslim New Yorkers' solidarity work. For example, Park51 often partnered with St. Paul's chapel, a historic Christian organization located just across the street from the World Trade Center. Park51 routinely recruited volunteers for community service projects organized by the chapel. Together, the organizations collected backpacks, stationery and other school supplies from donors for a

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[64] These coalitions demonstrate classic social movement organizing, and form similarly to other historic alliances, such as American women's and peace movements in the 1980s. For more, see Van Dyke and McCammon's *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements* (2010).

back-to-school drive benefiting the city's underprivileged children. The two groups also prepared meals for the homeless, ate Thanksgiving meals together, and held vigils for justice after the high profile police killings of two black men, Eric Garner of New York City and Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri.

St. Paul's had a long relationship with Lower Manhattan Muslims. In the 1970s, the World Trade Center's Muslim employees were seeking a place to pray on Fridays, and church leaders welcomed them. After 9/11, St. Paul's became an especially important ally for Muslims because it was an organization loaded with political significance. As the place where George Washington prayed after his inauguration, it was regarded as an iconic American institution. Furthermore, it was seriously affected during 9/11 due to its proximity to the World Trade Center. The attacks had transformed the chapel's exterior into a wasteland. The towers had crumbled onto it and buried every blade of grass in ruin. Paper and other debris hung off the tops of old tombstones in what looked like a depressing, post-apocalyptic scene. Inside, the chapel was immediately reorganized into a shelter for rescue workers, with pews serving as emergency cots. Because it was affected by the attacks, and because of its pivotal role in providing shelter in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, St. Paul's has acquired an important status in 9/11 remembrance culture.[65] It is able to leverage this position and stand with Muslim New Yorkers not just as a matter of authentic Christian values, but also "American" ones, which Park51 is seen as antithetical to.[66]

In addition to Muslim-Christian alliances, Muslim-Jewish partnerships were also commonplace in New York City. In May 2014, I attended a interfaith discussion at Temple Emanu-El, a very large and prominent synagogue, located across from Central Park in the

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[65] For more on 9/11 remembrance culture, see David Simpson's *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (2006), Marita Sturken's 2004 *American Ethnologist* article, "The Aesthetics of Absence."
[66] See Chapter 3.

city's Upper East Side. The dialogue was led by Imam Shamsi Ali, one of New York's most influential religious leaders,[67] and Rabbi Marc Schneier, an equally prominent Jewish leader and founder of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. The two began working together after the November 2008 Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist attack in Mumbai, India, which was anticipated to create a surge in Islamophobia. Each spoke about the deep mistrust many Muslims and Jews have of one another, and how serious dialogue needed to take place between the two groups in order for them to transcend Islamophobia and anti-Semitism together. They urged the audience not to let the Palestinian-Israeli conflict define their relationship with one another. "Our relationship is longstanding, way before this conflict came along… we are concentrating on a dark spot in our history, but we Jews and Muslims have lived together beautifully," said Shamsi Ali. The rabbi chimed in: "As the Children of Abraham, not only do we share a faith, but we share a fate, a common destiny… we must cultivate compassion for one another."

In 2014, the Muslim-Jewish Solidarity Committee was formed by the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, and like many Muslim and Jewish New Yorkers, I joined it. Although some disagreed with the Foundation's support of Zionism, they nevertheless understood the alliance as one of the benefits of living in a pluralistic, American society, in which they could join forces to combat the intense, often violent, xenophobia they all suffered. Committee members vowed to "take joint public stands against hate… directed at either community" and to "counteract ignorance, prejudice, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism within [their] respective communities" (MJSC website). Working with the hashtag philosophy #WeRefuseToBeEnemies, we organized joint trips to mosques and synagogues, so that Jews

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[67] In 2006, Shamsi Ali was rated one of the 7 most influential religious leaders in the city by *New York Magazine.*

and Muslims could become familiar with each others' beliefs and practices. These outings formed the basis of friendships between many Jews and Muslims who had previously only imagined each others' religious groups as "others."

Apart from fostering interpersonal relationships, the committee routinely followed through its mission for Muslims and Jews to support one another in the face of hostility. For instance, when a Jewish exchange student was stabbed inside a synagogue, Muslim members of the committee were at his side in the hospital. When Pamela Geller erected the anti-Muslim subway ads, the committee held meetings about how to best respond, and authored a powerful statement against the Metropolitan Transit Authority, denouncing its permitting the propaganda.

Through interfaith bridges, New York Muslims positioned themselves as the Abrahamic brethren of Jews and Christians. This was relevant because xenophobes such as Yerushalmi often excluded Muslims on the basis that the United States is a nation built on Judeo-Christian values. Muslim interfaith relationships went beyond ties with Abrahamic groups, however, and also included Sikhs, Hindus and others.

Changing the Narrative

One of the main ways Muslim New Yorkers addressed Islamophobia was by taking charge of their own stories. On a Ramadan evening in 2014, I sat in a Lutheran church in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, with interfaith leaders and allies who had gathered to address anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bigotry. The event was sponsored by Take on Hate, a new project headed by Linda Sarsour, which sought to implement policy changes and "inspire a positive perception of Arab and Muslim Americans" (Take on Hate). From its inception, Take on Hate sought to "demystify their distorted image" by showcasing Muslim diversity, highlighting the

contributions made by Muslims to society, and by providing an online platform in which

Muslims anywhere could submit their own stories and experiences for publication on its

website. This served to increase Muslim visibility, for as Sarsour noted, "When people don't

know about you, it's easier for them to hate you." Through its virtual mode, Take on Hate

linked Arabs and Muslims around the country to create strength in numbers. "You can be an

Arab in Arkansas and still be connected to the Arab American community," she said.

Fig. 4: Take on Hate interfaith press conference at City Hall, addressing Geller's subway ads. Sarsour stands in pink.

Humour was another mode employed by Muslim New Yorkers to counter media

portrayals of their religious group. Comedians from various "brown"[68] backgrounds created

safe spaces around the city in which the social and legal marginalization of Muslims was

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[68] In this context, "brown" refers to Muslims as well as non-Muslims who are often confused for Muslim, and therefore share with Muslims experiences of demonization, disparagement, profiling and violence. "Brown" people can include Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Arabs and Persians of various religious backgrounds.

addressed candidly. In dimly lit basements and comedy clubs around the city, fears and other negative emotions associated with being a national pariah were temporarily assuaged through the lampooning of government policies and Islamophobes, giving way to bouts of much needed laughter. I discuss one such event, the Big Brown Comedy Hour, in Chapter 5.

Just as they have been crucial in increasing civic engagement, Muslim youth have also been important in producing alternative narratives and images of Muslim Americans. On September 11th 2014, the 13th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, I sat in a small theatre in Queens. The place was a hole in the wall, surrounded by closed auto shops in an industrial neighbourhood. I was there to watch a play produced by LaGuardia Community College students, who were partaking in #BeyondSacred, a discussion series that highlighted American Muslim diversity and experiences post-9/11.

As the last audience members squeezed into the tiny space, a South Asian man bumped into a Latino man, causing the latter's expensive iPhone to fall to the ground. The phone's owner immediately directed enraged, twitchy-eyed glares at the culprit, whose fumbling efforts to apologize only made the things worse. The Latino man exploded into a tirade, which quickly descended into unabashed hate speech. He loudly hurled racial epithets at the South Asian man, who just stood there at a complete loss for words. I looked around at the worried faces of other audience members, who were stunned in their seats and unresponsive. Nobody dared to take a stand against the raw bigotry at display – the abuser was far too volatile and the situation felt too risky for intervention. Then, the conflict was put to rest through the revelation that it was merely the play's opening act. We breathed a sigh of relief and laughed at ourselves for not seeing through it all earlier. Our foresight had been clouded by the date: September 11th. In our minds, it was a real possibility that a Muslim event on 9/11 had

attracted a vigilant Islamophobe with a short fuse, who came with intentions of disrupting us with hate speech, or worse, violence. Nevertheless, many audience members expressed shame about the fact that, when push came to shove, we chose self-preservation rather than exemplifying the social justice values we proudly proclaimed.

The students' gripping vignette demonstrated that for many Muslim Americans, everyday places in New York are experienced as a minefield in which hate may erupt anywhere if one fails to navigate carefully. The performances that followed were similar, artistic reflections of Muslim life, particularly depicting Muslim experiences of marginalization and encounters with Islamophobia. The acts were followed up by a discussion in which audience members were invited to share their post-9/11 experiences. "I wasn't *Muslim* American on the 10th of September 2001," said one a college-aged youth, implying that post-9/11 Muslims were defined primarily by what set them apart, rather than what they had in common with other Americans. Steadily, more audience members came forward to share their personal experiences with Islamophobia. This gave way to the important question, "What do we do about it?" There were suggestions to "educate [about Muslims and Islam] through everyday contact" with others, to "share your personal stories" in order to put forth accurate representations of everyday Muslims, and the most pointed suggestion, to "take a stand" and "see something, say something" when bigotry is witnessed against any group. The event was significant for the many youth present, who were too young to remember the 9/11 attacks, and comprised an entire generation for whom anti-Muslim bigotry was a norm that they were accustomed to.

Another youth group in New York City, The Muslim Writers Collective, similarly aimed to "reclaim the American Muslim narrative" (Muslim Writers Collective). Since its

founding in January 2014, the group hosted monthly open mics in which young Muslims shared their work with peers. While the events were particularly intended to showcase the work of young writers, they routinely welcomed spoken word artists, musicians and informal storytellers. Each meeting covered experiences of growing up as a second generation Muslim in the United States. Recurring themes, for example, addressed generational tensions around taboo topics such as premarital relationships and drinking, and also the pain caused by Islamophobia.

Additionally, the Muslim Student Association at Columbia University sponsored an annual symposium geared toward youth. The Muslim Protagonist event aimed to reimagine Muslims not as antagonists who appear in dominant narratives, but as protagonists in their own accounts that are worthy of narration. The annual event featured panels of well-known academics, writers and artists who stressed the importance of putting forth "alternatives to mainstream narratives about Muslims."[69] It also invited celebrity figures, such as Amy Goodman of the news program Democracy Now!, who delivered the keynote address for the 2015 symposium. Her speech on media advocacy against war filled the auditorium with the sound of snapping fingers – a quiet means of communicating approval without the shattering interruption of a traditional applause. Rather than being fixated on Islam as an inspiration for violence, or pathologizing Muslims as inherently prone to terrorism, Goodman pointed to historical factors, such as the U.S. occupation in Iraq, as a major source of ongoing strife. Her suggestion that, "When you bomb the cradle of civilization back to the cradle, bad things are gonna happen," was met with several murmurs of "*Alhamdulillah!*"[70]

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[69] Quote from one of the speakers at the 2015 Muslim Protagonist event.
[70] "Praise God" in Arabic.

In addition to providing a platform for speakers, both the Muslim Writers Collective and the Muslim Protagonist programs included workshops to help budding talents tell stories about being Muslim. For instance, one Protagonist workshop was geared toward teaching youth "what to write in order to grab attention" and tailor their work for particular publications and media outlets. The workshop's description read, "Being able to write and be heard by mainstream media outlets is integral for ethnic and faith minority communities."

The most insightful trait both Muslim writers' groups shared was their lack of focus on Islam. During my fieldwork, I found that among youth who participated in the projects, a common response to post-9/11 Islamophobia was to speak not about Islam, but of ordinary, secular experiences, which showed that Muslims were, first and foremost, regular human beings and Americans. Rather than painting themselves primarily as practitioners of the Islamic faith,[71] or otherwise having their discussions revolve around religion, storytellers at the events related to other young Muslims by sharing accounts of the most mundane aspects of everyday life: the pros and cons of living at home with one's parents, for instance, or the trials of online dating.

The need for Muslims to take control of how they are represented became even more urgent when, after the Paris attacks of November 2015, 30 state governors citing security concerns sought to block 10,000 Syrian refugees from being resettled in their states (CNN 2015; New York Times 2015; NPR 2015). Apart from the general political atmosphere which had been hostile toward Muslims for many years, this refusal of refugees clearly demonstrated the tangible consequences that the usual, negative portrayals of Muslims, and ongoing terrorist attacks by extremist groups overseas, can have on Muslim lives.

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[71] Samuli Schieke (2010) argues that Islam's role in Muslim life should be considered in terms of existential, pragmatic, everyday sensibilities and motivations, and that "privileging Islam as a supreme guideline in all life fields" ends up reproducing Islamist goals.

Propagating and Reforming Islam

While some youth writers carved out niches to portray Muslims through secular experiences, other Muslim New Yorkers took a faith-centered response to Islamophobia. For instance, members of a conservative mosque in Queens spent an entire Sunday proseletyzing in Times Square with the message, "Islam is not Terrorism." They regarded *da'wah*[72] as the key to clearing up misconceptions about their faith, and also thought that Islamphobia was clouding the judgments of non-Muslims who might otherwise embrace Islam. Their mission aimed to inform the public about Islam and Muslims, and in the process, lower the inhibitions of any potential converts. Some volunteers spread out over an area of two blocks with "Why Islam?" pamphlets in hand. Others set up tables with refreshments, English and Spanish language Qurans, as well as various pamphlets that informed non-Muslims about topics such as the importance of Jesus in Islam. Alongside the tables were a series of large, eyecatching banners. "Hijab is Freedom," read one. "Abraham. Moses. Jesus. Prophets of Islam," read another. These banners showed Muslims' compatibility with dominant American values, such as liberty and belief in Old Testament prophets. The largest one stood about eight feet tall and proclaimed in massive letters, "We are 1.8 Billion, not to be defined by a few."

It was only a matter of time before confrontations ensued. Some passersby were incensed by the "nerve" the Muslims had to make themselves, and Islam, so visible in public. Of course, the whole point of their organizing an event in Times Square was to be visible; to assert themselves as New Yorkers who were free to take up space anywhere in the city, even in its most iconic areas or areas that had been threatened by terrorists.[73] Each individual from

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[72] *Da'wah*, which literally means "summons," is an invitation to understand Islam.
[73] In May 2010, Times Square was the target of an attempted terrorist attack. Pakistani-born U.S. citizen, Faisal Shahzad, was arrested for planting the failed car bombs. He was reported by another Muslim, a nearby hot dog vendor. In October of the same year, he was sentenced to life in prison.

the mosque wore a bright green arm band with the message, "Ask me about Islam. I'm Muslim." These served the double purpose of allowing the volunteers to easily locate each other through the dense crowd, and also to unabashedly identify themselves as Muslims to non-Muslims. Throughout the day, however, their presence continued to be regarded as provocative. A young, white man threw up his hands while having a heated discussion about Islam with one of the Muslims. Meanwhile, an older, white man said nothing but angrily shoved items off the proselytyzing tables onto the ground. A Muslim youth immediately moved to confront him, but was stopped by a mosque elder. The elder advised the youngster to exercise patience and forgiveness with the man, for that would publicly demonstrate the positive virtues of Islam.

Fig. 5: A passer-by is offended by the display and argues with a mosque member about Islam.

Not all was tense and bleak, however. A block away, a young, African American woman was focused on giving *da'wah*. "Would you like to learn about Islam?" she optimistically called out to tourists. "It's good to smile when you approach people," she explained to me. "Smiling is a sunnah."[74] Just as she was beginning to feel discouraged after an afternoon of being thoroughly ignored, a young Latino man paused to give her a twenty dollar bill. "For your *masjid*![75] Keep it up!" he said as he walked away. Perhaps he was a Muslim; perhaps he was simply showing solidarity with the volunteers' mission to combat bigotry. Either way, his donation revived the spirits of the youth volunteers. Meanwhile, a white, American woman who was volunteering also remained positive. "I was one of the people who took a pamphlet from a table just like this," she told me while fixing her bright, pink hijab. "It changed my life! If I can just reach one person like that and show them that Islam isn't what they see in the media, if I can show them how beautiful Islam is, it's enough for me."

The New York chapter of Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV-NY) was also involved in deflecting negative stereotypes of Muslims as religious extremists. MPV hosted annual retreats to promote a "progressive" version of Islam that complemented Western democratic and liberal values. Its 2012 conference was entitled, "A Theology of Mercy: Putting into action the Islamic principles of compassion, justice, love and service." Presentations at the retreat ranged in subject matter from a progressive understanding of Islam's basic principles to HIV and Islamic ethics, the power of Muslim women's councils to articulate more egalitarian versions of Islam, and Islam and LGBT rights. MPV-NY's 2014 conference, "Islam for Critical Thinkers," similarly focused on women's issues, among other topics

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[74] *Sunnah* refers to the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad, which have been transmitted orally and recorded by various scholars.
[75] Mosque.

pertaining to equality. MPV conferences were explicitly framed in a post-9/11 context to address concerns about Islam and "radical theology" being used by terrorists to justify inequality and violence.

The New York City Progressive Muslims Meetup also worked on projects of gender equality and LGBT rights among Muslim congregations. Each week, it sponsored a Quran discussion, led by a religious reformer who advocated interpretations of the holy text that were commensurate with what he called modern, American lifestyles. The most significant theme emerging from these conversations was the treatment of religious belief and practice as a private affair, which could be uniquely tailored to one's own needs rather than a subscription to a "blind faith" based in outward rituals. While the two progressive groups had some striking differences in opinion about how to resolve particular issues faced by Muslims, such as the marginalization of LGBT Muslims, both subscribed to a social justice theology that allowed them to reinterpret unegalitarian religious beliefs. They actively challenged mainstream images of Islamic fanaticism (which commonly revolve around tropes of oppressed Muslim women. See Abu-Lughod 2002) by fashioning practices that reflected their ideals of equality – hosting mixed gender prayers, for instance.

Both progressive groups' social justice based religious orientation compelled them to confront Islamophobia. Both hosted regular social events addressing topics related to anti-Muslim xenophobia. During such gatherings, attendees could be found contemplating, for example, whether it was a greater religious duty for Muslims to complete Haj in Mecca or to stand up against Saudi Arabia's human rights violations by boycotting the pilgrimage. Group members strived to embody Islamic social justice ideals primarily for its own sake, but also to stand out to their non-Muslim peers as positive examples of Muslims. The groups would also

organize community outreach projects, such as an afternoon of feeding homeless people in the Bronx, a 5k benefit race for Gaza, or interfaith dialogues.

Both MPV and the New York Progressive Meetup groups are discussed further in Chapters 2 and 5.

Conclusion

Islamophobia is not the unique territory of either the Right or the Left in the United States. Rather, it is institutionalized through mainstream forms of hegemony, and plays out in American life through a variety of legal modes, from prison systems (see conclusion) to legislation. Due to the sweeping nature of targeting practices, these measures lead to little more than the absolute vilification of Muslims. Antiterrorism measures outlined by several scholars (Cainkar 2009; Kumar 2012) have long been the standard, from President Carter's blacklisting of Iranians in response to the Iran hostage crisis, to Ronald Regan, to George H. Bush's surveillance program during the First Gulf War, to Clinton's Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, to George W. Bush's aforementioned National Security Entry-Exit Registration System and PATRIOT Act, the latter of which has been upheld by the Obama administration.

As Sara Ahmed (2004) notes, the hubbub around "terror" is rooted in an economy of fear associated with particular bodies and a looming threat that could be anywhere. She links fear to an economy of hate, which involves feelings of injury that are converted to a disdain for those who are identified as the cause of pain. Ahmed argues that hate is used in nation-building discourse by lumping together hated figures to establish a boundary between the self and other. As this chapter has shown, feelings fear, insecurity and disdain are put in the

service of Islamophobic frameworks by the state as well as influential politicians, policy makers and media commentators. Yet while Islamophobia is strategic, it is also highly affective. As Donovan Schaefer notes, contemporary Islamophobia manifests in a non-economic variety that is displayed openly in the actions of everyday citizens, such as those who descended on Park51 or those who violently attack Muslims. He notes that such hate is "motivated by clusters of compulsions surging through bodies in ways that are not necessarily thoughtful, useful or even tactical—but no less desirable, contagious, or addictive" (2016, 122). The link between the strategic and affective dimensions of Islamophobia is demonstrated throughout this dissertation.

Many Muslim New Yorkers linked Islamophobic rhetoric to hate crimes, insisting that there was a body count attached to anti-Muslim platitudes, such as those espoused by Donald Trump. By March, 2016 and again after Trump's election, the possibility of Muslim internment camps unbelievably became a point of sincere discussion. As matters appeared to have reached an absolute worst, Muslim New Yorkers carried on lobbying for favorable candidates, collaborating with other minority and faith groups, speaking out against hate, and taking charge of their own stories. Whichever approach they preferred, pluralism and bridge building work was an integral part of it, for as Linda Sarsour noted, "Time alone doesn't change communities. It's activism that does that. It's people and communities."

Among Muslims I met, some looked to the experiences of Irish, Italians, Jewish and Japanese immigrants, and pointed out that these groups similarly endured intense marginalization before gaining acceptance in the United States. This outlook treated Islamophobia as a cruel but expected hazing ritual into the American fabric, and promised hope for a better future. In a foreword for Sheehi's book on Islamophobia, the celebrated

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African-American activist journalist Mumia Abu Jamal[76] summed up these hopes in four

powerful words: "This, too, will pass."

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[76] Abu-Jamal is currently serving a life sentence after being convicted for the 1981 murder of a Philadelphia policeman. In spite of his imprisonment, which is widely protested by those who question the validity of his trial, he remains a celebrated speaker and writer on social justice issues. For more, see his collection of prison writings, *Live From Death Row* (1995).

Chapter 2
Religious Positions

If ISIS is so anathema to "moderate" Muslims, how come zero have gone to fight them?

– Television host Bill Maher, 2015

In the United States, Muslims are defined using a heuristic that organizes them into subgroups according to their theologies and cultural habits, as well as their political views. What results is a delineation of their religious and political orientations through terms such as "moderate," "fundamentalist," "progressive," "traditional," and others. This nomenclature is built on slippery assumptions about people's lifestyles, mindsets and worldviews, and is inadequate for describing Muslims and their various positionalities. For instance, a "moderate" Muslim is widely perceived to be, among other things, a person who does not "dress Muslim" (for example, wearing a turban), or someone who denounces terror so dutifully that, according to Bill Maher (quoted above) he should be willing to ship himself off to Syria to confront the group physically. Yet the "moderate" category also includes other traits, and is so elusive in how many features it includes, that it has been criticized as entirely useless and called a dangerous tool of Islamophobia (Lean 2014). Similar criticism has been leveraged against other designations that are used to define Muslims and that exist in relation to one another, such as "progressive." Mired in labels, American Muslims can find themselves boiled down to a confusing alphabet soup of religio-political stereotypes.

These stereotypes are highly subjective and offer little theoretical usefulness, including because the worldviews of Muslims who identify differently from one another are

not mutually exclusive but overlapping. In this chapter, I explore two different discourses about Muslims. The first is about how non-Muslims in the United States, specifically the media, citizens and state, conceptualize "moderate" Muslims. The second is about how Muslims think and speak about themselves and each other. I describe their interpretative practices and also examine what terms like "moderate", "progressive" and "traditional" Muslim means to them. For instance, some participants considered "moderate" a concept imposed from the outside, through which non-Muslims could decipher "bad" from "good" Muslims. Along these lines, they viewed such categorization as divisive, and resisted it. I also outline the concept of "traditional" Muslim, which most Muslims link to religious authenticity, while some also deploy the term "traditional" as a negative category referring to the backwardness and blind faith of other Muslims. I want to be clear that I have no intention of determining "correct" ways of being Muslim, or of defining the parameters of Islamic "moderation" or "traditionalism,"—there are no clear answers to such an inquiry. I aim only to illustrate how different values are ascribed to each of these elusive categories, and how the research participants understood and navigated them.

Moderate Muslims

Of all the categories used to define Muslims, "moderate" has the least explanatory power, mainly because those who are identified as such have a vast diversity of stances and practice. However, this has not stopped certain Islamphobes from trying to establish particular standards to determine a Muslim's admissibility into the "moderate" camp. For instance, conservative commentator John Hawkins compiled the following 7-point constitution in which a Muslim "should" believe in order to be considered an authentic moderate (2013).

Reading through the list, it is obvious that Hawkins' criteria of what constitutes moderate Muslim behaviour depend on his assumption that normative Muslim behavior is exclusively violent and misogynistic.

1) ...Opposes terrorist attacks on civilians the world over.

2) ...Doesn't believe that damaging a Quran or a Muhammad cartoon is a legitimate reason to behave in a violent fashion.

3) ...Believes people have a right to leave the Islamic faith in peace without having to face legal repercussions or violence.

4) ...Rejects wife beating, forced marriages, clitorectomies and violence towards women.

5) ...Thinks women have just as much of a right to be educated as men, should be able to leave the house without a male relative and should be allowed to FREELY CHOOSE whether or not they want to wear a Burqa or Hijab.

6) ...Rejects anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and genocide against Israel.

7) ...Is against Sharia[77], which is a primitive, barbaric code that is pro wife-beating, pro-rape, anti-free speech, homophobic and entirely incompatible with civilized behavior.

Hawkins is not alone in attempting to define the parameters of what constitutes a moderate Muslim. Daniel Pipes, a conservative commentator who has been criticized for being an anti-Arab propagandist and Islamophobe, has also made several attempts to pin down what a moderate Muslim is. One of his articles, "Identifying Moderate Muslims"

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[77] To understand why this is problematic for Muslims, see the discussion of Shariah in Chapter 3.

(2004), simplistically defines them as "anti-Islamist Muslims" and "liberals," and claims that there are many "fake moderates who are "difficult to identify." He tackles this challenge by grouping Muslims according to their relationships to domestic and foreign policy. For instance, he cites Zudhi Jasser, founder of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, a star witness in Congressman Peter King's "Homegrown Terror" hearings, an outspoken supporter of the Israeli government, supporter of the NYPD's Muslim surveillance program, opponent of the Park51 Community Center, and "the right's go-to guy" (Serwer 2014), as a true moderate. In contrast, Pipes posits Tariq Ramadan, a reformer who emphasizes mindful exegesis over taken-for-granted readings of religious texts, who pressed Muslims worldwide to condemn the 9/11 terrorists immediately following the attacks, who is an ardent opponent of capital punishment and other forms of violence, and who prioritizes a commitment to universalism and Muslim-non-Muslim solidarity, as a "fake moderate." Pipes assigns Ramadan to the "fake" camp not because Ramadan validates certain patriarchal positions, but because he is the grandson of Hasan al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood), he sympathizes with Palestine over Israel, and he has alleged contact with the wrong people, namely, Muslim individuals who were later accused of being extremists.

The difference in how Jasser and Ramadan are categorized by Pipes shows that state-friendliness is one of the main litmus tests by which a Muslim's supposed moderation is gauged, and how alignment with hegemonic policies and political values play a crucial role in the formation of a "moderate" Muslim subject. Saba Mahmood has described undertakings by the US government to foster a moderate Muslim mindset – that is, an orientation that complies with liberal political rule. One such project, Muslim World Outreach, was established in 2003 with funding starting at $1.3 billion. It sought to "transform Islam from

within" (David Kaplan, quoted in Mahmood 2006, 323) by identifying and supporting organizations in Muslim countries that were perceived as being open to Western democratic values.

The project is framed not merely as a security issue but as a matter of human interest. As Mahmood has explained, rather than the CIA or State Department, most of its $1.3 billion funding was disbursed through USAID (the United States Agency for International Development). The money was spent "establishing Islamic schools that counter the teachings of the now notorious fundamentalist madrassas, reforming public school curriculums, and media production…shaping the content of public religious debate" (Mahmood 2006, 331). Mahmood suggests that the Muslim World Outreach project's main purpose is to foster a "moderate" Islam; that by doing so, it neutralizes the threat of Islamic fundamentalism without directly stifling Islam in ways that clash with the American values of religious freedom and the state's "declared neutrality toward specific religious truth claims" (Mahmood 2006, 324).

The United States also engages Muslim sensibilities domestically through programs such as the "Generation Change" event hosted by the State Department's Special Representative to Muslim Communities. Presented as a "grassroots" and "community organizing" effort, the 2010 event was a Ramadan dinner where "innovative American Muslim leaders under the age of 30" would discuss "key ways to become change makers for their generation" (State Department 2010). Speakers at the event included a Muslim comedian who incorporates interfaith and multicultural rhetoric in his routines, producers of *New Muslim Cool* (a documentary about a Latino Muslim rapper who preaches Islam to at-risk youth) and creator of *The 99* (a comic book about 99 ordinary Muslims who gain mystical

powers derived from Allah's 99 attributes, and battle extremism throughout the Muslim world). These individuals were desirable to the State Department for several reasons, chief among them because they "used technology to move forward" and "amplify" certain, vague ideas approved of by the State Department—ideas that were thought to carry the "potential to change and shape the world in a positive way." The official description for the "Generation Change" event was similarly vague and cleansed of any political intention. On the State Department's blog, it was simply ascribed to "the Secretary [of State]'s commitment to reaching out to young people all over the world" (Pandith 2010).

For the US government, moderate Muslims are those who are "open to a Western vision of civilization, political order and society" (National Security Division, quoted in Mahmood 2006). Moderate Muslim identity work is done via native allies, or liberal Muslims, such as the young Muslims courted by the State Department for the Generation Change event. Of course, the concept of "liberal" Muslims is not unproblematic, as the subgroup itself consists of an array of reformers and thinkers, of which many are critical of US imperialism. But, as Mahmood points out, and as was confirmed by my own research with Muslim New Yorkers, what makes these Muslims suitable partners for state projects to reform Islam is that both parties view interpretive practices as crucial in shaping religious subjectivities. Change the way the Quran and other texts are approached, and pave the way for the emancipation of Muslims from traditionalism–so goes the logic.

Moderate Muslim Leaders

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf of the Cordoba Initiative[78] is an example of a native ally, and has had a long-term relationship with the State Department. As detailed in the Introduction to this dissertation, one of his primary goals is to cultivate what he terms an "American Muslim identity" through "moderate" interpretations of religious texts. He focuses on teaching Islam as a fundamentally moderate religion that concerns itself with compassion and enlightenment. In his work, he highlights particular Islamic texts as evidence. For instance, Quran 7:156, which says, "I will inflict my punishment upon whom I please; yet my mercy encompasses [is vaster than] everything"; also, a *hadith* in which the Prophet Mohammad quotes God as saying, "O Son of Adam, if your sins reach the heights of heaven and you seek my forgiveness, I will forgive you."[79] Rauf's point is that many Muslims concern themselves excessively with the legal particularities of the faith, at the expense of a spirituality that is anchored in Islam's essential principles. As I will show later in this chapter, the priority given to the essence of faith features heavily in progressive Muslim thought as well.

Imam Rauf preached religious moderation for many reasons: to challenge religious extremism and to make Islam accessible and relatable for Muslim American youth, for instance. He also wanted to improve the relationship between Muslim and Western countries, for instance, through outreach trips that promoted religious tolerance in the Middle East. The State Department defended Rauf against critics who were offended by the government's partnership with a figure that had been openly critical of US foreign policy.[80] The Department

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[78] See introduction for more on the Cordoba Initiative.

[79] Translations provided by Rauf in his 2012 book *Moving the Mountain: A New Vision of Islam in America*

[80] In September 2001, following the 9/11 attacks, Rauf appeared on the news show *60 Minutes* and commented that, "…the United States' policies were an accessory to the crime that happened… because we have been accessory to a lot of innocent lives dying in the world. In fact, in the most direct sense, Osama bin Laden is made in the USA." Many, particularly right-wing conservatives, interpreted his comments as "blaming the US for 9/11," and as disqualifying him from being a moderate enough ally.

stated about Rauf that "His work on tolerance and religious diversity is well known, and he brings a moderate perspective to foreign audiences" (Labott 2010). Additionally, Rauf had been involved in training programs for both the State Department and the FBI, for which he was criticized by some Muslims, particularly those I met in anti-war circles. When I met the Imam, he told me he believed that assisting law enforcement to "weed out" fanatics among Muslims could only be beneficial for the American Muslim population.

In theory, ridding Muslim circles of extremists can indeed be a good thing. In practice, however, law enforcement projects have done harm to American Muslims. As I have detailed in Chapter 1, they rely on inaccurate assumptions about Muslims, as well as questionable practices involving informants, which lead to various civil rights infringements and the detention of Muslims without due process.

Imam Shamsi Ali (Chapter 1), an Indonesian born and Saudi and Pakistani trained religious scholar based in New York, is another native ally and prominent "moderate" Muslim leader. Like Imam Rauf, he encourages religious adaptations to modern American life, remains active in interfaith work and has engaged with the FBI and various politicians. For instance, he was selected as the Muslim representative for George W. Bush's visit to Ground Zero following 9/11, worked with Mayor Bloomberg and NYPD commissioner Ray Kelly, and had Bill Clinton write the foreword to his co-authored book, *Sons of Abraham: a Candid Conversation about the Issues that Divide and Unite Jews and Muslims* (2013). Ali has a close relationship with the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (Chapter 1), an alliance formed after he publicly acknowledged Israel's right to exist, and expanded his network to include Foundation chair and hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons. The Imam's love of rap music

aided his image as a moderate as it showed his ability to integrate into American culture, and earned him the nickname, hip-hop Imam.

The soft-spoken, interfaith, hip-hop Imam's image is endearing to many Muslims. However, many considered him far too liberal and as neglecting his primary duty to lead the mosque—one person even issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) instructing people not to worship in any service led by him (BBC News). While this was not the opinion of anybody I met, some Muslims I knew regarded him as a Zionist who was harmful to Palestinians, and more frequently, as a law enforcement mouthpiece. Ali had responded to the NYPD's surveillance of Muslim New Yorkers by taking on an advisory role with the police. He was subsequently accused of prioritizing the police and Mayor's interests and "selling out his own community," so to speak. Yet he aggressively defended his engagement[81] with parties that are often perceived as anti-Muslim and cited Islam's emphasis on Muslim-non-Muslim brotherhood (2013, 186) as well as the Prophet Mohammad's emphasis on mercy and nonviolence. He quoted the following hadith in his aforementioned book: "The Prophet said, 'Help your brothers. Either the oppressed, or the oppressors.' One of his companions asked, 'How should we help the oppressor?' The Prophet said, 'Take his hand, so he cannot oppress'" (Ali 2013).

In 2011, the criticisms leveled against him cost the Imam his post at the Islamic Cultural Center (ICC) of New York. Things came to a head when he encouraged his congregation to join protests in support of the Arab Spring and against Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak. He was reprimanded by mosque administration, which supported Mubarak, and

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[81] Ali has a complicated relationship with the NYPD. Two of the mosques targeted by the secret surveillance programs were Shamsi Ali's, even after he accepted their invitations to speak at their events. Still, the imam maintained that he was not overly concerned about the program because "I know what the NYPD did…is an attempt to make sure that our city is safe." However, he was aware that such spying had the potential of discrimination. "What I was troubled about," he said of the program, "was how this effort would be reconciled with religious freedom." (Quoted in Khattak 2014).

insisted that standing up against oppressors was a duty in Islam. While the center insists that he was expelled, he maintains that he resigned. Either way, Imam Shamsi Ali remains a celebrated voice of Muslim "moderation" among Muslim New Yorkers.[82]

The "public face" of American Muslims

When I asked my research participants what the concept of "moderate" meant to them, their first instinct was not to consider what it might mean amongst Muslims. Instead, they answered from the (perceived) point of view of non-Muslims, saying that Muslims' religious positionings were evaluated by others according to their pliability with state interests, and their ability to assimilate. Several Muslim New Yorkers I met made active efforts to reject the "moderate" label. For instance, Azim told me:

> …in a religious context, it ["moderate"] means nothing to me. I don't think
> that everybody who uses it… really means it in a religious kind of context. I
> really think it's purely political. It's a sense of… giving an appeal to an
> audience to feel safe. That, you know, "I'm moderate, I'm acceptable for you
> to speak to. I know you have an [negative] idea of what Muslims are, but you
> know, I'm not that. I'm moderate, you can speak to me, it's safe."

Azim took issue with the "moderate" label because it positioned all Muslims as violent and intolerant, and then favoured those who were deemed to have overcome this default, usually

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[82] In 2014, I went to New York's Temple Emanu-el for a book launch of Shamsi Ali's *Sons of Abraham*, where he received an ovation from the audience for his views on Muslim-Jewish relations and Israel. The Imam is also a speaker at the annual New York City Muslim Day Parade, where he represents one of the many faces of Muslim moderation.

by virtue of having assimilated in particular ways. Jay, a 60-year-old African American Muslim who I met in a progressive Quran discussion group, similarly described the term "moderate" as conveying, "I'm safe! I'm safe! I go to Disneyland!," with a love of Disneyland standing as a quintessential American trait. It was well understood that integration into American culture was generally used as the yardstick by which levels of Muslim moderation were determined.

During my fieldwork in New York, assimilationist rhetoric was consistently reiterated in various public service campaigns that sought to boost tolerance and understanding of Muslims, and in which Muslim Americans took part. The most recent such project was produced by the popular culture website, BuzzFeed, which released a video entitled "I'm Muslim But I'm Not…" The video featured American Muslims from a diversity of backgrounds, including a young, white man named Tom, explaining how safe they were in charming tones. "I'm Muslim but I'm not angry," or, "I'm Muslim but I don't wear the hijab," or, "I'm Muslim but I'm not dangerous… unless we're on the dance floor" (2015). This video went viral in Muslim circles on social media, and was "shared" on Twitter and Facebook by many people who took part in my research as participants. What struck me as odd was that I knew these individuals to be wary of the call for "moderate" orientations, and highly critical of the dominant expectations that Muslims assimilate or prove their ability to integrate into American culture. Yet here they were, distributing the very same ideas. I realized then that, in spite of their apprehensions, the prevailing pressure of Islamophobia compelled these participants to throw their caution to the winds and partake in a larger purpose of de-stigmatizing Muslims. For instance, a young woman of Pakistani background, Sonya, shared the video in response to an explosive conflict she was embroiled in with her (non-Muslim)

boyfriend's family members, in which they disapproved of him being with a Muslim. Knowing they would see her posts, she used Facebook to try and show them that Muslims were not extremists. In response to his friends distributing the video, even Azim, the most ardent critic of assimilationist rhetoric, sympathized by saying, "I understand why Muslims feel compelled to tap dance a bit."[83]

Sara, a Brooklyn-born woman whose parents came to the US following the Afghan-Soviet war, told me succinctly: the "moderate" image simply amounts to the "public face" of Islam and Muslims in America, and is not usually invoked for self-identification by Muslims themselves. Sara's observation matched my own findings, in which only one of the research participants was inclined to explicitly identify herself as "moderate." All other participants deployed the term and its associated assimilationist rhetoric strategically in certain contexts, usually in response to the public perception of Islam and Muslims. While they tended to distance themselves from the term "moderate," they nevertheless experienced Islam as a well-balanced religion that advocated moderation in all realms of life, and required them to favour middle roads over extremes. As Imam Rauf told me in a catchy phrase, "Islam moder-*ates* people."[84]

The single Muslim New Yorker I met who referred to herself as "moderate" was Elizabeth, an African-American woman in her 60s, with whom I spent considerable time socializing over the years. She complained to me over the phone one day about a friend of

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[83] Here, Azim is invoking Uncle Tom, the main character of Harriet Beacher Stowe's classic *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a slave who is beaten to death by his owner. Over time, the term "Uncle Tom" came to reference not a martyr but a "sell out" that is excessively concerned with pleasing one's own oppressor or otherwise complying with dominant standards. The epithet "House Muslim" (a reference to House Negro—a slave who worked in the master's house) was similarly used by Azim to describe certain Muslims, particularly those who worked with law enforcement or positioned themselves as "moderate" or "progressive" Muslims.
[84] The Imam has based his efforts to create a "moderate Muslim identity" on a discourse about Islam as a middle road, and Muslims as a balanced people on that road, which long predates 9/11.

hers who had started wearing a burqa and was becoming increasingly submissive to her husband. "I'm moderate," she said to contrast herself with her friend, who she viewed as having become "too strict." Yet several of Elizabeth's peers perceived her, too, as a rigid and austere in her theology: she clung to increasingly unacceptable homophobic views, which she believed were prescribed by Islam, and passed strong judgment on women who did not cover themselves with hijab as she did. Nevertheless, Elizabeth explained that her headscarf was the "perfect balance between mini-skirts and burqas," polar forms of dress she considered "extreme." In taking such a middle road, Elizabeth thought of herself as a moderate Muslim, even if others did not perceive her as one.

Elizabeth's case showcases the highly subjective nature of the "moderate" category. American Muslims who are perceived as having a "moderate" orientation, and those who might claim it themselves, include a dizzying array of Islam followers who subscribe to different religious understandings, political views, and lifestyles, but are joined by the common goal of distancing themselves from violence and terror. One person at a discussion I attended about Muslim representations in media explained that the "moderate" archetype serves to easily and immediately convey a Muslim's non-threatening status to non-Muslims who "primarily learn about Muslims from the media." This attendee was noting, as Sara did earlier, that the "moderate" category has a certain utility in conveying a positive, "public face" of Islam and Muslims, particularly American Muslims. Therein lies a major problem with notions of "moderate" Muslims: it first divides followers of Islam into the two categories of "good" and "bad" Muslims, and then ascribes a set of expectations to each. "Good" or "moderate" Muslims, apart from supporting state policies, are also expected to denounce terrorism at every occurrence. Moderate Muslims are often cynically conceptualized as either

non-existent or as a quiet majority of people who are unwilling to confront radical elements of their faith, even though Muslims around the world, including major Muslim American organizations, have indeed denounced terrorism.[85] Many non-Muslim Americans continue to view their Muslim counterparts as being complacent with Muslim extremists. The burden to prove otherwise lies with American Muslims, who are charged with the duty of speaking out against each instance of Muslim violence or terror.

Muslim Apologies

The expectation that Muslims should make it a point to disassociate from violence and repair Islam's reputation appears incessantly in American Muslim lives, and is a key component in crafting a "moderate" Muslim image. The association between terror and ordinary Muslims surfaces routinely, for instance, in CNN's segments, "Should Muslims always denounce terrorism?" and "Should Moderate Muslims speak out more?" Fox News, in its ominously titled segment, "The Silence of Muslims," preferred positing perceived Muslim complacency as a fact rather than a question up for discussion. Not only are such associations of all Muslims with terror deeply Islamophobic, they also lead to an apology fatigue of sorts.

In 2014, Muslims worldwide, including Americans, took to Twitter to mock the expectation that they apologize for terrorist attacks. They formed the hashtag #MuslimApologies. "We're sorry for traffic jams, when toast lands buttered side down… & England being unable to take (cricket) penalties," wrote one user. "I'm just going to wear this shirt every day from now on," posted another, alongside a photo of a t-shirt that read, "I'm sorry for everything… in the past, present and future."

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[85] For example, see Nash Jenkins' 2015 *Time* article, "Muslims Around the World Speak Out Against Terrorist Attacks in Paris," and Zafar Siddiqui's 2014 *Star Tribune* article, "American Muslim Organizations Condemn ISIS Terrorism."

While some Twitter users employed exaggeration to mock the idea that Muslims should be apologizing for terror, others used the Muslim Apologies hashtag sarcastically, to call attention to Islam and Muslims' positive history and groundbreaking contributions to the world. "I'm sorry for Algebra," read one tweet. "I'm sorry that the founder of the world's oldest university was a Muslim woman in 859 (Fez, Morocco)," read another. The latter tweet was responding specifically to the mainstream obsession with Muslim women, who are most often depicted as highly uneducated and oppressed, and invoked by both the US government and Islamophobes in support of their various political endeavours.[86] Still other users utilized the hashtag to call out a double standard. "We will keep apologizing for every death caused by ISIS, as long as every American keeps apologizing for Hiroshima & Nagasaki!" tweeted *The Muslim Times*, an international news blog.

While some Muslim Americans used humour to obviously distance themselves from terror and violence carried out by Muslims, others organized to publicly and straightforwardly state their good character and compliance with state powers. In August 2014, I attended the annual Muslim Day Parade in New York City and found almost every speaker present, including Imam Shamsi Ali, denouncing violence and calling for moderation. The Chairman of the organizing committee announced that Muslims have been living in the United States "with peace, harmony, dignity," and encouraged Muslims to "adopt democratic pathways" in life. He additionally urged everyone to remember "those who died in the 9/11 attacks thirteen years before." Knowing the scrutiny[87] under which this particular Muslim event was taking

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[86] See Lila Abu-Lughod's (2013) book *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?* Also, Nathan Lean's (2015) Salon.com piece, "Bill Maher and Fox New's Muslim feminism: How Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Asra Nomani embrace the soft Islamophobia of Western expectations."

[87] It is common knowledge that hawkish Islamophobes such as Pamela Geller send agents to record Muslim gatherings for her to analyze and criminalize on her blog. It is also common knowledge that Muslim spaces and events are under routine surveillance by the NYPD and other law enforcement agencies. In addition, state agencies are conspicuously integrated into the Muslim Day Parade. For example, the 2015 parade was kicked off

place, meeting the dominant criteria of Good Muslims, including showing concern about 9/11, was essential to disarming critics and conveying moderation. Indeed, public statements against acts of terror are common among Muslim organizations and mosque leaderships. So are conversations between Muslims, which denounce groups like ISIS and lament the use of Islam to justify terrorism, homophobia, misogyny, and all sorts of ills.[88] Therefore, the never ending calls by non-Muslims for Muslims to denounce or apologize for violence was met with frustration. I scarcely met a Muslim in New York City who didn't have apology fatigue. As Azim explained:

> It comes to a point where you just roll your eyes… In the news right now is the Nigerian girls… the 280 girls [kidnapped by the group Boko Haram in 2014]. So what does every single Muslim prioritize at this moment? Letting the world know "Hey, it's not us. It's these crazies, they don't resemble us, that's not what Islam is." That's the priority and that to me is sad. No other group has to do that… That [the kidnappings] was really just one thing in a whole stream of things, you know, Nigeria is the latest. We're not going to stop having to defend ourselves.

Given the comments made by Bill Maher, John Hawkins, and countless other talking heads, Azim's prediction seems accurate. Years of Muslims condemning terror outright, or otherwise showing themselves as normal and nonviolent individuals, has done nothing to

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by the NYPD marching band, followed by a solemn procession of Muslim police officers and corrections workers in uniform, and ended with the FBI's Community Outreach booth handing out Superman action figures and other items to children attending the event.

[88] As I show in this dissertation, Imam Khalid Latif, the progressive Muslim groups, and Imam Siraj Wahhaj do foster such conversations with other Muslims.

slow media speculation of Muslim complacency. At the time of writing, Franklin Graham, the son of famous evangelist Billy Graham, urged Fox News viewership that, "It's not just the Muslims in the Middle East [that are violent]. We have to be careful of the Muslims in this country. We have to stop the immigration of Muslims from coming to this country… if we don't stop that, we are going to regret that…" (2015)—a sentiment repeated by Donald Trump in December of the same year. The white noise of such media is absorbed by ordinary citizens who commonly espouse suspicious views of Muslims, whether through hostile remarks made at anti-mosque protests or in the comments section of online news forums. "Where are the moderate Muslims?" they ask rhetorically. Because the concept of "moderate" is so slippery, its criteria can be shifted by Islamophobes to fit their claims, interests and perceptions.

In May 2015, hundreds of anti-Islam protesters descended upon the Islamic Community Center of Phoenix, Arizona. They were mostly white men, came heavily armed, and in some instances, wore military gear and Third Reich paraphernalia. The irony of shouting, "Nazis go home!" at Muslims was lost on participants, as was the irony of complaining about the violence potential of Muslims while surrounding a prayer service with weapons. Ordinary citizen and Iraq war veteran, Jon Ritzheimer, had organized the event in response to the Garland, Texas shootings, where two Muslim gunmen unsuccessfully attempted to attack another anti-Islam event, the "Draw Mohammad" contest hosted by Pamela Geller. "This is not the country I want my children to be raised in," explained Ritzheimer, whose "Fuck Islam" t-shirt minced no words. "They need to learn tolerance,"[89] he elaborated about Muslims. The mosque he was targeting, however, had a record of advocating tolerance, condemning terrorism, criticizing militant Muslim groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram, and of hosting a series of sermons about nonviolence.

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[89] May 2015 CNN interview with Anderson Cooper.

Identical action from Muslims took place around the country. In New York City, for example, Majlis as-Shura (a coalition of imams) organized to simultaneously preach against religious violence in Friday services around the city, even launching a social media campaign under the well-meaning, if clunky, hashtag #MajlisShuraNYCforJusticeNotViolentExtremism. Per the norm, these facts did not give Ritzheimer and likeminded allies pause. They were able to overlook Muslim leaders' efforts against religious violence by simply shifting the criteria of what counted for religious moderation among Muslims. "True Islam is terrorism," said Ritzheimer in a CNN interview, implying that authentic followers of Islam must follow every word of the Quran literally, including verses that permit violence. By claiming that "true" Muslims must prioritize such verses equal to other subjects in the book, for instance, the life of Jesus, family structure or charity, Ritzheimer and likeminded individuals can easily dismiss Muslims who actively combat extremism as going against the Quran and therefore not really Muslim.

In everyday life, this sort of criteria shifting serves to accommodate ordinary xenophobia. Muslim Americans who have always lived non-violently expect to nevertheless be accused of subscribing to a violent ideology and approving of violence—for not speaking out against terrorists overseas, for example. Those who do speak out against such crimes expect to nevertheless be accused of not doing so enough, or for being hypocrites who adhere to sharia, which is conceptualized as the same thing that militants like ISIS advance. Because of the ease with which "moderate" criteria can be shifted, almost any single "Muslim" quality can be taken as a sign of immoderation, and therefore as a threat.[90] As many of the participants in this study attested, Muslims' very bodies have been enough to warrant

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[90] Many non-Muslims have been targeted by anti-Muslim bigotry after being mistaken for Muslims because of their skin colour, attire, or other traits. As Chapter 1 shows, the first person murdered in the post-9/11 Islamophobia frenzy was not Muslim but Sikh.

suspicion. Muslim women, especially those who wear hijab, have narrated countless experiences of discrimination and violence.[91] Muslim men are not viewed any less suspiciously.[92] For instance, Azim, who is Latino, was subject to additional screening at the airport after growing a beard and wearing a *kufi*.[93] On one occasion, the TSA took interest in only one of many items in his bag: a t-shirt with Arabic script on it. Indeed, an Arab man who was prevented from flying out of New York's Kennedy airport was told by an agent that, "going to an airport with a T-shirt in Arabic script is like going to a bank wearing a T-shirt saying, 'I'm a robber'" (Associated Press, 2006). From language to physical appearance, to faith practices, any trait may be interpreted as a sign of Muslim threat, depending on who is doing the interpreting. Proving one's moderation, as Nathan Lean (2014) observes, becomes a trap.

For some, the concept of "moderate" additionally connoted, as Imam Rauf concluded, that, "You're a milk-toast Muslim, you're not really a passionate Muslim, you're not a 'true' believer… You're compromising [in your faith]." As an advocate of a "moderate Muslim identity," which his organization equates with an "American Muslim identity," Rauf argues that this negative reaction is based on "a myth" because it assumes that there is only one "proper" way to follow Islam and be Muslim, and that "moderate" must fall outside of that way. He explained to me:

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[91] For instance, in the spring of 2014, a man spat on and threatened to kill a Muslim teenager as she rode a bus in Queens, because he deemed her a "terrorist" based on her physical appearance; for a notable example of discrimination against Muslim women, see the Supreme Court case involving Samantha Elauf, a woman who was denied employment by Abercrombie and Fitch because she wore a hijab.

[92] In her book, *Homeland Insecurity* (2009), Louise Cainkar suggests that Muslim men and women are perceived as posing two different kinds of threats based on their respective assignment to public and private spheres. Muslim women, who are seen as caregivers that pass down tradition and other ways of being to younger generations, are perceived as a cultural threat. Muslim men, on the other hand, are regarded as combatants posing a physical threat to the public.

[93] A skullcap commonly worn by Muslim men.

The idea of moderation is really the opposite of extremism. The notion that there's only one opinion that's correct, this is fundamentally against Islam. You ask many Muslims how many *madahibs* [schools of thought] there are and even those who don't know anything [about theology] will say that there are four *madhabs…* the four are the major ones. So even if you accept that there are four, it means there is more than one way to be right, correct? [They say,] "Yes." So then I ask them, "Why do you behave like only one decision is correct? What interpretation is correct?"

Imam Rauf's view reinforces the problematic binary between moderation and extremism, which forces American Muslims to identify with state-friendly language lest they be regarded as dangerous fanatics. Nevertheless, his reasoning is not without merit and resonates with many Muslims, including self-identified Progressives, to whom I now turn.

Progressive Muslims

"Week in and week out, you criticize Muslims! For having beards, for wearing a scarf… but maybe these things are an expression of love [for Islam]!" Al, a white convert in his 50s, had just disrupted the quiet norm of our progressive Quran discussion to challenge the discussion leader, Sameer. Sameer was a soft-spoken Pakistani-American man in his 60s. He hosted the weekly discussion in Midtown Manhattan, where his efforts to reform Islam involved frequent criticism of outward gestures of Muslim piety, such as growing beards or wearing hijab. Al's outburst resulted in a thick tension around our small cafeteria table of six, as the rest of us awkwardly stared at our hands, waiting for Sameer to respond. Sameer said gently, "I'm more interested in inner understandings [of Islam]," adding that it is these "inner

understandings" – self-reflective processes of interpretation – that are key in "really loving" Islam. He noted that there is a widespread desire for religious and political change "all over the Muslim world," and that Muslims would progress if, instead of being "strait-jacketed into traditional rules," they asked themselves how a particular religious teaching helped elevate their lives.

This response did little to assuage Al, who remained visibly upset. Sameer, however well meaning, had once again invoked a dichotomy between "inward" and "outward" expressions of faith, implying that those who cultivate a religious appearance are superficial in their religious practice. What this suggested was that people like Al, in growing a beard and praying ritualistically in Arabic (a language they did not understand) were unsophisticated traditionalists who subscribed to particular rules and rituals for no good reason except that their predecessors had done the same. This view, which favoured introspection over embodiment and frequently denounced the centrality of rituals in Islam, was espoused commonly among many self-identified progressive Muslims I met in New York.

For instance, in August, 2014, I attended the Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) annual retreat, at which Sameer was a speaker. The event, which took place at the LGBT church described in Chapter 5, attracted the regular members of MPV-NY, as well as a dozen or so new faces. The title of the conference, "Islam for Critical Thinkers," immediately posited Muslims who identified as "progressive" in a hierarchal relationship with those who did not.[94] The title implied that those who were not progressive were simply "blind" followers of Islam and lacked analytical skills and thoughtfulness. This assumption was echoed throughout the conference. While such a framing may have been an effort to challenge the

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[94] For more insight about this and other common criticisms of the "progressive" label, see Omid Safi's edited volume, *Progressive Muslims* (2003).

submissive attitudes of Muslims who often reproduce problematic hierarchies in the name of faith, any such message was lost in oversimplified imaginings of a pre-modern, "traditional" Islam that was timeless, oppressive and homogenous, and against which progressive Islam was defined.

In MPV's counterpositioning of traditional vs. progressive, both categories were deployed as social determinants that held progressives up as especially able to adapt to modernity, which was frequently conceptualized in terms of assimilation into American culture. Evoking the progressive pole of this binary immediately conjured the other pole, a "traditional" or "fundamentalist" Islamic school that resisted change, discouraged individual choice, and quashed dissent. I was not alone in noticing that MPV's rhetoric relied heavily on its desire to craft an American Islam in its own image,[95] as well as inherently racist[96] categorizations of Muslims, which left no room for the so-called "traditional" ones. The voices of white converts were routinely elevated in MPV's online forums. These individuals discredited born Muslims' (usually Muslims of colour) understandings of Islam as tainted with cultural influences, ironically overlooking the reality that their religious interpretations were also contingent upon specific cultural contexts. They sought to reform the faith to coincide with their own ways of life, while claiming that such an interpretation was closer to the original Islam of the Prophet Mohammad. Whether online or in-person (as was the case

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[95] MPV's ideas of what should constitute an "American Islam" reproduced hegemonic expectations of religious and ethnic minorities, and desired that Muslims act as a monolith living according to dominant norms. Not only did this vision exclude Muslims who were deemed too traditional, either due to their conservative beliefs or their ties to their ancestral cultures, it alienated others as well. For instance, as Islamic studies scholar Michael Muhammad Knight (cited above) pointed out in a 2016 Facebook post, MPV Founder Ani Zonneveld's insistence that "American Islam" be based in English language prayer overlooked the fact that an increasing number of Latino converts could only pray in Spanish.

[96] More broadly, progressive Islam has also been criticized for being inherently racist in how it is dominated by middle class, ivory tower Arabs and South Asians that marginalize the voices of black and Latino Muslims, and generally invalidate non-Western ways of knowing. For example, see Vanessa Rivera de la Fuente and Eren Cervantes-Altamirano's 2016 piece "Progressive Islam: A Critical View from Latin Muslim Feminists," published on the blog *Feminism and Religion*.

with Al clashing with Sameer), such a dynamic was clearly racial, as white converts comfortably condescended to brown and black Muslims about faults in the latter's various religious perspectives.

Born Muslims, too, spoke of cultural baggage tainting Islam. MPV's founder, Ani Zonneveld, boiled "traditional" Muslims down to "turbans," the Arabic language, and other anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotypes embedded in mainstream American culture (Knight 2012). Zonneveld and many MPV members often spoke of ills such as child marriage with the same disdain they had when discussing everyday norms, such as long beards and native clothing. While there is obviously a connection between patriarchy and the way we present our bodies, such traits were inflexibly confined to the realm of "traditionalism," and viewed as being incompatible with American Islam. For instance, I attended an MPV meeting to which a first-time attendee wore *shalwar-kameez*[97]. Judging by her attire, the regular members present instantly assumed she was a "traditional" Muslim who didn't belong among progressives. Her appearance raised suspicions of homeland ties that hadn't yet relaxed enough to distance her from religious austerity. As we all learned in time, "that girl in the shalwar-kameez" was a local, American-born activist rising to prominence. She was the founder of an influential group that encouraged young Muslims to speak freely about faith, sexuality, racism, and other topics central in progressive considerations. Yet in that initial MPV meeting, this activist's theological and political stance was wrongfully assumed by her native garb. Once again, assimilation into American culture was one of the measuring sticks by which a Muslim's acceptability was determined. Indeed, many self-identified progressives I met used physical and gestural traits, such as attire and language, as a measure of how assimilated and secular, and therefore, how progressive, a Muslim might be.

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[97] A traditional South Asian outfit of loose-fitting trousers and a tunic.

After years of attending MPV-NY conferences and meetings, it became abundantly apparent to me that the group's *modus operandi* of explicitly distancing itself from perceived "traditional" habits was often an attempt to rectify the reputation of Muslims as a regressive and problematic group. Criticisms aside, both MPV and Sameer's Progressive Quran discussion regularly hosted dialogue about important social issues: interfaith marriage or domestic violence, for example. The topic of LGBTQ rights, and reconciling the tension between "being gay and Muslim" was one such focus, and serves as a clear example of how the progressive Muslims developed new religious understandings to address pressing social and political realities. Islamic studies scholar, Ayesha Chaudhry, notes in her discussion on Islam and domestic violence that Muslims "exert a great deal of effort to re-imagine the meanings" of certain Quran verses to "align with their expectations of a just God's revelation" and that "the literal wording of the divine text matters less than a believer's expectation of the text" (2013, 135). Passages of the Quran can therefore be "interpreted to have multiple meanings, including meanings that contradict the lexical wording of the text" (135). The Islamic tradition, she explains, is thus recast into new paradigms.

Before continuing, it would serve well to outline what being a progressive Muslim meant to the Muslim New Yorkers I met. "Progressive" is a term commonly confused with "moderate" in reference to liberally inclined Muslims, and the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Whereas the category of "moderate" has become something of a catchall encompassing all non-violent Muslims, my fieldwork showed that the term "progressive" conveyed something much more specific and action-oriented. In the most basic terms, as Islamic studies scholar Omid Safi (2003) explains, a "progressive" orientation seeks to find an interpretation of God's message that accommodates issues of modernity, and actively creates

safe and welcoming spaces in which to do so. It almost goes without saying, of course, that "progressive," like any terminology that seeks to describe a way of being Muslim, is not a hard and fast category. Nevertheless, there are a number of guiding principles around which the progressive Muslim orientation is organized. As Safi explains, "At the heart of a progressive Muslim interpretation is a simple yet radical idea: every human life… has exactly the same intrinsic worth," an idea which is anchored in the Quran (2003, 3). This idea encompasses human rights and social justice values, such as gender equality and religious pluralism; it concerns itself with the struggle against oppressive structures, and pursuing equality and justice for marginalized groups, for example, women and sexual minorities. Another major outlook of progressive Muslim thought is that many Islamic tenets are historically contingent, and therefore not bound to exclusivist or normative interpretations that are based in a patriarchal tradition. As a young man in his early 20s told me at an MPV meeting, "Just because something was okay to do 1400 years ago, doesn't make it okay today." Along these lines, a progressive orientation invokes the principle of independent reasoning, or *itjihad*, to reconcile premodern religious principles with contemporary demands.

While progressive Muslims prioritize an egalitarian theology, they anchor their views in the inherited Islamic tradition, albeit relying on minority opinions within that tradition to maintain authority in mainstream religious communities (Chaudhry 2013). For example, one of the scholars to whom MPV members turn is Amina Wadud, an Islamic Studies professor who famously served as a female Imam for the 2005 mixed-gender prayer in New York City. Wadud is also the author of a groundbreaking work, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, in which she strives against a status-quo reading of the Quran that positions women as subjects rather than agents. She instead moves towards an

interpretation "that validates the female voice and brings it out of the shadows" (1999, xv). While Wadud is a serious and well-respected academic in her field, her religious interpretations and opinions are not mainstream and have been heavily criticized by other Muslims. This was especially the case with her controversial female-led prayer, which was either lambasted for going against a common decree prohibiting women from leading men in prayer[98] or dismissed as Western feminist rabble rousing (Al Jazeera 2005; Sertori 2009). Wadud's action was supported by the Progressive Muslim Union of North America, which stated that,

> The goal of the New York City woman-led, mixed gender prayer was not to impose this particular style of prayer on others, but to be part of a challenge of the current status quo, which attempts to dictate one style of prayer on everyone, namely where men lead, and women stay behind. Our point in endorsing woman-led prayer and launching the Prayer Initiative is not so much to dictate how people should pray, but rather to insist that a wide spectrum of interpretations be respected and discussed (The Pluralism Project 2005).

Others also defended the female-led prayer as a necessary jihad in pursuit of much needed gender egalitarianism (more broadly, a quest for religious moderation), and emphasized its legitimate grounding in the Islamic tradition. "The Quran itself does not address the issue of

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[98] Women generally stand behind men in prayer due to mainstream traditions prohibiting men from looking at women, most especially while in worship. For instance, interpretations of Quran passages, such as, "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them" (24:30).

who leads prayer," noted Islamic jurist and law professor Khaled Abou Al Fadl, adding that, "The Prophet said the most learned should lead" (Al Jazeera 2005).

The progressive Muslims I met often had a contradictory relationship with the idea of tradition. On one hand, they imagined "traditional" Muslims as necessarily subscribing to a draconian and patriarchal religious structure, and as consisting of new immigrants who clung stubbornly to cultural habits deemed incommensurate with modern American society. On the other hand, they invoked Islamic tradition to lend credence to their own viewpoints. MPV's advocacy for LGBTQ acceptance among Muslims provides another insightful example.

"Traditional Islam teaches intolerance of LGBTQ individuals," stated Ani Zonneveld at MPV's 2012 retreat in New York City. Yet, in spite of this straightforward condemnation of the Islamic tradition, Zonneveld wrote an article in which she invoked it (though selectively) to advocate for marriage equality. To support her claim that gay marriage is entirely Islamic, she quoted a sentence directly from the Quran and elaborated:

> Marriage in Islam is simply a contract between two consenting adults.[99] The
> stipulation is that they must be mature enough to make that decision, of sound
> mind, and not coerced into marriage. It is not gender specific, nor is it
> stipulated to be between a man and a woman. Instead, the Quran 24:32: "AND
> [you ought to] marry the single from among you...", clearly highlights
> marriage has to be between single individuals, regardless of gender (2013).

MPV-NY members also pointed to the Quran to combat homophobia among Muslims. They selectively cited verses referencing the story of Lot, for example, 21:74, which states,

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[99] The Quran (4:24, 4:25) permits sex and marriage with female slaves, and the issue of consent is unclear.

"And to Lot We gave judgment and knowledge, and We saved him from the city that was committing wicked deeds. Indeed, they were a people of evil, defiantly disobedient," and 29:28, which states, "And [mention] Lot, when he said to his people, 'Indeed, you commit such immorality as no one has preceded you with from among the worlds. Indeed, you approach men and obstruct the road and commit in your meetings [every] evil.'" Some of the progressive Muslims I met did not interpret these verses as condemning homosexuality specifically, but understood them as condemning the generally lustful and violent acts of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. To the others, such as Sameer, Quran verses about Lot were deemed too vague to determine a solid theological stance on homosexuality.

Sameer's weekly discussions drew from a book he had published, in which each chapter focused on a particular ayah (verse) and offered alternative interpretations of it. The book and discussion aimed for a theology that closed sectarian rifts and allowed for a religious practice that any person could find meaningful. The group's discussion of the following verse again offers an insightful look into the interpretive practices of progressive Muslims:

> And those to whom scripture was given did not become divided into sects until
> after evidence had come to them. But they were enjoined nothing more than to
> worship God, be sincere in religion and be regular in prayer and give charity,
> for this is the essence of religion (Quran 98:4-5, as translated by Sameer).

The more vocal members of the group agreed that this passage clearly showed that the requirements of Islam—sincerity, prayer, and charity—were very few and very simple. In

their view, being Muslim entailed these straightforward, private expressions of faith that were easy to comply with. They viewed practices outside these private expressions as peripheral rituals that became a source of needless discord between different Muslim groups. "Different religious groups have different ways of prayer, and they make it a point of contention and division. It is noteworthy that the Quran speaks repeatedly about the importance of prayer but does not prescribe a formulation for it," explained Sameer. Along the same lines as Zonneveld's view, it was well established among regular discussants in Sameer's group that the five times daily prayer prescribed for Muslims ought to be recited in English, rather than the standard Arabic[100]; that for non Arabs, worshipping in Arabic was not a mindful or sincere act but an obligatory motion that amounted to "checking off a box." Regardless of which ayah was selected each week, the general theme of every discussion was the same: Islam had been complicated by various cultural norms being presented as religion.[101] For a more enlightened and satisfying religious practice that accommodated human progress, Muslims needed to consciously prioritize the broader, "bare essentials" of the faith over rituals fashioned out of their cultural particularities rather than God's straightforward mandates.

Zonneveld, MPV members, and other Muslims such as Sameer, relied on the Quran to establish authority even as they heavily criticized "traditional" Muslim mindsets. They believed in the holy book as the crux of Islamic tradition and did not contest its core values or its centrality in their faith. Rather, they took issue with patriarchal interpretations of the text, which have marginalized certain groups, notably, women and LGBTQ individuals. The case

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[100] The 11th Century Islamic (Hanafi) jurist, Sarakhsi, similarly argued that the Quran could be translated into other languages as long as it retained its meaning and inimitability. He argued with those who claimed that the Arabic Quran was incomparable that non-Arabs could understand great Arab poets very well and that Mohammad was the Prophet of all mankind, not just Arabic speakers (Ahmed 2012, 28-29). For more about this, see Rumee Ahmed's *Narratives of Islamic Legal Theory.*
[101] This topic, conceptualized as "true Islam," is also discussed in Jennifer L. Bryan's work on the post-9/11 discourse of Muslims in Jersey City. See "Constructing 'the True Islam' in Hostile Times: The Impact of 9/11 on Arab Muslims in Jersey City" in *Wounded City: The Social Impact of 9/11* (2005), pp 133-59.

they made was not to reform the central tenets of Islam, but the "bad theology" which

permeated the faith as we know it today – theology that they thought was coloured by the

cultural practices of certain Muslim populations (for example, female circumcision) and

marred by an unquestioning submission to religious scholars who uphold deeply patriarchal

and hetereonormative interpretations of Islamic texts. They believed that such theology had

compromised the universal applicability of Islamic principles.

MPV members and Sameer spoke of religion as if it was completely separate from

"culture." "That's cultural," they would say of any Muslim beliefs or practices with which

they disagreed. They sought not only to de-Arabize Islam, but also to free it from South and

South-East Asian influences. I received no clear answer when I asked them what Islam and

Muslim practice would look like without cultural influences, and specifically, what reforms in

progressive or American Islam would be without our own American sensibilities. I also asked

whether the prophet's behaviours, which we are supposed to emulate, could ever be

considered apart from the culture from which he, and they, emerged. Sameer argued that

Mohammad shunned his people's norms by bringing in a new faith, rejecting female

infanticide, rejecting idolatry and so on. According to his view, the revelation was a rupture

that caused the prophet to rise above his culture, and if he could, why shouldn't we?[102]

Despite progressive efforts to overcome cultural particularities and universalize Islam

through a "back to basics" approach focused on core Islamic principles, several participants

complained that both MPV and Sameer's philosophies failed to resonate with them. These

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[102] Imam Feisal Rauf, on the other hand, embraced the power that culture had to influence on people's faith practices, and put the concept of culture at the center of his efforts to promote a moderate, American Islam. He correctly observed that Muslim practices take on the colour of their various cultures; the way people dress for modesty, or how they celebrate Eid, for instance, is different in Pakistan than in Egypt. Therefore, it simply made sense to him that American Islam would represent American values and tastes. Rauf's taken-for-granted assumption of what constitutes "American" values—dominant Protestant values—is discussed in the Introduction.

individuals felt that the outlooks presented were divisive in how they positioned progressive

Muslims as more open-minded and knowledgeable than "blind" traditionalists. They also felt

that MPV meetings and Sameer's discussion group were insular in how quickly dissenting

voices, such as Al's, were marginalized. The two groups were accused of being exclusive and

middle class, as discussants frequently quoted academics, such as Wadud, and used

theoretical jargon (about "agency" and "hegemony" for instance) to further their points.

Indeed, in both MPV meetings and Sameer's discussion group the regulars were usually

highly educated individuals who were well versed in the social sciences and related theory.

Newcomers were unlikely to return.

Hima was one such person. A Somali immigrant in her 30s who had grown up in a

conservative and patriarchal religious setting, and who had just stopped wearing hijab, she

attended Sameer's Quran discussion because she wanted to gain new perspectives on Islam.

She reported that rather than feeling as if she had entered a welcoming place in which she

could learn something new, Sameer's Quran discussion group felt "like a counseling session,"

which pathologized "traditional" Muslims and sought to "cure" them. She observed that the

discussion group was reductive and abstracted so-called "traditional" ways of being, instead

of considering the genuinely meaningful and deeply satisfying role that religious rituals play

in the lives of Muslims like herself. She left the discussion feeling insulted, and did not return

for a second visit.

Azim similarly objected that MPV meetings fostered an environment of moral

superiority in that they, "never feel organic… [they feel] just too forced, like 'Hey, look at

these ideas that make us *so* progressive and different from those other Muslims over there!'"

When he first began attending MPV meetings, he would challenge the group, pressing other

attendees to acknowledge that the progressive orientation was highly political and potentially divisive; that it separated self-proclaimed progressive Muslims from the others while ironically lamenting the sectarianism that divides Muslims the world over. Every MPV meeting I attended involved Azim scoffing inwardly at many of the things that were said. When I asked him why he continued attending the meetings regularly when they so clearly annoyed him, he responded that he was in it for the company and the Thai dinner that followed. As I found out later, he was also drawn to the meetings out of love. He eventually entered a romantic relationship with an MPV member—a charming, young, Egyptian woman—with whom he would have hours-long debates about Islam, Muslim life and the pitfalls of MPV.

"Traditional" Muslims

Among the Muslim New Yorkers I met, "moderate" and "progressive" Muslim positionalities were defined against ideas of what constituted a "traditional" Muslim. A "traditional" Muslim was commonly perceived as one whose religious beliefs were stagnant, who was overly concerned with legalities and rituals, and whose theological paradigm failed to accommodate the changing times. In this section, I explore the category of "traditional Muslim." I show how subjectively the term "traditional" was used by Muslims in New York, and also how it was a concept so alienating and stigmatizing that even the most orthodox Muslims I met were extremely hesitant to identify with it.

My purpose in problematizing categories such as "traditional Muslim," or "progressive Muslim," throughout this chapter is not to downplay religious differences among Muslims. Such differences should be acknowledged, of course, especially in any work aiming

to counter representations of American Muslims as a homogenous group. My purpose, again, is to highlight the values ascribed to this particular category of religious difference, which give it its conceptual power. As I have shown in Chapter 1, these values have social and political consequences for Muslim Americans, particularly those who are perceived as being "too religious".

Even as many of the self-identified progressive Muslims I met invoked the Islamic tradition to support their various religious and political positions, and even as many of them understood human culture and practice as fluid and complex, they nevertheless spoke of being "traditional" in a taken-for-granted manner, as siloed into a singular way of being. As Osilla and Soares (2009) point out, such reified views of Muslims are formed not only by the normative discourse of state or other popular rhetoric, but by Muslims themselves. So even as progressive Muslims and others believed that "traditional" or "conservative" Muslims were fixed in their ways, many conservative Muslims I met indeed proclaimed an understanding of their faith as "unitary, timeless and unchanging" (Osilla and Soares 2009, 2). Such representations, Osilla and Soares argue, do not merely describe reality but have the generative power to intensify the reality alluded to in the discourse. These Muslims' idealistic view of a homogenous ("perfect," as they often called it) Islam made it easier for others to view them as "traditional," that is, held back by tradition. Even so, the concept of "traditional" Muslim is mired in problematic assumptions about conservative Muslims and the relationship between their discourse and practice. In reality, there can be a yawning gap between what the conservatives *say* and what they ultimately *do*. For instance, as I show later in this section, even Muslims who claimed to take the Quran as the literal word of God did not always do so.

A sensible understanding of what "traditional" means should be grounded, first, in a discussion of what the Islamic tradition is.

The Islamic tradition is rooted in the Quran, *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and *Sunnah* (lifeways of the Prophet Muhammad). Talal Asad, in his landmark piece, The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam (1986), conceptualizes Islam as a discursive tradition. He views tradition as wrought from discourses that inform practitioners about the proper form and purpose of a particular practice—a practice with an established history, which links past and future via the present. During my fieldwork, every Muslim New Yorker I interviewed invoked longstanding religious discourse to inform his or her theological positioning. Even progressives, such as Sameer and MPV members, who were highly critical of the so-called traditionalists, relied unquestioningly on what they said was the "essence," or "basics" of Islam. As Brian Turner has noted, "Even innovative thinkers in Western settings are careful not to challenge directly a literal reading of the scripture…from a theological position, but argue instead for reform from the standpoint of political expediency" (2007, 9). MPV, for instance, was formed after 9/11 in a conscious attempt to challenge Islamic extremism and religious violence and patriarchy through alternative interpretations of the texts.

Traditionalism among the Muslims I met was extremely diverse. Simply put, even among the most orthodox, some Muslims were more conservative than others. Obviously, pointing out that a spectrum of belief and practices exist among American Muslims is not sufficient by itself. Terms such as "progressive" and "traditional" are used by Muslims to delineate and describe Muslim positionalities so frequently that they are indeed meaningful categories. Their relatability to, and relationships with, each other are organized based on the

perceptions that accompany such titles. It is therefore important to explore the basis upon which such distinctions are drawn.

During my fieldwork, I found that what set the so-called "traditional" Muslims apart from the progressives who identified them as such was their distinct approach toward the Islamic tradition, particularly the holy texts. Whereas progressives also rooted their positions in the Quran, Sunnah and Hadith, they considered these sources to be open to interpretation and accommodating of historical circumstances. Others, however, saw them as relatively fixed. This is not to say that the so-called "traditional" Muslims were completely averse to the Islamic tradition being interpreted for contemporary needs. Rather, whereas progressive Muslims highlighted the individual's connection to God and lack of clergy in Islam, and advocated personal interpretations to mediate between religious texts and social contexts, the more orthodox Muslims generally limited interpretations to the *ulema* or religious scholars, whom they considered uniquely qualified to make determinations about Islamic requirements. Many participants acknowledged that their religious knowledge was acquired through their immersion in Muslim social settings and everyday religious habits, rather than through any advanced education of their own. The only formal religious education most of them received was in the Sunday school programs[103] their parents had enlisted them in as children. In adulthood, they looked to religious scholars, who were always orthodox men highly educated in theology and jurisprudence.

Religious understandings, then, were shaped by the sources of information available to people. Even as many Muslim New Yorkers relied on the expertise of *ulema,* and formed their religious positions based on longstanding, taken-for-granted interpretations, they were

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[103] Although Friday is the day of worship for Muslims but also a work day in North America, religious education for children often takes place on Sundays, in programs that are modeled and named after American Sunday schools.

simultaneously "freeing themselves from unwieldy juridical-historical traditions… to

reconstruct a better, purer and more cohesive structure of interpretations," which lead to

increasingly individuated forms of media-influenced religious authority (Volpi and Turner

2007, 10). For instance, some younger Muslims I met gave credence to the messages of "rock

star imams." These celebrity leaders were media savvy American imams who rooted their

sermons in the Islamic tradition, and were outspoken about issues that were commonly

imagined as the exclusive realm of progressive or "moderate" Muslims: religious freedom,

and women's and human rights. For instance, Suheib Webb, a white convert and well-liked

imam, used Snapchat to deliver slang-filled, speed sermons to Muslim youth. Using a

"straight talk" tone, he delivered injunctions about infrequently discussed topics, such as the

permissibility of abortion up to 16 weeks.

Imam Khalid Latif of the Islamic Center of New York University (ICNYU) was

another famous figure that influenced many Muslims I met, especially youth. Like Webb, he

fit many of the criteria used to categorize "traditional" Muslims: dressing in turbans and

robes, keeping a beard, and not shaking hands with women, for instance. For this reason,

some of the progressive Muslims I met remained dissatisfied with him. By others, Latif was

overwhelmingly regarded as a forward thinking, "moderate" imam, and the Islamic Center he

oversaw came highly recommended by Muslims of all ages, including some progressives, as a

"moderate" space. Latif's various calls for social justice, such as the inclusion of women in

mosques, overshadowed any of his traits that might have been considered "too traditional."

Using stories from the prophetic tradition and other religious lessons, he frequently addressed

urgent social issues, such as poverty and anti-black racism among some Muslims. He is

known to advocate for women through ICNYU programs for domestic and sexual assault

victims, through his social media accounts, and also as a regular contributor on the *Huffington Post* (Latif 2012; 2013; 2014). While many saw Latif as a "moderate Muslim," he told me that he did not identify as such. Rather, he felt the term "authentic" was a more accurate description as it emphasized that everything he practiced or preached was firmly rooted in the Islamic tradition.

Except for self-identified progressives, the majority of Muslim New Yorkers I encountered did not use any conceptual categories to position themselves religiously. They had never thought about using any terminology to locate themselves on a religiosity spectrum, and regarded themselves simply as "Muslims," or "Shia"/"Sunni" if asked about their orientation. They combined levels of moderation with orthodoxy in varying degrees of religiosity, and could not be easily compartmentalized. However, patriarchal norms were common among many of those who were, in Omid Safi's terms, conservative traditionalists: their theology mandated that all Muslims are "bound by what they deem the authoritative juridicial or theological decisions of the past" (Safi, 6). Yet, even the most conservative people I met engaged in thoughtful analyses of religious ideas, rather than subscribing "blindly" to religious injunctions as they were frequently accused of doing by progressive Muslims or individuals such as Sameer. Even as they acknowledged the authority of the *ulema* and other religious scholars, they nevertheless took it upon themselves to weigh the merit of particular interpretations and rulings, especially in contexts of personal interest.

For instance, I regularly attended a "sister's only" Quran discussion in Brooklyn, to which Elizabeth (the African American Muslim mentioned earlier in this chapter) had invited me and which the progressive Muslims I knew would deem, without hesitation, highly traditional. Each week, we met in the cozy brownstone townhouse of one of the women,

Umm Salah, who lovingly adorned a table for her guests with fresh fruit, cakes and chocolates, and in the biting winters, hot tea. The core membership of the discussion group consisted of black women like Umm Salah who were in their 50s and 60s, and had converted to Islam during the civil rights era, through the Nation of Islam. Like many individuals who were once in the Nation, they now followed mainstream Sunni schools of thought[104]. The women's various Middle Eastern, African and Afro-Caribbean style headdresses and garb met the standards of modest cover employed by many Muslim women, and certainly gave them the outward appearance of religious conservatives. Indeed, they were conservative in many of their beliefs and attitudes, for instance, in their treatment of homosexuality as a comical and sinful absurdity, as well as their acceptance of men as masters of the household. Although many of the women present were highly educated, outspoken, career women who commanded respect from their husbands, they nevertheless insisted on performing the role of dutiful wives. They took pride in cultivating the habits of "good" and docile partners, such as punctual meal preparation for their husbands and yielding to them on many household and spiritual matters.

On the surface, these sisters' theology appeared highly conservative, especially as they tended to interpret many religious texts through plain sense meanings. For instance, one of their discussions was about a *hadith* that claimed God created Adam to be 60 cubits in height. After spending some time converting cubits to feet, the group determined that Adam was a towering 90 feet tall. They struggled to imagine such a reality, to understand how mankind could have evolved to become drastically short overtime, and grappled with their feelings of

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[104] This shift occurred when Warith Deen Mohammed (son of the Nation's leader Elijah Muhammad), became the Nation's leader and eventually moved the group towards mainstream Sunni Islam. It was renamed World Community of Islam in the West, and later, American Society of Muslims. In the late 1970s, the Nation of Islam was re-established by Louis Farrakhan, who rejected Mohammed's views and leadership.

doubt. In the end, they rationalized that, as Muslims, we were obligated to believe every idea bestowed upon us by God and the prophet; that our lack of understanding was our own shortcoming and not a reflection of God's potential, which was undoubtedly limitless, to the extent of being unimaginable. They invoked Quran 36:82, which is commonly used to comprehend God's unfathomable power to create equally unfathomable realities: "Verily, when he intends a thing, His Command is 'be!', and it is!" With this understanding, the sisters' doubt was transformed to awe.

Except as a momentary test of faith, the question of Adam's height had absolutely no bearing in the lives of the sisters present. However, when topics of greater personal impact were introduced, acceptance of religious texts and injunctions was not nearly as quick. In such cases, they struggled to find alternative meanings for otherwise mainstream religious understandings. For example, one of our discussions led to the matter of whether non-Muslims could go to heaven. This question concerned every sister deeply because, as converts to Islam, they had beloved family members who were still Christians or had died as Christians. They could not imagine God punishing the individuals they knew to be genuinely good people. Moreover, such a condemnation would mean losing the possibility of reuniting with their family members in the afterlife. The sisters raced to find answers that would reconcile their theology with their love for their mothers, fathers and siblings. Suddenly, there were some basic yet profound questions to ponder. What did it mean to be a Muslim, anyway? Surely, Allah didn't expect all of his human creation to be exactly the same, otherwise he wouldn't have made us different from one another. Wasn't a Muslim simply one who believed in God and used her life to do good? At the end of the day, were ritualistic

particularities really that important to be in Allah's good graces? Quickly, Quran 2:177 was invoked:

> It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or West[105]; but it is
> righteousness- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the angels and the
> Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance of love for Him, for
> your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and
> for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity;
> to fulfill the contacts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain
> (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the
> people of the truth, the Allah fearing.

This is the same verse that is one of the main go-to passages of progressive Muslims, like Sameer, who argued for a religious practice that prioritized an "essence of faith" over a staunch following of rituals and legalities. Both the progressive Muslims and orthodox conservatives I met scoffed at each others' theology, the former accusing the latter of following "blindly," and the latter accusing the former of being relaxed and wanting to change Islam rather than do to the "harder" work of changing their own habits to meet "proper" Islamic requirements. Yet both called on the same textual evidence to meet their idealized cosmologies (Chaudhry 2013).[106] Just as many progressive Muslims used Quran 2:177 to

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[105] Facing East or West refers to Muslims' orientation for their five daily prayers. Today, Muslims face Mecca to pray whereas in the earlier days of Islam, they faced Jerusalem. The verse is commonly interpreted to mean that a Muslims' most immediate concern should not be with such details but with larger issues of greater impact, which are listed subsequently.
[106] In her book, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition,* Ayesha Chaudhry describes idealized cosmology as "a representation of a perfect world, a vision of the world as it should be rather than merely as it is… visions

reconcile their lives with their faith, so was this conservative group utilizing the verse to conclude that it would indeed reunite with Christian family members in heaven. The sisters, who did take some parts of the Quran for granted, nevertheless engaged with the text critically. Through their interpretive process, they complicated the assumption that a literal reading of religious texts is one of the main traits of "traditional" Muslims.

Because of the myriad ways in which Muslims engaged with and understood their faith, "traditional" was a term deployed frequently but loosely. It was used to refer to any number of things about Muslims—from the way people dressed, to the language they prayed in, to the *hadith* they quoted. These traits were attached to a certain set of assumptions about traditionalism through which Muslims perceived to be "traditional" were viewed negatively. As a result, the term frequently carried the undertones of an epithet, so much so that I have yet to meet a single Muslim New Yorker who self identifies using it.

Conclusion

My research showed that relativizing religious positionalities through conceptual categories, such as "moderate," "progressive" and "traditional," encouraged certain ways of being Muslim while discouraging others. Muslims were distinguished through these categories both by each other and by non-Muslims, although none of the terminology was very well defined. The notion of "moderate" Muslims, for instance, remains extremely nebulous. It may mean one thing to the state (for foreign policy and domestic surveillance purposes, for instance) and quite another to individual Muslims traversing the labyrinth of meanings and social problems tied to their faith communities. As I mentioned earlier, I

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of the universe as it would exist if all humans submitted entirely to God's laws… the world as God intended it… unpolluted by mundane realities" (2013, 7).

encountered only one person who explicitly identified herself as a "moderate" when contrasting herself against someone whose habits she had subjectively deemed "extreme." Overwhelmingly, the Muslim New Yorkers I spoke with treated the term with ambivalence; some even regarded it as offensive, in that it sought to gauge to the level of threat posed by Muslims.

During my fieldwork, progressive Muslims clearly distinguished "moderate" from "progressive" orientations, explaining that the first encompassed a sweeping array of non-violent Muslims, while the latter referred to Muslims with specific social justice aims and goals to adapt their faith to prevailing American lifestyles. MPV members and other progressives viewed the "traditional" category, in a nutshell, being resistant to modernity. They bolstered this view by pointing to conservative Muslims, whose practices were deeply rooted in patriarchy, and who viewed their faith as unchanging.[107]

MPV members in particular perceived themselves according to what Saba Mahmood calls "positive" and "negative" freedoms. Mahmood defines negative freedom as "the absence of external obstacles to self-guided choice," while positive freedom refers to the ability to "realize an autonomous will." An autonomous will is conceptualized through ideas about "universal reason" and is perceived as being "unencumbered by the weight of custom, transcendental will and tradition" (Mahmood 2005, 11). MPV members regarded themselves in terms of positive freedom, as better suited to modern life than "traditional" Muslims, who they thought were blind followers of faith, regressive in their practices and even dangerous. However, as Mahmood points out, "what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and

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[107] Conservative frameworks which seek to maintain orthodoxy by shunning progressive and other views can also be seen as problematic, for as Omid Safi has articulated, "traditions do not arrive from heaven fully formed," and that each one, including Islam, is a "tradition-in-becoming" (2003, 7).

docility from a progressivist point of view may actually be a form of agency" (2005, 14) that

can only be grasped by examining the discourses and structures that allow for its existence.

Some Muslims, such as Azim, Elizabeth and her friends, criticized progressive

Muslims as positioning themselves according to the ideological and imaginative aspects of

Orientalism, which they thought pandered to hegemonic viewpoints that complemented the

goals of the US Empire. On one hand, the progressives I met seemed to echo the position of

many non-Muslim individuals and institutions.[108] However, it was also clear that most of

them were having an intra-Muslim conversation to address injustices within their own

communities, rather than deliberately assisting state narratives about Muslims. In fact, their

focus on social justice included critiques of the US government and many of its wartime

policies.

Although all of the Muslim New Yorkers I met relied on primary Islamic texts, there

was a great deal of diversity in what they believed and how they positioned themselves

religiously and politically. The existence of religious difference was not as meaningful as the

values ascribed to those differences. These values guide not only how Muslims are seen by

each other and non-Muslims, but as I have shown in Chapter 1, they also inform state policies,

targeting practices, and other politics that have a tangible impact on the lives of many.

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[108] As Mahmood notes, "traditional" is the orientation most often targeted by the State Department in its project to "moderate" Muslims into being more amenable to Western democratic values. See the previous chapter for a discussion of the state's perception of Islamic "fundamentalism".

Chapter 3
Sacred Space: Muslim and Arab belonging at Ground Zero

"After the Muslims conquered Jerusalem, and Cordoba, and Constantinople, they built victory mosques. And now they want to build a mosque at Ground Zero."

--Campaign materials for Renee Ellmers 2010

This statement opens a 2010 campaign ad for Congresswoman Renee Ellmers of North Carolina. It is accompanied by classical, orientalist images depicting Muslims in battle, which in turn are followed by photographs of mosques such as Al Aqsa in Jerusalem. The final image is an aerial view of the ruined World Trade Center site during its reconstruction. The ad ends with a personal message from Ellmers: "The terrorists haven't won, and we should tell them in plain English, 'NO. There will never be a mosque at Ground Zero.'"

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The World Trade Center is inextricably linked to memories of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, and is now a site where orientalist tropes and media representations of the threat posed by "Islamic fundamentalism" are deeply embedded. The space became politicized immediately after the 9/11 attacks and the media promptly named it "Ground Zero" and "hallowed ground," setting the stage for how it was going to be experienced by people. A variety of meanings assigned to the site have become apparent in the process of rebuilding it over the past few years. For instance, in having its primary building renamed "Freedom Tower," the place has been made to stand for distinctly American notions of liberty and democracy, a "line between the national self and the anti-national other" that

cannot be crossed (Cressler 2011), and stands in overt triumphalism against foreign enemies (Simpson 2006). The "enemy" consists of Arabs and Muslims, who are viewed as a collectivity characterized by religious fanatics, terrorists and otherwise high-risk citizens (Joseph 2008).

The area encompassing the World Trade Center, too, has become a location where orientalist tropes are in constant tension with ideas of national identity, of who and what constitutes "American," and who has rights to the space. Such frictions have materialized in disputes over Arab and Muslim claims to space in Lower Manhattan, specifically in "Ground Zero," which is an ambiguous space including and surrounding the World Trade Center. This chapter focuses on two locations that are in tension with the sacred configuration of Ground Zero: the well-known Park51 Community Center (aka the "Ground Zero Mosque") and the lesser-known Little Syria district, through which multitudes of tourists, unaware of the area's history[109], make their way to the World Trade Center each day. It examines Lower Manhattan's significance in the struggle for Arab and Muslim belonging in New York City, and more broadly, in the United States.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the two places differ in significant ways. First, Park51 was a contemporary, functioning place while Little Syria was a heritagized, remnant site from the 1940s. Second, while Little Syria's legacy potentially legitimizes Park51 as a continuation of long-standing Arab and Muslim existence in Lower Manhattan, Little Syria's Arab population was overwhelmingly Christian. While there were Muslim residents and a mosque in the area, efforts to preserve Little Syria have more to do with Arab

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[109] The history of Muslims in lower Manhattan stretches much further than Syrian immigrants, and dates back to the transatlantic slave trade. Among the estimated 15-30% of slaves who were Muslim, many wound up in lower Manhattan, such as the 419 individuals buried in the African Burial Ground National Monument located on Broadway. For more, see *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua* by Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy, (2001, Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers).

nationalism than any brand of religiosity. Despite these distinctions, however, the reality is that "Arab" and "Muslim" have been collapsed into a single ideological category, and that mention of "Syria" instantly conjures images of Muslims in the public imagination, most especially since the rise of ISIS and conversations about Syrian refugees entering the United States. The racialization of Islam within American culture has left both Arabs and Muslims (among other groups, such as Hindus and Sikhs) suffering exceptional and heinous treatment since 9/11.

Park51

One of the most noteworthy spikes in anti-Muslim sentiment came in May of 2010, when plans to build an Islamic community center near the 9/11 site gained notoriety. The center, Park51, emerged at a time when Islam's political currency has been leveraged to stoke nationalist fervor, specifically, as communications scholar Lee Pierce (2014) has noted, in the wake of the failed War on Terror. The center quickly became a polarizing campaign issue in the 2010 midterm election season, with politicians such as Renee Ellmers strategically releasing statements either in support of or opposition to it. Opposition to the project was couched in a language of jingoism that framed it as a three-fold problem: (1) the physical threat of Islamic terrorism; (2) the ideological threat of "creeping" Islamic values wiping out the American way of life; (3) insensitivity and disrespect to the memory of 9/11 victims, akin to building a monument to kamikaze pilots at Pearl Harbor (Media Matters for America 2010).

Consequently, the project was dubbed the "Ground Zero Mosque" by right-wing blogger Pamela Geller (discussed in earlier chapters) and many Americans likewise reacted

with anger about what they perceived as Park51's "true" purpose: Muslim triumphalism, a "Victory Mosque" saluting the extremists who had transformed the World Trade Center to rubble, or a sounding board for the dissemination of Islamic Law into broader American society. Debates about the place raged as hostile crowds protested near its steps, positioning Muslims as outsiders who sullied the hallowed space of Ground Zero with their presence, hurling angry words at them from behind stars and stripes. Through these incidents, the case of Park51 became the most visible mosque issue to date.[110]

Park51 in Media

As outlined by Justin Elliott (2010), in the beginning, everything about Park51 was treated as fairly unremarkable. In early December 2009, the *New York Times* ran a favourable front-page news story about the project and it generated no public response (Blumenthal and Mowjood 2009; CAIR 2014; Greenspan 2013). While conservative media did report on it once in late December 2009, and also referred to it as a mosque, the matter only exploded after it came to the attention of Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, who were primary engineers of the anti-mosque movement following the Park51 controversy. They picked up the story in May 2010, immediately following the New York City Community Board's unanimous vote to approve Park51's development and, in what is seen as a clever strategy to gain notoriety, rebranded it as *the* triumphalist "Mega Mosque at Ground Zero." "Monster Mosque Pushes Ahead in Shadow of World Trade Center Islamic Death and Destruction" read Geller's first blog entry on the topic, followed by the subtitle, "Ground Zero Mega

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[110] Noted in a presentation by Corey Saylor, National Legislative Director for CAIR (Council on American Islamic Relations) and author of its 2013 Islamophobia report, *Legislating Fear*.

Mosque: Takbir![111]” Days later, a conservative reporter for the *New York Post* quoted Geller

extensively in the first newspaper article that depicted Park51 as immoral and warranting

suspicion. Titled "Mosque Madness at Ground Zero," it wrongfully reported that the project

would open on the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks (Peyser 2010), and became the

landmark piece upon which stories throughout conservative and then mainstream media were

built. The idea of a "Victory Mosque" became a new anti-Muslim epithet, one that was

invoked time and again, for instance, in November 2014, when the National Cathedral in

Washington, DC hosted its first Muslim prayer service. Of the occasion, the conservative

newspaper *Washington Times* wrote: "Many Muslims will see it as akin to raising their flag

over a conquered enemy" (Knight 2014).

Victory Mosque rhetoric constructed the grounds for essentialist "Muslim mind"

theories about Park51, chiefly the idea that everyday Muslims are inspired (by their faith or

otherwise) to work toward domination of the U.S. Conservative commentator Cal Thomas

(2010) was only one of countless voices postulating Muslim conspiracies against the nation:

> Ask yourself: if you wanted to infiltrate a country, wouldn't a grand strategy
>
> be to rapidly build mosques from Ground Zero in New York, to Temecula,
>
> Calif., and establish beachheads so fanatics could plan and advance their
>
> strategies under the cover of religious freedom and that great American virtue
>
> known as "tolerance," which is being used against us?

Through repetition, conservative pundits solidified the idea that mosques around the

nation are "terrorist command centers" (see below); therefore, as the rhetoric went, Park51

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[111] *Takbir* refers to the commonly used religious phrase "*Allahu Akbar*", or "God is Great," which is used in numerous contexts, including victory. Here, Geller is using it to invoke imagery of militant Muslims celebrating the conquest of a place.

was likely a "terrorist recruitment center," too (The Rush Limbaugh Show), "a meeting place

for some of the scariest minds – some of the biggest terrorist minds" (Media Matters for

America 2010). The following conversation, featuring Fox News host Bill O'Reilly and

contributor Dick Morris[112] (2010), became typical of the right-wing media's coverage of the

issue:

Morris: These *Sharia* mosques – and that's the key word, "Sharia," not mosque – have

become the command centers for terrorism.

O'Reilly: You believe that this mosque, if it were built—

Morris: Look at their role in 9/11 and Fort Hood.

O'Reilly: --would be used for nefarious purposes, that's the bottom line on Dick Morris, you

believe that it would be—

Morris: Yes, it isn't just that it would be a triumphant monument –

O'Reilly: It's speculation though, Dick. Right.

Morris: -- it would be a command – Well, the other ones are.

O'Reilly: Ok.

Morris: But the other mosques are.

O'Reilly: Alright.

Morris: So this one would be, too.

Morris' exchange with O'Reilly shows the taken-for-granted manner in which all

mosques are treated as a threat. "Look at their role in 9/11 and Fort Hood," says Morris of

"sharia mosques," identifying "sharia" as the clear indicator of a mosque that shouldn't be. In

an attempt to inoculate himself against charges of Islamophobia, he infers that he is not

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[112] Transcript from Media Matters for America.

opposed to Muslim houses of worship in general, but to sharia. In doing so, he confuses sharia (a wide range of theological and legal discourse) with *fiqh* (interpretation of Islamic law), the latter of which can indeed result in justifications for terror in rare instances. Sharia, not fiqh processes of a militant variety, is central to Muslim being and mosque teachings. It guides Muslims not only in major realms of society, such as economics, politics and justice, but also in their everyday habits: diet, hygiene, and prayer for instance. In fact, sharia is not dissimilar to Biblical laws in that it reproduces many principles of the Decalogue and other Hebrew Scriptures. That being said, it is of crucial importance to note that sharia is not a single body of "Islamic law," as it is commonly conceptualized. Rather, it is "a method of religiously grounded practical reasoning designed to explain how to live a life pleasing to God" and that "the vast majority of its doctrines, particularly its legal doctrines, remain subject to further debate and consideration (Fadel 2012, 6). Law professor Mohammad Fadel correctly notes that it is extremely misleading to cherry pick certain doctrines from medieval works of substantive law and then imply that they represent contemporary Muslim views. Yet none of this (common knowledge among experts on Islam and Muslims) kept Morris and other pundits from speaking of Sharia as *the* precursor to Islamic violence.

The hysterical tenor of media fanned the flames of incendiary public response against Park51. Karim, an African American man in his 50s, whose near seven-foot frame made him a formidable watchman in addition to the center's custodian, described the opposition to me.

Karim: People were determined to destroy the project when it came out.
Political forces were gathering; people from all over the United States,
opposition, were actually making pilgrimage to come to New York City, to

make declarations in front of the masjid…from "We're going to have to kill them" to "We're going to have to destroy the project…people were standing with signs outside, there were church groups making vigils outside and all kinds of things. You know, you had Terry Jones[113] threatening to burn Qurans. He was threatening to burn Qurans outside the building…and there were other religious groups, from Christians and other people – Jewish groups – that were determined to see that the project be destroyed. I remember outside there were some kids out here from local colleges. They were protesting that we had a right to be here... People would come by and threaten them, threaten to beat them up…

Fig. 6: Karim opens Park51 for *Duhr*, the afternoon prayer.

Anti-Park51 protests were intense. As Karim noted, out-of-state Americans traveled great distances to come to New York City and show their disapproval. Livid hordes echoed

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[113] A Florida pastor (and author of the book *Islam is of the Devil*) who began a nationwide Quran burning campaign, including a burning outside Park51. In the end, Jones did not fly to New York City but did set ablaze hundreds of Qurans in his protest of Islam on other occasions.

media points that blurred the line between ordinary Muslims and terrorists, confusing practicing Muslims[114] with violent ones. Their gatherings included dramatic visual aids such as retired missiles pointed at the building, one with the effigy of an Arab man noosed to it. There were also scores of caustic signs, such as those with "SHARIA" written in what was meant to look like dripping blood. Protesters routinely reiterated the idea that Islam is inherently violent and that Muslims seek to impose sharia in the United States.

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On September 11th, 2011, the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Park51 was barricaded by the NYPD to keep away protesters. On the street corner, two college students wearing "Support Park51" t-shirts were facing off with a man holding a sign that had a Quran attached underneath the words "Toilet Paper." "They need to be converted or they need to be wiped out!" he said about Muslims as the students jeered at him. I silently watched the exchange unfold. An incensed passerby was moved to respond, reminding the bigot of the city's multicultural fabric: "Shut the fuck up! This is New York!"

Half a block away, on Park Place and West Broadway, people gathered for the anti-Park51 (and generally anti-Islam) "9/11 Freedom Rally," organized by the doomsayer Pamela Geller. As if the police barricades weren't enough, the rally's perimeters were also bordered with long banners defining various jihad threats. One of these was "Love Jihad." Depicting them as insidious and shifty, the banner explained that everyday Muslims exploit the emotions of non-Muslims to trap them in a romance, convert them to Islam and spawn more Muslims with them in the future.

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[114] Pamela Geller and her allies have been key in maintaining the idea that "If you're a follower of traditional Islam… you support jihad" and that "There are no moderates. There are no extremists. Only Muslims." (From Pamela Geller's blog, AtlasShrugs.)

Indeed, as the anthropologist Elizabeth Greenspan (2013) has noted of earlier anti-Park51 demonstrations, Geller's 9/11 Freedom Rally, which drew a densely packed crowd of hundreds, also had a very circus-like ambience. Its overall mood was that of a giddy fervor rather than the solemn concern one might expect from those calling for sensitivity at Ground Zero. There was a man in an American flag jumpsuit, complete with an American flag hat and shoes. He waved Old Glory from a stars and stripes flagpole, and gleefully told anyone who paid him attention that Muslims were terrorists. A young woman with American flags sticking out of her hair paraded a sign proclaiming that "Mohammad was A TERRORIST." Another sign rose above the crowd: "Allah can kiss my ass!" Patriotic polemics at the rally linked gun rights, the need to bring God back into schools and Zionism as the panacea for steady Muslim takeover. "America! Remember! Today is Patriot's Day!" screamed one of the speakers so loudly that his voice began to crack. The periodic swelling and ebbing of "USA!" chants was finally stilled as a recording of "God Bless America" cued the audience to go home.

In spite of the anti-mosque efforts directed at it, Park51 officially opened later that month with a modest ribbon cutting ceremony, music performance and photography exhibit featuring the diversity of children in New York City.

Park51 in Actuality

Park51's development was an innocuous, if poorly planned, attempt by real estate developer Sharif El-Gamal and American Sufi leader Feisal Abdul Rauf, to shape a local community hub inspired by the likes of the YMCA and Jewish Community Center (JCC). It was to be a place that paired recreation with Muslim heritage programs; where swimming and

basketball would take place alongside discussions on Muslim genealogy and Arabic lessons. But one of the center's facets obscured all others: it was to include a prayer area for Muslims.

In New York City, having large groups of Muslims praying on the sidewalks during Friday service is not unheard of. In many mosques, such as the one El-Gamal originally attended, people are packed like sardines with their foreheads prostrating onto the feet of the those praying in front of them, and spending entire sermons sitting on the floor in circulation-cutting, contorted positions that test the body's limits. El-Gamal sought to remedy these conditions by providing a prayer space that would accommodate the overflow of Muslim worshippers from adjacent mosques.

Located two blocks north of the World Trade Center on a relatively lifeless street, Park51 was housed in an abandoned Burlington Coat Factory warehouse, next door to a similarly run down and boarded up bar (which would become its temporary home later on, during the main building's renovation, and is described later on in this chapter). While prevalent "Victory Mosque" discourse conjured images of Arabic prayer calls blaring throughout Lower Manhattan from imposing minarets (despite the publicized, minaret-less artist rendering of the building), I was instantly taken aback by the unremarkable and dilapidated look the site has in actuality. So mundane is its appearance that, when in September 2010 I attended an interfaith "Liberty Walk" in solidarity with Park51, many of the activists had difficulty finding it. While it was in plain sight, we simply could not recognize it as the striking Islamic structure built in our imaginations.

Fig. 7: Men exit a Friday prayer service at Park51.

The building, originally modeled in a classical Italian Renaissance style to impart a sense of prosperity, stood with rust staining the length of its old Corinthian pillars. There was no signage to indicate what it was now, but the trademark, red words, "Burlington Coat Factory," showed what it had last been. Large sections of white paint peeled to reveal an era of retro peach, and haphazardly sprayed graffiti added to the building's condemned appearance. Inside, as I discovered on a later visit, a damp smell, exposed wires and dilapidated walls characterized the large, open space. Half of the floor was unfinished, while the other half was covered in carpeting of wide green and grey stripes. This was the building's infamous mosque space -- the stripes on the carpet were set diagonally to keep worshippers oriented toward Mecca. Nearby, the dark stairwell to an upstairs bathroom looked so menacing that many people refused to use it. Eventually, a bathroom was made available in the lower level of the building, which was better lit but in an even worse state of disrepair – shattered floor tiles and dingy linoleum with a makeshift walkway of white fabric leading to the new lavatory. A far cry from the palatial capital of Islamic conquest that the right feared,

the whole place was in shambles inside and out. Nevertheless, Park51's opponents perceived it as a breeding ground for dangerous Islamic militancy.

My fieldwork confirmed that these fears were unfounded. I followed Park51 for approximately five years,[115] through three locations. Interim phases during the renovation of its original home (the former Burlington Coat Factory) were spent at the defunct Dakota House bar immediately next door, followed by an art gallery further away on Leonard Street, near Chinatown. The center had no regular imam or religious leader. All three locations hosted a number of different men delivering sermons and lectures on different weeks. They spoke on a variety of subjects, and none even remotely suggested militancy. While one speaker addressed the subject of "honouring thy parents," another dispensed advice about dealing with anti-Muslim bigotry "the Islamic way" (through awareness, patience, community education and keeping the faith), and still another lamented the ills of material attachments. Such was the content of weekly services. The most unpleasant sermon I witnessed there ("unpleasant" connoting only my personal tastes) was about hellfire and brimstone. While providing gory details about the various punishments God has in store for sinners is a conventional religious lesson – and by no stretch of the imagination unique to Islam -- the impassioned lecture sowed no seeds for a mutiny. This particular sermon was in fact dismissed outright by some worshippers who exchanged side-eye glances with their friends, while others who were present just stared ahead in bored apathy.

It warrants repeating that in all the years I watched Park51 evolve, never did I see one sermon recruiting people for violent jihad, one prayer for the destruction of the nation, one call for the forced conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, or any other sign of hostility. What I

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[115] In addition to two years of formal fieldwork between 2013 and 2015, I followed Park15 informally since its opening in 2010.

did find Park51 teeming with, especially in its earlier phases, were the efforts of its

congregants to create a place that would be groundbreaking for American Muslims; one that

would help establish them alongside other religious groups that are embedded and accepted in

American culture, in part, through well-known foundations such as the Jewish Community

Center.

Azim, a Puerto Rican convert to Islam from Catholicism, felt compelled to join the

effort as an intern for Park51 when it first became the target of negative press. Four years

later, in 2014, he reflected on the project. He noted that Muslims in New York City

(particularly youth) are usually limited to "floating spaces" for their activities – such as a field

trip here and a pool rental for "sister's only"-swimming there. It is a disjointed way of being

that necessitates a central location for Muslim New Yorkers to call their own. He added:

> They have to jump and go place to place like, 'Hey, let's meet up here' or
>
> 'Hey, let's do this here.' But just a place that we could say, 'That's us. That
>
> defines me. That's my religion and that's my community.' A building that [we]
>
> can point to, we don't have that.

He further emphasized the positive impact having a permanent hub like Park51 would

have for generations of Muslims:

> When you can point and say, "St. Patrick's Cathedral," as a Catholic you have
>
> a sense of pride, you know the history behind it. You see just the beautiful
>
> architecture and what that means. And in this city, architecture means so much.
>
> And so when… you see places like the Jewish Community Center like we

have, Upper West Side and such… They have that, this group has that, and we

don't. To me that's the goal… being Muslim in New York City is to have that

space. And so we do [have] this constant idea of this floating space, but that

just leaves us unsettled… I'm older now than when that first initiative [for

Park51] came out… I'm in a place where I would love to see my children have

that place. But when I was younger, it was *me* going there everyday and

enjoying it. And obviously Imam Feisal, his idea came from somewhere...

There's a reason why he wanted to do it. Physical space does matter.

While there are many physical spaces specifically for Muslims in New York, they tend

to focus exclusively on religion. As Azim explained,

Those other spaces feel like a mosque. But Park51 was supposed to be more.

Very community oriented programming, not just Islamic programming. [Your

own] Pool in NYC, not like renting one out a gym. Jewish and Christian

centers and Christians, they have those things on a grand scale.

He was right. I found no other Muslim center in the city that compared to the YMCA or JCC.

In fact, I found no mosques that included non-religious events in their programming. The

Islamic Cultural Center of New York was the most prominent Muslim place, yet its name was

misleading. In fact, it was usually referred to as "the 96th Street Mosque" as people primarily

knew and experienced it as a strictly religious place. What set Park51 apart from the other

mosques was that it did not define Muslims through Islam but through their own a broad

senses of being Muslim and belonging to the ummah. By framing itself first and foremost as a community center, it was a place where Muslims of all backgrounds could be included regardless of their religious persuasions, hopefully bridging the gap between many disparate groups across the city. Moreover, even without the political significance that was attached to Park51, but especially because of it, Park51 carried the potential to be a place where Muslim New Yorkers could come together and organize for their interests.

As Bakalaian and Bozorgmehr (2009) have noted, religious spaces are nodes for mobilization. They are collectivizing forums in which networking, activism, fundraising and information dissemination coalesce around common fate attitudes. These sites frequently become hubs that mobilize constituents to defend civil rights and accelerate integration and acceptance into American culture. Park51 and the mosque within it were both similarly seen as sites of empowerment. Although the center did not host events typically associated with civil rights, such as voter registration drives, participation in any occasion amounted to Muslims asserting themselves as having every right to that space. The center's controversial and highly visible position was taken as an opportunity for Muslims to be recognized as a prominent and respected faith group, equal to others in the American religious mosaic.

Park51 was formed out of active processes over time, and was affected by the positionalities of the individuals involved in the project. Devoted individuals like Azim worked not only as interns for the organization but also as participants involved in its various events. To emphasize religious tolerance and moderation, these events included both religious and secular activities: a Friday prayer service or a neighborhood bread baking class, a Ramadan meal shared after sunset prayers or tours and discussion sessions for visiting groups. It was through these activities that the center became a thick place, a place "contrived

in the imbrications of affect, habit, and meaning…" that "enhances one's sense of meaning and belonging, forging a series of affective and experiential connections in place" (Duff 2010). The ugly and desolate warehouse was transformed into what one participant called "beautiful," and Park51's value came to be increasingly measured not by its physical appearance or amenities (or lack thereof) but by the experiences shared within it.

The community center became a significant spatial moment in American Muslim history. There was heightened awareness of what it meant to be Muslim in the context of the "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy, that is, being continually defined as a potential threat whose loyalties are always in question, and as one who can never be fully American. Indeed, several scholars have observed that the 9/11 attacks and resulting anti-Muslim environment pushed American Muslim self-awareness to new heights (Bakalaian and Bozorgmehr 2009; Cainkar 2011; Maira 2009; Williams 2013). The "green scare"[116] atmosphere in which Park51 was located led to a sense of double consciousness and a fear that Muslims' inclusion as Americans was at stake. In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk,* W.E.B. Du Bois introduces the concept of double consciousness as "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,--an American, a Negro…" (1994, 5). As many a minority group had experienced before them, American Muslims understood that they were the objects of others' disappointments and frustrations. In this climate, they were denied both their right to be different as followers of Islam and their right to be the same as citizens of the United States. As Muslims were increasingly exceptionalized as undeserving of liberties enjoyed by all others, such as freedom to worship, Park51 supporters saw ownership of the building as

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[116] "Green scare" refers to an anti-Muslim climate that parallels the anti-Communist, Red Scare of the Cold War; a political climate that fosters fear and suspicion of everyday people and fellow citizens.

carrying important civil rights implications. For these allies, Park51 provided a physical ground for the struggle against Islamophobia, and the space served as a springboard for social change.

As Henri Lefebvre has noted, ideas to "Change Society!" completely lose their meaning unless they also produce an appropriate space from which to implement that change. Park51's allies understood this very well, and developed the project as a space where "Muslim American identity" (in their words) and anti-Islamophobia work could materialize. The production of such a space involved simultaneous assertions of similarity and difference, and mediated between conceived and lived spaces. In other words, concepts of the Ground Zero space as incontrovertibly "American" were reconciled with Islamic practices often regarded as antithetical to American values. On one hand, Park51 advocates emphasized Muslims' place in American culture by highlighting their similarities with non-Muslim Americans. On the other hand, they developed Park51 as a place that unabashedly spotlighted difference. Both of these endeavors were undertaken through discourse and practice.

First, Park51 was positioned as epitomizing the multicultural tradition of the United States and, on a local scale, as "a crucial thread in the diverse and accepting fabric of the Lower Manhattan neighborhood" (Park51 Facebook page). This was done through participation in interfaith events that built bridges with other groups, such as a Ramadan collaboration with members of St. Paul's Chapel (mentioned in Chapter 1) to feed the homeless. It was also done through community events such as the baking class mentioned above, and through espousing common religious bonds with non-Muslim Americans. Notably, Park51 followed the broader trend of American Muslims disrupting the exclusive "Judeo-Christian" category by emphasizing their own Abrahamic genealogy. For instance, a

2010 post on its Facebook page stated: "Muslims worship the same God as Christians and Jews."

This type of bridge building required showcasing Islam's thorough compatibility with American values.[117] Throughout the controversy, El-Gamal postured Park51 as a house of American Islam, calling it "the voice of the moderate Muslim" (Hernandez 2010). By correlating being American with religious moderation, he further emphasized that the center would be a place that would "not tolerate any kind of illegal or un-American activity and rhetoric" (el-Gamal quoted in Farley, 2010). Speaking in the language of his opposition, he used "un-American" to connote state-unfriendliness or any actions that could be interpreted as inciting violence, hostility or treason. Feisal Rauf and his wife Daisy Khan, too, spoke of Park51 (even before the controversy took place) as a site that pushed back against Islamic extremism through interfaith activities, and also through the Imam's vision of Islam as a practical religion that is adaptable to 21st Century lifestyles and inherently advocates a middle road. As mentioned in the introduction, Rauf endeavors to promote an interpretation of Islam that is relevant for younger Muslim Americans who feel out of place, and have difficulty reconciling their faith values and lifestyles with that of their first generation elders. In a context where immigrants' native values are frequently perceived as incompatible with American modernity, Park51 aimed to bridge ideological gaps between generations. It was promoted as the space in which a completely unproblematic integration of being fully Muslim and fully American was possible.

The rhetoric of religious moderation was especially boosted by the many spiritual sermons delivered during Park51's earlier history. These were talks focusing on private acts

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[117] This closely resembles the course of American-Jewish identity work, as detailed in Beth Wenger's *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (2010).

of worship, everyday pragmatics, and social life rather than on pure dogma. The relative lack

of policing around women's dress code and gender mixing within the space was also

noteworthy. It was these qualities that made Park51's atmosphere agreeable to younger and

less orthodox worshippers. The fear of police surveillance (discussed in Chapter 5)

notwithstanding, Park51 felt like a comfortable space to Muslims of all ages, a place where

they felt relatively free to engage in whatever level of religious practice they preferred.

Women's inclusion and other shows of religious moderation, however, were not

enough to assuage opponents on the right, who continued to position Park51 as inherently

anti-American. Pushing back, the center crafted a mission statement (which undoubtedly read

as a frightening omen for some of the more virulent anti-Muslim bigots): "Inspired by Muslim

values and heritage, Park51 is a center dedicated to … helping weave the Muslim-American

identity into the pluralistic fabric of the United States" (Park51 website). The notion of

Muslim integration was met with even greater vitriol as right-wing pundits mocked the idea of

a moderate or American Islam as an oxymoron and outright lie. "Everybody's falling for this

notion that there's Muslim outreach going on [against extremism]," hyperventilated the

conservative radio celebrity Rush Limbaugh. "This is not Muslim outreach. They're planting

the flag of victory with this mosque. That's what they're doing. Opening a mosque at Ground

Zero? That says 'We won.' That's what's going on here" (Rush Limbaugh Show 2010).

Even as it was positioned as wholly American, Park51 emphasized religious and

cultural difference. Lefebvre's idea of differential space provides grounding for an analysis of

Park51 as a place that welcomed such differences. Differential space arises out of what

Lefebvre calls abstract space, which "tends toward homogeneity, toward the elimination of

difference or peculiarities." Abstract space is characterized as an urban setting of hegemonic

values, and one that is commodified through its exchange value in the capitalist structure. While being the dominant space, abstract space may be appropriated for engendering a different set of norms. Changes in Lower Manhattan's economy following 9/11 led to the abandonment of many spaces, which could then be acquired and transformed. This is precisely what happened with the Burlington Coat Factory, the abstract, consumerist space, which was taken for Park51's creation as a place that "accentuates difference." Both places have the same outward appearance, but Park51 remains distinct through and through. As Merrifield (2006, 113) explains of differential space, "It's different because it celebrates bodily and experiential particularity, as well as the non-negotiable right to difference."

Indeed, Park51 actively bolstered a sense of a distinct Muslim heritage, for instance, by decorating its PrayerSpace with Quran verses, and offering classes in subjects like Arabic and Capoeira (a martial art form brought to Brazil by Yoruba slaves, many of whom were Muslim). In addition, the center hosted gatherings for the five daily prayers and religious events such as Ramadan meals and Eid celebrations. While its unique, Muslim-specific programming clashed with hegemonic representations of Ground Zero (which position it as a place violated by Muslims, and not one where Muslims can fully belong), the center continually asserted quintessential American ideals of tolerance and inclusion. Park51's message was that there is nothing more American than being different.

As mentioned earlier, Park51's fraught and highly visible position made it an ideal location in which people could very publicly and unabashedly present themselves as fully American and fully Muslim. Ironically, the deafening criticisms leveled against the project inadvertently served bring it to the fore as a part of New York City, and as a piece of American culture. The "Ground Zero Mosque" became so (in)famous that the title was even

appropriated and adopted by Park51 itself in a fundraising campaign, to highlight that *this* place was iconic of the challenges faced by American Muslims; therefore, donations to the project would serve the much larger, immaterial purpose of Muslim inclusion and acceptance. Indeed, due to the intense opposition to the project, people's commitment to it was strong years after media interest cooled.

The Cultural Mediation of Ground Zero

As opposition to Park51 mounted, so did support. The primary response in the center's defense was to focus on its capacity as a community center and say, "it isn't a mosque." But this line of defense simply distanced Park51 from its association with Islam and did nothing to problematize the idea of something inherently suspicious about Islam or unethical about Muslim proximity to the World Trade Center. Over time, the pressure from those who saw the community center as merely a front to fund a mosque became too much, and El-Gamal divided the project into two. Park51 was registered as a non-profit community center and the mosque portion became a separate religious entity called PrayerSpace. The mosque's naming was a strategic move, once again, to show the developers' active stance against extremist Muslim ideologies. As Daisy Khan, one of the project's developers and Imam Rauf's wife, explained:

> We insist on calling it a prayer space and not a mosque because you can use a
> prayer space for activities apart from prayer. You can't stop anyone who is a
> Muslim despite his religious ideology from entering the mosque and staying

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there. With a prayer space, we can control who gets to use it.[118] (Quoted in

Peer 2010)

The second response in Park51's defense has been to conceptualize "Ground Zero" as

limited to the nucleus of the attacks - the World Trade Center - and then claim, as the *Tampa*

Bay Times did, that Park51 "is not *at* or *on* Ground Zero. It does not directly abut it or

overlook it" (2010). This reaction acknowledges that there is a sacred quality about Ground

Zero, and resolves the conflict by physically distancing Park51 from that sacred space. Like

the first response, it does nothing to normalize Muslims as everyday people or to count them

as citizens who should be able to exist in all areas of the city alongside other New Yorkers.

Additionally, while ceremonial practices commemorating the 9/11 attacks are generally

limited to the World Trade Center site, the far reaching fragments of bodies, wreckage and

ash render "Ground Zero" a gravesite with ambiguous boundaries. By this logic, "Ground

Zero" is not only where the Towers stood, but the greater space of Lower Manhattan; a broad

assemblage of memorials expanding out from the World Trade Center. As Pierce explained

about the opposition to Park51, "Proximity, closeness, distance; such concepts are no longer a

matter of inches and feet…" (2014, 60).[119] The sister of a man who died in the attacks

illustrates the futility of limiting "Ground Zero" to the World Trade Center:

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[118] Whereas a mosque is considered a house of God in which no Muslim may be denied the opportunity to worship, Khan's sought to distinguish the "Prayer Space" that operated as an entity other than a mosque, in which people would have the authority to refuse service to those whose ideologies were incompatible with the organization's.

[119] Given Ground Zero's undefined borders, Park51 supporters have often asked where it *would* be appropriate for Muslims to pray. If not two blocks away from the World Trade Center, then what? Four blocks? One mile? Outside of Manhattan entirely? Complicating the issue of proximity is the fact that there are other mosques in the area predating Park51, which have not been the object of speculation or ire. Additionally, the former World Trade Center itself housed a prayer area in which Muslims would pray.

When I go down to remember 9/11 on the anniversaries, no matter what

memorial is built, the place I go to remember Sean, it's like a little spot in the

sky, where I pictured he made up his way up to in the north tower. I can go to

the corner of the Burlington Coat Factory and I can look right at that spot. I

can see the construction. It's there. And when the people died that day, their

remains were scattered there. There was even a part of the plane that hit that

building.[120] That's Ground Zero. The proximity is just too close. It's too

close to where these people were killed. (PBS)

Such testimonies reveal that Ground Zero is a space where the tragedy of 9/11 cannot

be tidily contained within the nucleus of the attacks. Rather, Ground Zero is a large,

undefined area that is regarded as a resting place of innocents and martyrs whose remains

could be anywhere[121], and where such "remainders are always reminders" (Pierce 2014) of

what happened that day. Of course, much of New York City is also a gravesite. For instance,

the iconic Central Park has turned up the bones of African-American inhabitants who lived

there when it was the neighbourhood of Seneca Village.[122] Yet, apart from some official nods

and archaeological curiosity, there has been virtually no interest in preserving the memory of

Seneca Village, and no sacred honor has been accorded to the gravel now paving over its

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[120] Parts of the airplanes used in the 9/11 attacks punctured the Burlington Coat Factory's roof and caused damage to several support beams. During my fieldwork, in 2013, large pieces of wreckage were found lodged between Park51 and the adjacent building. The medical examiner found no human remains, however. For details, see Hernandez (2010) in the *New York Times* and Long (2013) in the *Associated Press.*
[121] Both Sturken (2004) and Bird (2003) examine dust, the powerful 9/11 trope central to the idea that victims' remains could be anywhere, and infused with anything at Ground Zero.
[122] That population was disappeared after being deemed a colony of "squatters" during the area's "redevelopment," which coincided with intensified racism from the Civil War (see Rozenweig and Blackmar 1992).

history. Given that such destruction has always given shape to New York City, what sets Ground Zero apart as worthy of consecration?

Chidester and Linenthal note that the sacred is a situational term, "a notional supplement to the ongoing cultural work of sacralizing space, time, persons and social relations" (1995, 6). Therefore, while other areas of New York City are also shaped out of destruction and violence, Ground Zero is seen as different – more akin to the Gettysburg Battlefield than Central Park. The moral position against Park51 depends on marshaling an image of Ground Zero as an exceptional space born out of exceptional circumstances, namely, Islamic violence and terror. Indeed, the surreal moments that transformed Lower Manhattan into "Ground Zero" are seared into our minds in a vignette of blue sky, tall buildings, bursts of fire. Through a nonstop circulation of images, particularly moving images, we remember what the event looked like with the clarity of a first hand account, although most of us were not there. An immanent sense of horror and loss abides, tangled with concerns about protecting the resting place of (inadvertent) martyrs, and honouring those who serve both locally as first responders and as soldiers in the War on Terror. The command to "Never Forget" comes to refer to all of these feelings, goals and ideals. It materializes in various forms, from architecture to public discourse to security policy. It is this "hard work of attention, memory, design, construction and control of a place" (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, 6) through which Ground Zero's hallowed status is sustained.

While a cross was erected upon the World Trade Center wreckage almost immediately after the attacks, and while many Americans view 9/11 as a declaration of religious war, the sacred status of Ground Zero is not just a divine or holy classification. Rather, "sacred" here conveys the site's inviolable quality after a momentous trauma; a transgressed place that must

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be defended against perceived threats, both physical and ideological. It is telling that no matter one's position in the Park51 controversy, the sacred status of Ground Zero is generally accepted as incontestable (Pierce 2014). Even then Mayor Bloomberg's 2010 endorsement of Park51, in which the thought of religious discrimination famously moved him to tears, acknowledged that it was "fair to ask the organizers of the mosque to show some special sensitivity." The mayor was making a special request to those engaged in the perceived crime of building-while-Muslim near the 9/11 site.

Citing Van der Leeuw's analysis of the sacred in spatial terms, Chidester and Linenthal make three important points about sacred space that are relevant to this discussion of Park51. First, they note a politics of position involved in the creation of sacred space. Sacralizing is always a political act in which the formation of a sacred space is a conquest of that space; its acquisition holds the promise of certain possibilities within it. To those who interpreted Park51 as an Islamic monument or trespass, it was crucial to "reclaim" its 4000 square feet in the name of "American values" – values which were perceived as endangered by Muslim presence. Second, and overlapping with the first point, the authors observe that sacred space is tied to a politics of property. Its power is derived partly from the fact that the space is appropriated and owned. Put differently: "The sacred character of a place can be maintained through claims and counter claims on its ownership" (1995, 8). Indeed, as several scholars have noted (Greenspan), Park51 created anxieties on all sides about which group the property belonged to, and in turn, whose values should be reflected on it.

On one hand, opposition against the center has been framed as a national security concern, that is, the physical threat of violent jihad. Just as prominently, objections are presented as an effort to protect a national essence defined most significantly by Christian

values and capitalism. Adversaries maintain that these principles are antithetical to the essence of Islamic culture. As proof, they cite the 9/11 attackers' plan to strike symbols of Western culture as being representative of authentic Islamic values. Such a paradigm makes pariahs out of Muslims and calls for them to be cast out from around the World Trade Center. This brings us to Chidester and Linenthal's third point: the politics of exclusion are a crucial part of the relational, situational component of making a space sacred.

The sacralizing of Ground Zero is linked to a very specific set of identity practices, which frequently omit Muslims (and others). For instance, the aforementioned cross was simply a piece of wreckage, a metal crossbeam, which workers erected in the orientation of a Christian cross for symbolic purposes. The victims of the World Trade Center attacks were not solely Christians, or Americans for that matter. Nevertheless, the object provided ministry for many site workers and quickly became an icon of national endurance. Other crossbeams from the World Trade Center, and replicas of the original "cross," were distributed to various Christian organizations around the city. Christianity's centrality in American identity politics was reaffirmed through the 9/11 attacks, as Ground Zero came to be understood as a Christian place. To the many who believe that "America was founded on Judeo-Christian principles" (Forbes, 2009), Park51's presence on Ground Zero symbolizes an alien infringement on what is now a significant American heritage site.

Anti-Park51 rhetoric also lays bare core nationalist ideologies of a free country, which the abstract spaces of Ground Zero represent. As both Simpson and Greenspan have noted, the name "Freedom Tower" was coined by then Governor George Pataki before the building was even imagined. The original design of the Tower included a prominent glass shard mimicking the Statue of Liberty's arm, which inadvertently supported some site workers'

wish that the new building incorporate "a giant statue of a hand flipping off the terrorists" (Simpson 2006, 63). The building's Statue reference was subdued in its final architecture, but its height of 1776 feet remained to honour the Declaration of Independence. "This is not just a building. This is a symbol of New York. This is a symbol of America. This is a symbol of freedom," proclaimed the governor at the unveiling of the building's design (Simpson 2006, 67).

Capitalism, epitomized by Downtown's tourism industry and the economic engines of Wall Street, features heavily in the national ethos of freedom. Financial success, economic opportunity and upward mobility are linked in the all-American pursuit of happiness. The buildings of Lower Manhattan stand as heirlooms of these values, and become rhetorical objects that must be owned (by non-Muslims) to preserve them. The fight against Park51, then, is a fight to "win the struggle for America's soul," as one speaker at Geller's 9/11 rally had insisted.

The constitutional legality of its construction was undoubtedly frustrating for Park51's opponents, whose contingency plan was to frame the project in moral terms, as "insensitive." Muslim ownership of space in the area, then, was presented as crude and undiplomatic; a callous trespass and deliberate abuse of civil rights. "Just because they have the right [to build] doesn't make it right," was an oft-uttered sentiment throughout the Park51 controversy (Kidd 2010; Samson 2010). In the same vein, Newt Gingrich equated building a Muslim space near Ground Zero to the constitutionally protected but obviously offensive act of flying a Nazi flag next to the Holocaust Museum, and another conservative commenter compared it to opening a sushi stand at Pearl Harbor (Media Matters for America 2010). Abraham Foxman, head of the self-described "premier civil rights agency," the Anti-Defamation

League, also denounced the project. He told NPR's *Morning Edition* (2010), "If he [Imam Rauf] would say: 'I do want to show the American public that there is an American Muslim Tradition.' That would be a wonderful, dramatic beginning. Rather than insisting: 'This is where we want to heal… *In your cemetery.*'" [My emphasis.] While Foxman's remarks are particularly disturbing in how explicitly they set American Muslims (who also perished at Ground Zero) apart from their fellow citizens, each of the above grievances suggest that American Muslims should be treated with exception due to their claiming the same faith as the 9/11 terrorists: they are, somehow, guilty by faith association. Rendering all "Muslim" material around Ground Zero as a hurtful transgression, these statements by prominent figures reveal just how "the sacred has been wielded as a self-evident defense against any permanent Muslim presence near Ground Zero" (Cressler 2011).

In spite of the efforts to consecrate it, Ground Zero's sacrosanct quality remains perforated. In a downtown business district, there is no way to demarcate sacred and profane spaces. The two are meshed, with the former existing between pizza joints, knick-knack vendors, and pubs, to name a few. Each parcel in the area, then, is interpreted individually as sacred or mundane, benign or offensive, in a context-dependent manner that fragments the overall space. The New York Dolls and Pussycat Lounge strip clubs have famously typified this spatial exegesis. In spite of the common perception of strip clubs as immoral or unsavoury places that threaten family values, and in spite of their close proximity to the World Trade Center, these venues have never been perceived as dishonouring the revered status of Ground Zero. That Muslim's venues in the area are condemned as distinctly repugnant shows that Muslims are exceptionalized as outliers whose presence is uniquely

disrespectful to the space, and that they are "not counted among the true constituents" of Lower Manhattan (Cressler 2011).

In this context, Muslims who visibly practice Islam are particularly stigmatized as threats. Halal food vendors offer an insightful example here. Alongside 99-cent pizza shops, halal carts are normalized as part of Lower Manhattan's (and New York City's) geography. The Muslim halal[123] vendor near Chambers Street routinely had a crowd of patrons around his cart who seemed unperturbed by his proximity to the World Trade Center. His being in the area was legitimized within the wider context of the financial district, providing lunch for brokers and bankers, labourers and tourists. Yet if he were to relocate the cart and situate it instead at 45 Park Place (the address of Park51) as a worshipper, his presence at Ground Zero would be met with much greater suspicion. This is especially true of the earlier days of the Park51 controversy, when the center's attendees were sure to be met with angry protests outside the space.

Several Muslim leaders have addressed such tensions by arguing that Islam commands Muslims to avoid conflicts and hurt, and so Park51 should be built elsewhere.[124] An overwhelming number of Muslims, however, regard Park51 as innocuous and, especially due to the conflict surrounding it, see it as playing an important role in their pursuit of belonging. The following conversation with Karim took place in 2014, and while Park51 had been out of the media for several years by this point, the issue still held significance for him. Referencing military service as a beacon of national loyalty, he pointedly remarked,

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[123] Although "Halal" refers to meat prepared according to Islamic law, "halal food" a now widespread shorthand in New York City for the specific type of fast food served by street vendors, which is often not prepared according to halal standards. This food includes miscellaneous Mediterranean and Middle Eastern items, such as gyros and falafel.

[124] For instance, Zudhi Jasser, whose statements firmly ground him in "Victory Mosque" camp [See the 2010 article, "A Patriotic Muslim's Warning on Ground Zero Mosque," by Aaron Elias] and Imam Muhammad Musri, who viewed Park51 as a "clear provocation."

"Muslim slaves fought for the freedom that was eventually acquired by the

Americans… Muslims have fought and died in every war this country has ever

had. From the Revolutionary war, even the Civil War... So, our participation in

this society is well documented.[125] That's why as Muslims we have to

appreciate our place in history and keep it going. That's why Sharif (El-Gamal)

was right to continue, because he understood the dynamic that he was facing.

That if they were able to destroy this project, it would only end up hurting

Muslims everywhere.

Karim, like other participants, saw a ripple effect taking place, in which opposition against

Park51 was triggering attacks on Muslim communities in other parts of the United States.[126]

For him, the violation and potential endangerment of Muslims throughout the country made it

even more important for Park51 to stand its ground and force opponents to accept Muslims.

…the idea that because of the opposition you would back down would only

embolden people to do it to other Muslims in other parts of the country…

They were threatening people who wanted to start a masjid in Staten Island,

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[125] Once again, such rhetoric has parallels to the American-Jewish quest for inclusion. As Jewish studies scholar Martin Lund notes in his dissertation (2013), "After several American wars, Jews have felt forced to highlight the fact that Jews participated in the fighting to counter anti-Semitic accusations of Jewish cowardice." See also: *American Judaisim* by Jonathan Sarna (2005).

[126] These tensions are documented in Laurie Goodstein's *New York Times* article, "Across Nation, Mosque Projects Meet Opposition," August 7, 2010. In addition, a 2012 publication, "Controversies Over Mosques and Islamic Centers Across the U.S." by the Pew Research Center details community resistance faced by American mosques (instances include logistical complaints about issues such as noise or parking, but also opposition against Islam itself).

they was [sic] threatening people in New Jersey who wanted to build a

madrassa, people burned down a masjid construction site in Tennessee. There

were all kinds of things going on all around the country, and that was because

of the controversy surrounding this and the publicity behind it. So, you know,

once things start, you can't back down because that will only embolden your

enemies to do more things to your people, so you have to stay the course.

He equated the struggle for Park51, and related Muslim endeavors to belong, to the civil

rights movement of the 1960s. "Can you imagine if Dr. King said, 'You know what? This is

too tough. I'm goin' home!'… We have to take inspiration from that [the civil rights

movement] in order to see that this is our opportunity to make sure that… our rights are

protected."

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On a sunny day in May, 2014, I arrived at Park51's temporary location at the

aforementioned bar next door, the Dakota Roadhouse. Worshippers crowded outside, waiting

to file in through the narrow door of the new venue, which was much smaller than the space

we were all used to. The overflow of people on the sidewalk was largely dark skinned, with

no shortage of long beards, Eastern-style tunics, and hijabs in view. A woman observed as she

walked by. She seemed bothered by the bar's conversion to a mosque and remarked loudly to

her otherwise oblivious child, "This *used* to be a place Mommy liked going to."

Inside, the setting was dark and dingy, as can be expected in a former nightclub. Men

took turns hoisting their feet up into the bar sink, to wash them as part of the pre-prayer

ablution ritual. Since going to alehouses is prohibited by mainstream Islamic schools of thought, the sight of Muslims prostrating in one was strange. The sermon, however, reconciled this odd juxtaposition. "If you see the end near and have a seed in your hand, plant it. This is what our prophet taught us," began the speaker. He carried on to explain that finding the bar as an interim location was God's blessing, an opportunity that had to be seized in the face of adversity, as it allowed Park51 to persist in its historic role of making space for Muslims. Park51, in other words, was a promising seed of change.

Sharif El-Gamal echoed this message after prayers, reassuring everybody that he was going to keep Park51 "right here," meaning the fraught area two blocks from the World Trade Center. He urged the congregation to "stand in a straight line… don't be too loud outside… leave in an orderly fashion," to curb any complaints from those who have posited that Muslim houses of worship are disruptive to the public. He stressed the importance of making a positive impression "so people wonder, 'who are those people who are so organized?'" and have no reason to oppose the center. As we filed out, I noticed that carpet from the old location had been brought in, recut and taped together to cover the floors of the Dakota Roadhouse. As the center continuously changed temporary locations, the cutting and taping together of the old carpet from venue to venue became a trend, the familiar green and grey strips on each new floor a reminder of Park51's resilience.

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Park51 is the most prominent example of "moderate" Muslims being dismissed by the very anti-Islam camps that claim such Muslims don't exist. The efforts of American Muslims to combat extremism, from leaders such as Feisal Abdul Rauf to ordinary people such as Azim, are drowned out by the derogatory tones of influential right-wing mouthpieces, and fail

to register in public consciousness. Conservative commenters such as Fox News, Rush Limbaugh and Pamela Geller continually complained of Muslims taking liberties to be Muslim near the World Trade Center. However, Arab and Muslim life did not come to Lower Manhattan as a consequence of Park51. It had been there long before the World Trade Center was even conceptualized.

Arab Pasts at Ground Zero

The history of Muslim Americans is inextricably linked to, and overlaps with, that of Arab Americans. Arabs can be defined as an ethnic group from the Middle East and parts of North Africa, with shared linguistic, genealogical and cultural histories. While Islam grew out of modern day Saudi Arabia, not all Muslims are Arabs (and vice versa); the religion spread throughout the globe via early networks of trade and conquest, and also more recent patterns of migration and globalization. Muslims today hail from all parts of the world, but because of Islam's roots in the Middle East, the histories of Arabs and Muslims are connected. The migration patterns of both groups to the United States can be traced through several significant waves, examined by several authors, such as Louis Cainkar (2009). The first of these occurred during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, consisting of about 95,000 Arabs from the "Greater Syria" region (now Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine). These immigrants were mostly working class, Christian men, though women outnumbered men by the 1920s.

Many who arrived through Ellis Island in the 1880s settled with the area's Irish, German and Scandinavian residents, and established themselves in factory work or peddling an array of goods such as dry foods, clothing and religious objects. The formed what became

the Arab capital of the United States, and what is now the focus of a preservation project that is in tension with 9/11 memorialization efforts. Also known as the Syrian Quarter, the Arab cultural and commercial center was based in Lower Manhattan's Washington Street, and extended into the area that would become the World Trade Center. Within the first decade, the Lower Manhattan community became known as "the Mother Colony," the "principal Syrian colony of the country," and was characterized by the smell of Arabic coffee and the sight of fez hats. For four decades, it remained the nation's largest and most influential Syrian neighborhood as 42% of Syrians entering the United States through New York remained there, transitioning into American economic life (Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2009).

Around the turn of the century, residents first began moving out of the Quarter to Brooklyn Heights and Atlantic Avenue; over time, as an increasing number moved, and as the introduction of immigration restrictions prevented the replenishment of the Syrians in Lower Manhattan, Atlantic Avenue became the main Arab District of the city (Landmarks Preservation Commission 2009). The Quarter also suffered decline, first with the steady destruction of tenements to make way for a new business district, then with the construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel in the 1940s, and finally with the World Trade Center in the 1960s.

Much of what is left of Little Syria is an Irish flag waving against the white terra cotta facade of what was once an Arab church. The building is now a pub. While the enclave has been excised from public memory and overwritten by narratives associated with the World Trade Center, it is still a place where Arab American memories linger. For Little Syria activists and preservationists, the enclave's remnants create binding legacies in Lower

Manhattan at a time when the presence of Arabs in the area is considered provocative. Since Arabs and Muslims are now conflated and conceptualized as an enemy of the United States, and since hegemonic representations of the World Trade Center position it in opposition to that perceived enemy, Ground Zero has become a site for competing histories in which the marginalized Little Syria resurfaces with new centrality. Indeed, Little Syria is permeated with tensions, including memories of longstanding anti-Arab and anti-Muslim discourses, from being denied the right to citizenship for decades after their arrival to the post-9/11 hostilities of today.

In his book *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan,* historian Max Page notes that "Memory is built into the physical landscape and individual encounters with buildings… and whole regions… Landscapes and memory are codependent" (Page 1999, 251). Indeed, he and others (Gordillo, 2004) have argued that we remember only by transporting ourselves to a place. Bound up with historical memory, the remnants of Little Syria have a powerful intensity that affects preservationists. As a descendant of a Little Syria resident remarked, "I get chills down my spine when I'm here." And as Halbwachs notes, any individual "for whom… old walls, rundown homes and obscure passageways create a little universe, who has many remembrances fastened to these images… feels a whole part of himself dying" when a site that is imbued with a sense of self is threatened, and acts to preserve what remains (1950, 4).

Today, Little Syria stands as an unassuming strip of buildings, most significantly St. George's Syrian Catholic Church (the aforementioned pub) with its distinctive white, terra-cotta exterior. St. George's received landmark status, which the Landmarks Preservation Commission denied to the other two buildings in the strip for lacking the "architectural and

historical significance" of the church (Weiss 2013). This response disappointed Little Syria

preservationists, for whom a sense of Arab life around Washington Street lingers

meaningfully. While most people experience Washington Street as a "thin" place that is void

of any unique specificity, many Arab Americans and preservationists link it to layers of

emotion, everyday habits and contemporary traditions that intensify its resonance and enhance

their attachment to it. Descendants of those who lived in the district (re)experience the

neighbourhoods heyday by imagining generations long gone.

Fig. 8: Washington Street with the former St. George's Church.

Carl Antoun is a founding member of the preservation group Save Washington Street,

whose great-great-grandfather was Lebanese and settled in Little Syria. As the New York

Times noted, Antoun speaks of Little Syria "as if he can recall it himself" (Dunlap 2012). "I

kind of freeze in time," Antoun is quoted as saying. "In the back of my mind, I envision

peddlers from here down to the water. I see tenements, with mothers screaming out to their

children to come to dinner." For Antoun and others like him, the Quarter not only carries a

trace of their ancestors, but is also of crucial importance in establishing claims of belonging

that are valuable for all Arab Americans living in a post-9/11 era of alienation. "I think there's

a sense that anything Arab is dangerous," said Todd Fine, co-founder of Save Washington

Street. "It's important for children of Arab Americans who are facing discrimination to know that this location is the start of their heritage" (quoted in Kuruvilla 2013).

There is an awareness among the Syrian Quarter's advocates that collective memories are not just made socially but also physically, for as Fine has urged: "These *structures* help us visualize the massive army of Arab peddlers that moved out from Washington Street to New York City and its suburbs, and the setting that inspired world-famous writers like Kahlil Gibran and Ameen Rihani who transformed Arabic literature itself from their New York base" (Fine 2012). In both Antoun and Fine's statements, we can see how "physical landscapes… serve as touchstones for the work of recollection" (Page 1999, 251-2). Along these lines, Fine and his allies insist that, in deeming the remaining two buildings insignificant, the Landmarks Preservation Commission has failed to appreciate that these brick and mortar forms, like written and oral histories, also communicate an Arab American presence—one marked with crucial contributions to American society in the form of capital, culture and arts. For Fine, "These buildings are a way of both healing and educating."

Since the 9/11 attacks, the conflation of Arabs and Muslims in everyday discourse has resulted in similar, overlapping experiences of discrimination, and there is a fear among Little Syria's advocates that the hurdles they face in preserving the neighborhood are not benign but reminiscent of the troubling history of Arab and Muslim exclusion. Antoun insists that in a post-9/11 era when Arabs of all religious backgrounds are vulnerable, the struggle to maintain the Quarter becomes about Arab acceptance, Christian and Muslim alike. In a press conference sponsored by CAIR, Todd Fine reminded the audience that:

The World Trade Center South Tower was built over an Iraqi cigarette factory.

An Islamic Community Center was listed in a 1930s directory for the neighborhood. The cornerstone of a Syrian-Lebanese Maronite Church was discovered in the rubble of the South Tower.[127]

Fine stated these facts to show that the Arab presence in Lower Manhattan long predates the 9/11 attacks, especially as that presence has been particularly challenged since the Park51 controversy. While Park51 became infamous through explosive media coverage, the public knows relatively little about Little Syria, although it has equally meaningful implications for Arab and Muslim belonging in Lower Manhattan. An important difference between the two locations, however, is that whereas Park51 was treated as an effigy of national enemies, Little Syria is received in a much cooler manner, as relatively non-threatening. This may be due to the latter's temporal distance. For instance, while the landmark status given to St. George's Church is regarded as positive, it also neutralizes the perceived Arab threat by officially relegating Syrian Life in Lower Manhattan to the past. Unlike Park51, which is still in use, St. George's is a relic. So on one hand, the Syrian Quarter has never been the object of attention and ire that Park51 has. On the other hand, a palpable tension surfaces between the memorializations of Ground Zero and Little Syria, as Ground Zero continues to be imagined as a sacred space that cannot be violated by Arab or Muslim presence.

This tension is evident in Save Washington Street's ongoing conflict with the National September 11th Museum, in which the former has claimed that the latter fails to appropriately feature Little Syria in exhibits telling the area's history. As Fine has noted, "The 9/11 Museum has chosen to have a section on local history… its charter from the Lower Manhattan

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[127] This is disputed by the 9/11 Museum, which contends that the cornerstone was not found "on Ground Zero proper." (Alice Greenwald letter to Todd Fine.)

Development Corporation says that it should give a history of Lower Manhattan, and it has chosen in a section of the Museum to give the history about the World Trade Center, including the demolition of the old neighborhood for the construction of the World Trade Center." According to Fine, he and other Little Syria advocates spent three years asking the 9/11 Museum to include in its exhibit, "1 photo, 1 paragraph" to show that the area included "Arab Americans who were patriotic." Like Sharif El-Gamal, Fine also uses the language of integration. He urges the Museum to include an exhibit on those who called themselves Lebanese-Americans, established themselves economically through hard work and were "fully assimilated" by the second and third generations. Adding to anxieties about the Museum's exclusion of Arab American history is its noticeable lack of an Arabic language brochure, whereas brochures in nine other languages were available at the time of writing.

These concerns have been the subject of a series of letters exchanged between Fine and other Arab American advocates, and the Museum. Fine shared the letters with me. In them, the Museum offers to cover Little Syria's history in a temporary, rotating exhibit, or in a database of oral histories with thousands of other accounts. Fine objects that these options are peripheral to visual exhibits that require no extra effort on the patron's part to locate and learn from, and would therefore have a much weaker impact.

Those campaigning for Little Syria remain cognizant of the American identity politics linked to Ground Zero, and position Little Syria as epitomizing the American experience (just as Sharif El-Gamal and Imam Rauf did with Park51). In a letter lobbying the 9/11 Museum to feature Little Syria in its permanent exhibit, Todd Fine again pointed to famous writers such as Kahlil Gibran, who "dedicated their lives to cross-cultural understanding between the United States and the Arab and Islamic worlds" adding that, "Many creative ways to assert

fundamental American values in the 'Little Syria' context could be incorporated in the Museum." But, says Fine, the Museum has fallen short.[128]

In their written exchange, the Museum responded that it could not accommodate Fine's request, and stated that its primary duty is to "develop the narrative storyline" for the 2001 and 1993 World Trade Center attacks, including "their repercussions." In other words, the Museum frames the story of 9/11, and decides which experiences are to be included and excluded in that representation. Fine sharply responded that, "…what is lost and not acknowledged [in the Museum's mission] is the overwhelming need to humanize the Arab Americans and their children, who have suffered and been dehumanized under the 'repercussions' of September 11." The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee echoed the sentiment, writing to the Museum that, "There are many perceived benefits of presenting the substantial Arab-American history of this location within the permanent exhibit including presenting the full, rich history of the area and including Arabs and Arab-Americans who have experienced marginalization after September 11th."

The Museum's approach to Little Syria is an example of how remembering takes a lot of conceptualizing and ordering. Far from being a neutral reservoir for past events, the Museum, like memory itself, is "a process of active restructuring in which elements are retained, reordered and suppressed" (Fentress and Wickham 2005). In this process, there is a continuous blotting out of certain points and events, which we see in the erasure of Little Syria from the 9/11 Museum's exhibit. Whether the reasons are logistical as the Museum contends, or discriminatory as the activists fear, Little Syria is absent from the 9/11 Museum. This invisibility (along with the visibility of what is included in the Museum) gives shape to

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[128] The Museum does include passing mention of a strip known as Radio Row, which was a part of Little Syria, but makes no reference to its Arab American history.

the public stock of memories and collective identities wrought from 9/11, and Ground Zero's past becomes preserved through decontextualization. The space of Lower Manhattan, then, seems to be made of things that have always remained the same: Western neoliberal ideals reflected in a "timeless" terrain of skyward glass that is codified as a sanctified area, a nationalistic space not to be violated by the perceived enemy groups of Arabs and Muslims.

Since public memorialization is a major expression of larger society, the 9/11 Museum's reluctance to include Little Syria in a permanent exhibit has been interpreted by activists as meaning that Arabs should not claim Manhattan history. To give visibility to Arab American roots in Manhattan, the Arab American National Museum (AANM) created an exhibit on Little Syria to send the message, in the museum's deputy director, Devon Akmon's, words, that, "Yes we've been here for a long time, we've been contributing to these communities" (Public Radio International 2012). He emphasized that the Syrian Quarter's history is especially important due to its proximity to the World Trade Center site and to Park51. Since memory has a great role in telling us who we are and embedding our present selves in our pasts, the AANM sees the Syrian Quarter as crucial in having "a positive impact on future generations of Arab Americans." Its preservation is seen as part and parcel of preserving Arab American, and by extension, Muslim American integrity.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, Park51 is in a lull with no interim locations. At its peak, the PrayerSpace was thriving with a Friday attendance of about 700 people. However, unaffordable rents at its interim locations forced the project to close until the original location is reconstructed. According to Sharif El-Gamal, the new building will incorporate a Museum

of Islam, which will focus on American Muslim genealogies and histories. Some research participants interpreted this as a gesture of stubborn defiance by El-Gamal, who is eager to confront any suggestion that Muslims should remain inconspicuous at Ground Zero. Others wonder about Gamal's ability to fund and oversee such a project, and whether it will ever reach fruition. El-Gamal has promised that the Museum, like the community center, will have a prayer area for Muslims.

Meanwhile, Little Syria, or what is left of it, remains at the mercy of city planners. Having reached no resolution with the 9/11 Museum, it remains largely invisible to the public.

Henri Lefebvre notes that space is to be understood in an active sense, as a complex web of relationships that is continuously produced and reproduced. These relationships are central to the cultural mediation of Ground Zero and breathe life into the ideals that shape Lower Manhattan. Park51 and Little Syria provide clear examples of how values are built into landscapes and into minds, and also how cultural attitudes determine the fate of physical spaces—whether they will be preserved or demolished, remembered or forgotten, celebrated or have mock missiles pointed at them.

Chidester and Linenthal wrote six years before the 9/11 attacks that a place is made intensely sacred because it seems to be in danger of being defiled and dispossessed. This is certainly the case with Ground Zero, a social project in which an otherwise ordinary space has been subjected to post-9/11 interpretive processes, and is now imbued with dominant messages about the other, nationalism and belonging. The entire region of Lower Manhattan is widely accepted as a gravesite of monumental status, marked with the blood of heroes and martyrs. A Dutch tourist, who I saw casually swishing through his smartphone at the 9/11 Memorial, said he came, "because a lot of people died here." Although he admitted to being

completely unaffected by this fact, he said it gave the place a renown that made it a must see

tourist destination. Outside the Memorial fence, entire blocks are swallowed into Ground

Zero's "hallowed" status. The residue of the 9/11 terrorist attacks has rubbed off on the entire

region, for every place in Lower Manhattan is a place where the morbid confetti of office

paper floated, where ash covered, and where people witnessed devastation most immediately.

The space as we know it is mired in tensions because of an over time layering of

events involving different groups of people, and their shifting interests and ideals: waves of

immigration, demolition and construction, and many phases not discussed in this chapter

(when Wall Street was a slave market, for instance[129]). There remain many anxieties about

what should be allowed to leave a trace on Ground Zero and which memories and values

should be represented there. It is simultaneously a sacred place where remainders of 9/11

suspend its trauma, as well as a capitalist ground where life and the free market keep on

moving. For some, it is an icon of national strength, and for others, it is a place of deep

insecurity, where 9/11 is coopted as a license for anti-Muslim bigotry. Embedded within

Ground Zero are smaller spatial units wrought from similar tensions. Park51, for example, is a

place made out of ideas about religious conflict, terrorism, faith, resilience and more. As such,

it is a symbol of inclusion for some, and a symbol of the enemy for others.

Despite the fact that dominant portrayals of Ground Zero are driven by a patriotic

impetus, which defines the place according to particular ideals that include some groups and

exclude others, the space is open-ended, ever changing. It continues to index different sets of

meanings for different people, and stirs different passions in different hearts.

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[129] For more information on Wall Street's past of slave trade, see Abby Phillip's *Washington Post* article, "A permanent reminder of Wall Street's hidden slave-trading past is coming soon" (2015).

Chapter 4
Public Drama and Alienation at the World Trade Center

Here at this Memorial, this Museum, we come together. We stand in the footprints of two mighty towers, graced by the rush of eternal waters. We look into the faces of nearly 3,000 innocent souls… Here, we tell their story so that generations yet unborn will never forget.

--Former U.S. President Barack Obama[130]

Largely business as usual around the World Trade Center today, with the noticeable exception of the Memorial and Museum being closed to the public until 6 pm and cops stationed on every block, including one outside the Park51 mosque. Couldn't tell if there were actually more people present in the area, or if it just seemed so because the usual population was condensed due to street closures. "To be honest, there's not a whole lot more people than there usually are..." confirmed one policeman with noticeable trepidation, as if it was disrespectful to the spirit of today for him to admit out loud that this morning wasn't panning out much differently than most mornings.

On the other hand, the pain of 9/11 victims was intensely felt, particularly the few times they were seen, as with a man who displayed a sign that read, "I survived 9/11 - THANK GOD," and had an American flag draped over his walker. He told anybody who would listen stories about how his body shattered 13 years ago, and carried with him a framed photo of his friend, who did not survive. The sight of him, and the sight of the occasional 9/11 family members entering and exiting the memorial site, conveyed a palpable

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[130] Dedication Ceremony for the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, New York City, May 15, 2014.

sense of loss to those who are fortunate enough to not know it firsthand.

At the Catholic Church, noon mass was sparse and usual, but beautiful… At the Episcopal Church, the crowd was also sparse right up to the 12:30 "service for peace." The usual flows of people on the streets were interrupted by small groups of 9/11 Truthers, lone men warning of the second coming via beat up cardboard signs, and the evangelist/missionary types who are normally at the site promising solace from trauma through acceptance of their Lord. The nut who normally stands outside the public library wearing a large wooden cross and holding up anti-Semitic signs was also present, taking full advantage of the poor Mennonite choir's efforts to pull in a small crowd with their lovely hymns. Meanwhile, the Evangelists and 9/11 Truthers were in an argument about whodunnit: God or the Government.

The cops and first responders stood in a relaxed manner, engaging in friendly banter and discussing their home lives. Construction workers building a shopping mall at Ground Zero, wearing commemorative "Building America" shirts, sat around smoking cigarettes and talking about the possibility of going to college. A solemn ceremony in front of the Fire Department ended with a salute, followed immediately by the dispersal of some uniformed men straight into the pub next door. Still other uniformed men were already inside the pub, goofing off and being normal, everyday human beings (rather than the stone-faced warriors we imagine and/or require them to be on such occasions). And everybody else was normal, too, just wanting to get where they were going. It was mainly tourists who appeared grave. Their New Yorker counterparts, who undoubtedly have their own emotional associations with the day, nevertheless hustled about, being pissed off that their preferred subway entrances were closed.

So, for the larger public, the day was obviously different due to the commemorations, but simultaneously, it remained very usual, in spite of political efforts to make it feel dramatically different. You had to go looking for commemorative happenings to find them, yet if I didn't live in New York, I'd have believed it must be "Never Forget" all day, everywhere in this city on September 11.

Back in my neighbourhood, I saw a construction guy with a weathered Twin Towers sticker on his hard hat. I asked if he was a 9/11 worker back in the day and he laughed. "Naw, I just like the sticker."

--Fieldnotes, 9/11/14

Continuing the discussion on Ground Zero, this chapter describes how New Yorkers, particularly Muslims, think about 9/11 commemoration and experience the World Trade Center. I followed September 11th anniversaries for six years between 2011 and 2016. With the exception of the 10th anniversary, which coincided with the explosive Park51 controversy, the commemorations have been relatively tepid. Even the 15th anniversary observations repeated the relatively ordinary atmosphere of the previous years, such as the one described in the fieldnotes above. The theatre of armored vehicles and security around the World Trade Center was not commensurate with how people reported feeling. For instance, in 2015, an NYPD policeman standing outside One World Trade told me that,

Today is no different than any other day for me. Yeah, I think there's always a need for security, and to be prepared. But I'm a cop, so I think that every day. If you see me runnin', then worry. But nah, I don't feel any different today than I do any other day. I feel safe, we're all happy here.

In 2016, another officer I spoke with paraphrased the same response, as half a dozen or so policemen lining the fence of St. Paul's Chapel (across from the World Trade Center) appeared completely at ease, smiling and joking with one another. New York City's police and first responders are positioned as protagonists in the 9/11 story, and are invoked frequently in 9/11 remembrance traditions. To hear these uniformed icons comment on the ordinariness of the day was a powerful confirmation of the superfluous nature of the security theatre that characterizes Lower Manhattan each 9/11. Indeed, people consistently moved about the area not with apprehension or hyper vigilance, but in the usual, self-absorbed fashion: pushing past "slow-walkers," checking emails on their telephones, and so on. There were some exceptions, however.

There was always a crowd on the corner of Church and Vesey, directly across from One World Trade. In 2015, 9/11-related activists, proselytizers and vendors were concentrated there. Christians invoked the trauma of the attacks to strike fear of the Lord into our hearts. One humbly picketed for people to accept Jesus, while another angrily yelled at "sinners" and walked around with scripture and photos of aborted fetuses scotch taped onto his body. Also present were members of the 9/11 Truth Movement, and a woman from Harlem selling flags while cleverly wearing 9/11 Memorial gear to appear as an official vendor. Each party jockeyed for attention on the overcrowded spot, yet each helped the others' causes as well. The flag lady, a devout Pentecostal, politely suggested that the angry preacher be "less judgmental" in his efforts to proselytize, and emphasize love instead. She also gave the Truth activists what she called "lines" to help them better market their pamphlets. "You gotta tell people that the information is *free*," she advised. Her guidance proved fruitless. One man,

deeply upset by the Truth Movement's theories, snatched pamphlets from the activists and threw them everywhere in a rage. In a gesture of support, Mennonite missionaries accepted the conspiracy literature in exchange for their own, religious pamphlets.

Fig. 9: A woman sells flags, a man preaches and New Yorkers move about their day.

A second concentration of 9/11 observers was outside a department store directly across from the World Trade Center, which was luring people with an interactive art project: a strip of white board attached to the length of its exterior, on which passers by could write 9/11-inspired messages using markers laid out in an eye-catching tote bag branded with the store's logo. There, a crowd gathered around a street artist, who wrote peace poetry on the sidewalk using brightly coloured chalk as tourists photographed him.

Fig. 10: Tourists leave commemorative messages on the wall of a department store.

Fig. 11: A small crowd gathers around a sidewalk poet.

A few blocks away, towards Broadway, about a hundred chairs were being set up for what was almost certainly a right-wing event. Patriotic country music blared and large American flags were erected. When I asked an organizer (an older, white woman) about the event, she hesitated, looked at me suspiciously, then sourly told me it was "confidential." Of course, a publicly visible event is hardly confidential, but what she intended to make abundantly clear, in not so many words, was that I was not welcome there. Whether that was due to my ethnic background, or because she may have mistaken me for a troublesome blogger or press member, I will never know.

2016 observations were an anomaly for several reasons. First, September 11th fell on a weekend. This greatly reduced the number of New Yorkers bustling about their work flow, and gave commemorations more visibility. Second, it was the fifteenth anniversary of the attacks, and because it fell on a Sunday, a large number of tourists were able to make pilgrimage to the city. Third, being an election year, some felt a patriotic impetus to show up and connect 9/11 to their electoral politics. For instance, the Ground Zero pilgrim mentioned in the introduction, who wore "TRUMP 2016" and various patches with right-wing messages, insisted that he "had nothing against people of other religions" (speaking specifically about Muslims), but was simply concerned for America's safety.

When 9/11 fell on weekdays, as it usually did, it hardly slowed down the pace of everyday life in the area. There was no doubt that New Yorkers "Never Forget" the attacks. The passersby I spoke to had his or her own, unique memories of the day, and none among them felt a need to relive it through public displays. One woman told me that living in mourning would "mean that they [the terrorists] won." In general, even as pockets of commemorators set 9/11 apart from other days, people carried on as they ordinarily would. As Sturken (2004) and Low (2004) note, there is a tension between Ground Zero's sacred status and the stakes of Lower Manhattan residents, who desire to resume a sense of the quotidian.

Such relative indifference toward 9/11 commemorations conflicts with the work of the National September 11th Memorial and Museum, to which I now turn. Whereas many citizens would just as well resume life ordinarily, the Memorial and Museum utilize 9/11 imagery, ruins and an aesthetic of absence to continually "evoke the destructive power of hatred" (Sturken 2004, 316).

The Memorial and Museum

The once mundane plot of sixteen acres that held the Twin Towers is imbued with new meaning. Death is evoked everywhere, making it impossible to ignore the resounding command to "Never Forget." I witnessed this cultural inscription firsthand during the opening week of the 9/11 Memorial in 2011, and on the 10th anniversary of the attacks. Despite the claim that it has no intention of transporting the audience back to 9/11, its design makes people revisit the trauma of the attack and the collapse of the twin towers as affectively as

possible.[131] Many of us are now familiar with its design: a place of sterile, grey cement

surrounding two enormous, black holes in the ground where the Towers once stood. The

towers lacked these footprints in their actual structures, but the Memorial's *Reflecting*

Absence design gives them centrality, fetishizing the concrete materiality of 9/11 ruins

(Sturken 2004). Water cascades downward into these caverns, leaving newcomers with the

uncomfortable realization of just how big the Towers must have been–how many lives they

held within. One Memorial visitor, a middle-aged tourist from India, described the foreboding

feeling they stir in a single word: "Scary." Framing each footprint are the names of victims,

some with "Her Unborn Child," a reference that vividly depicted the extent of their

vulnerability.

At that time, during my first visits in 2011, the crowd's mood was one of quiet

curiosity rather than outward mourning. The people I encountered held themselves formally

and embodied "respect," moving about the Memorial with care and pensive expressions on

their faces. This conduct has changed dramatically in the few years since then. While the

Memorial and Museum provide a space for Crusader subculture—men wearing Captain

America and *kafir*[132] t-shirts, for instance—moods at the Memorial are now much more

relaxed. The sight of teenagers apathetically scrolling through their phones, or groups treating

the place as a general tourist attraction and taking happy self-portraits at the footprints, was

commonplace during my last visits to the memorial in 2015 and 2016.

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[131] The evocative nature of the Memorial and Museum is so potent that it can be gleaned just through media coverage of the place. As a result, many refuse to visit the site in person, out of fear that it will reopen a wound that has never quite healed (Smith 2016).

[132] "*Kafir*" is an Arabic word for nonbeliever or, as commonly translated in US media, "infidel." The word has been appropriated by Islamophobes, particularly military members deploying Christian crusade themes, who regard it as a badge to be worn proudly in what they perceive as a war with Islam.

Alongside the Memorial stands the 9/11 Museum. Even when it was not yet open to the public, Memorial visitors could look through its glass walls and see some wreckage on display. I particularly remember looking at remnants of an emergency stairwell, which gave me visions of victims frantically descending it before everything collapsed. My heart went out to the people my mind conjured—to a faceless, pregnant stranger running for the sake of "Her Unborn Child." Although very few such women likely used that particular staircase on 9/11, the Memorial and Museum have a profound effect on the imagination in this way, painting pictures that may not have been.

This filling in is, in part, how the haunting nature of Ground Zero is dealt with. As Gaston Gordillo argues, haunting is different from memory. It is an affect, "created by an absence that exerts a hard-to-articulate, nondiscursive, yet positive pressure on the body," which turns the absence into a physical presence that is felt; that affects (2014, 31). In the case of the World Trade Center, the absence is deliberately invoked through holes in the ground at the Memorial and, in the Museum, as I will discuss later on, through the voices of the now deceased victims. The uncanny feeling is assuaged by filling the absence with material things, for instance, various artifacts, remnants of the victims' belongings and body parts in the Museum, or "Tribute in Light" display, which beams an effigy of the Twin Towers into the night sky each September 11. Apart from such objects, the absence that haunts us at the World Trade Center is also filled by the immaterial details constructed out of our own imaginations.

These imaginations are escorted by two sets of political messages that are in conversation with each other. The first cluster of meanings concerns the culprits responsible for 9/11 and for the intensely felt absence of people and place. The second presents America

as a just and heroic force rectifying the situation. These key themes have become solidified

through the long-term repetition of the 9/11 master narrative. A master narrative is an

ideological script that becomes deeply embedded in culture. It is forged out of commonly

understood meanings, has historical persistence and is institutionalized (Halverson, Corman

and Goodall 2011). The motif of "freedom" features prominently in many American nation-

building narratives, from the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror, for which 9/11 is said

to be the catalyst. The 9/11 master narrative opens a chapter in America's story in which the

nation's freedom is threatened. In this account, liberal Western selves are once again cast

against an undemocratic, primitive "other" from the East, to whose Muslim nations the US

must bring freedom. Indeed, the 9/11 story follows a typical "invader" story form (Halverson,

Corman and Goodall) in which a foreign force attacks and kills many in a victim land. In this

framework, a champion must emerge to triumph over the foe, restore order and pursue justice

for the victims. In the 9/11 master narrative, the United States plays the role of both victim

and resilient champion, while Arabs and Muslims are characterized as the invading enemy.

As I discuss in the previous chapter, Orientalist ideals of the national self and the anti-

national other (Cressler 2011) are lodged in Ground Zero. These perceptions are given official

legitimacy by the National September 11th Memorial Museum in its mission to set the

narrative storyline about the 9/11 attacks.[133] Because nothing that is preserved in a museum is

of innate importance[134], the "official" 9/11 account is presented through the display of

particular objects and ideas that have been deemed important and museum-worthy. In other

words, what a spectator takes for granted as a finished product in the Museum is actually "the

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[133] See the previous chapter for Museum Director, Alice Greenwald's, response to Todd Fine, in which she
explains the institution's goals.
[134] In other words, any artifact in a museum is simply a material object, gaining significance only through an
interpretive process that ascribes particular memories and purpose to it.

tangible manifestation of a series of decisions made by the people who determine which events, issues and individuals will be attended to…" and who decide "which aspects of an event or issue will be the focal point, which plotlines will be followed, which characters will be promoted, and so on" (Monahan 2010).[135] During its first year of being open, the Museum hosted an estimated 2.7 million visitors (9/11 Memorial website). It goes without saying, then, that its selection and rhetorical practices are highly significant due to the sheer number of people who visit it.

The 9/11 Museum advances a patriotic master narrative of 9/11 that "controls individual and collective thought (Staples 2008, 81), and is a place with no room for dissent. In my visits there, I got the sense that verbalizing any skepticism about its displays of carnage and death would be regarded as highly inappropriate because it would rudely interrupt the shock and mourning of the stone-faced attendees.[136] In essence, then, alternative views[137] are silenced by an etiquette of quiet mourning.[138] By eclipsing voices that challenge the solidity

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[135] While Monahan is referring to the news media, his observations ring true for Museums in general, and particularly the 9/11 Museum, which heavily includes news media in its historical exhibit. In fact, its contentious film, "The Rise of Al-Qaeda," is made in the style of a news piece and is narrated by famous evening news personality, Brian Williams.

[136] While visitors generally go about the Memorial in a relaxed manner, the Museum's atmosphere is, by design, one that invites stoicism. The Memorial invokes the Twin Towers and victims specifically, yet lacks the personal quality of the Museum, which functions as a catacomb in which the victims' voices, belongings and body parts are entombed. Simply put, the Museum provides greater, more intimate proximity to the victims, which noticeably affects many visitors.

[137] It is important to note, however, that the Museum does have a segment documenting instances of public doubt surrounding 9/11. The piece briefly mentions the 9/11 Truth Movement as well as debates about post-9/11 government policies, etc. Yet this installation makes no demands on the conscience to engage in doubt. On the contrary, it is quick to cite a scientific article that disproves any alternative theories. Overall, the Museum's acknowledgment of doubt is overshadowed and pushed out by recurring dominant themes of victimhood, resilience, freedom and patriotism. These provoke our private senses of self as Americans, and tangle our personal memories of 9/11 with collective ones.

[138] Of course, not everyone's emotions are easily controlled. For instance, each trip to the Museum reveals the relative apathy of younger generations, namely, bored teenagers who are oblivious to the gravity of 9/11 and are unable to empathize with their parents' emotional ties to it. For example, I saw a mother being moved to tears as victims' names were called out in one of the Museum's installations; meanwhile, her daughter was completely absorbed in a smartphone.

of its storyline, the layout and content of the Museum alienate views that have the potential to produce fissures in the dominant account.

The Museum's director, Alice Greenwald, sought to devote it to "the telling of a complex, challenging, and fundamentally disturbing human narrative" (2010, 117). Its design director, Michael Shulan, considered excluding a photo of firefighters raising an American flag on World Trade Center debris to avoid overt patriotism, and to "not reduce 9/11 to something that was way too simple" (Klein 2013). Despite these efforts, the stories on display in the museum reinforce only mainstream viewpoints, which appear to have the greatest emotional appeal and utility.[139] For instance, to enter the Museum, patrons must pass through a state of the art security system, complete with x-rays, metal detectors and body scanners. Mimicking the theatre of airport security, these devices appear to be an installation themselves, linking the space of Ground Zero to terrorism, and reminding patrons that extreme vigilance is required in this post-9/11 era.

The main portion of the Museum is its "historical exhibit," which relies heavily on moving images. It begins with a sign warning visitors of disturbing content, and offers exits along the way for anybody who may feel too emotionally overwhelmed to stay. Patrons are greeted by the soundtrack made out of the voices of 9/11 victims, who are leaving their final words on loved ones' answering machines. Immediately upon entering the exhibit, one is confronted with a time-lapse video of the Twin Towers from the morning of September 11th 2001, showing the moments before and after the attacks. Competing with the answering

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[139] As another instance: the unidentified remains of many victims (totaling over 9,000 pieces of bone and tissue) are preserved in the Museum, behind a wall inscribed with an inspirational quote from Virgil, which moves many patrons. While Alice Greenwald (2011) has argued that the decision to hold the remains in the Museum is in accordance with the wishes of many 9/11 families, anthropologist Chip Cowell-Chanthaphonh (2011) has shown that some 9/11 family members feel that their loved ones' (potential) remains are being exploited by the Museum for financial gain and spectacle.

machine messages, there is another layer of sound comprised of live news coverage from the

morning of September 11th, and raw footage from the video cameras of everyday citizens.

Twisted metal, charred paper and mundane objects covered in dust are interspersed with

videos that grip the viewer completely. There are many such videos throughout the exhibit,

including grainy footage of the 9/11 hijackers going through airport security in an eerily well-

composed manner just before embarking on their dark mission.

However, one video, shot by a local named Evan Fairbanks, stands out in particular. In

the video, a camera points upward from the street, fixed on plumes of smoke rising from the

North Tower after the first plane hit it. We see a man standing below, expressionless. Then, a

second plane enters the frame, as if out of nowhere, and hits the South Tower. The man

retreats in alarm as the plane disappears completely into the concrete, re-emerging only as a

cloud of dust and vaporized particles. The sequence ends there but in the Museum, it loops

over, beginning with the camera pointing upwards, the smoke, the expressionless man, the

moment of impact. And on and on it plays, endlessly resurrecting the Twin Towers in the

space they once occupied.

Fig 12: A screenshot of the Evan Fairbanks video.

Modern film technologies have enabled us to relive the horror of the 9/11 attacks at a variety of different speeds and orientations: slow motion, replay, even backwards. Moving images of 9/11 are generally more potent than a still photograph, and are continually used in the Museum to keep patrons re-experiencing the event. These images "move" in more ways than one: not only do they capture terror in motion, they profoundly affect the visitors' emotions. They move people who pass through. Audience members are pulled into the scene and feel a deep, personal connection to the attacks. Witnessing the attacks repeatedly, and in motion, helps visitors recount them with greater clarity. Boiled down to seconds-long clips of impact, these dynamic images become fused with pieces of individuals' personal memories. They transport viewers back to the initial shock they felt on 9/11 and hold them there. The common question "Where were you when 9/11 happened?" assumes the significance of that moment.

On one hand, memories of what the 9/11 attacks looked like are informed by crisp media images that capture the drama unfolding from a safe distance. On the other hand, collective memories of this event are also made out of the shaky camera work of everyday citizens, such as the footage shot by Evan Fairbanks. An amateur account like this is particularly museum-worthy because it provides an insight into the day that the tidy media frames do not. It is in immediate proximity to the chaos and thus able to highlight the raw experience of people on the ground. It follows the movements of panicked individuals, and captures the havoc in a much more palpable fashion than official media footage. When replayed in a nonstop loop, moving images especially draw spectators in, giving them time to process and reprocess the scene. At the 9/11 Museum, the patrons I observed viewing the

Fairbanks video watched it loop several times over before moving on. They seemed completely mesmerized by the peril it documented.

Fig 13: A wrecked airplane window featured at the neighbouring 9/11 Tribute Center, a much smaller museum where 9/11 victims and survivors guide tours using their personal narratives. (Photography was not allowed inside the 9/11 Museum, but the Tribute Center displays similar artifacts.)

The Museum couples 9/11 artifacts with moving images of terrorists and plane crashes in a simple cause-and-effect display, as if to say, "Here are ruins. And here's how they became ruins." This pairing ignores the complex layering of conditions, perspectives, and other contexts surrounding the event and its repercussions. It forces the viewer to, first, focus on violence by the other (namely, Arab and Muslims) and, second, to understand the attacks as the starting point of an "uncomplicated narrative that unfolds in a fairly linear fashion" (Monahan 2010). When we finally break away from watching the looping footage, we find ourselves surrounded by remnants and ruins: photos of victims, pieces of warped metal, dingy clothing, and office items, all "transformed into historical objects, materials of poignancy and loss" (Sturken 2004, 312). The videos mediate these artifacts, marshaling a history of 9/11 that sustains the shallow master narrative[140] and leaves little room for observers to question

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[140] The 9/11 Museum leaves visitors with only a sparse understanding of political conditions leading up to 9/11. "The Rise of Al Qaeda" film, for instance, frames Osama Bin Laden's grievances with the United States as a shallow religious disdain for non-Muslim nations. A fuller context would mention that US foreign policy,

the stability of their views. Instead, the exhibit as a whole guides people in how they "should" talk about, and think about, the event (Staples 2008). What Brian Monahan explains about the news media can certainly be applied to the 9/11 Museum: that "Its aura of entertainment and compelling plot structure often mask its potency as a creator and conveyor of meanings" (2010, 8).

For instance, 9/11 Museum exhibits make only certain lives worth grieving. There is no contemplation about the immense destruction of life caused in the War on Terror, which is directly linked to the 9/11 attacks, and sustains itself in a vicious, cyclical conflict with "Islamic terrorism." On the contrary, the Museum's exhibits reproduce hegemonic stances regarding the attacks, the "other," and the War. For instance, one of the exhibits in the Museum is a letter from a small child to city workers, written in militaristic language (original emphases):

> Thank you! For all the work you put into cleaning up in NEW YORK, where
>
> the Twin Towers got bombed ☹
>
> But, America will stand strong against Afghanistan!
>
> America will be the one to win the war!

The young author demonstrates once again that "9/11" as we know it is a highly political, taken-for-granted, master narrative about the conflict between the United States and others in the "Islamic World," and one that is upheld by the 9/11 Museum.

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particularly the occupation of Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, played a crucial part in motivating Bin Laden, who accused the United States of carrying out "horrific massacres" in those places.

The Museum experience ends much as it begins: with a sense of impending doom. A short film entitled "The Rise of Al-Qaeda" winds down the historical exhibit with footage of terrorist training camps interspersed with explanations about the ideologies and motivations of Muslim extremists. The film was heavily criticized for its portrayal of Islam and Muslims, including by the Museum's own interfaith advisory committee, which was concerned about the film's potential to further alienate Muslims around the World Trade Center site, and elsewhere. The interfaith committee offered the Museum suggestions on how to better word pieces about Islam and Muslims. The Museum ignored the board's recommendations and made no changes to the film. However one evaluates the Museum's decisions of what to display and how, its choices demonstrate the careful selection of information to be disseminated to the public—selections which leave little room for interpretation. For while the 9/11 Museum devotes much attention to the concept of "freedom," it remains oddly coercive in how it guides thoughts and enforces emotions by pandering to and reproducing a culture of fear.

One of the recommendations made by the interfaith committee was for the Museum to include profiles of Muslim victims, such as Mohammad Salman Hamdani. That suggestion was also declined. The demonization of Muslims has been exemplified by Hamdani's case, and his mother remains in conflict with the 9/11 Memorial over its representation, or lack thereof, of her son.

Being Muslim at the World Trade Center

Talat Hamdani, a Pakistani American woman in her 50s, was recovering from an assortment of illnesses when I met her in 2014. She had been sick for several years following

the death of her oldest son, Salman, in the 9/11 attacks. He was a young NYPD cadet in his 20s and a resident of Queens, who in September 2001 was working as a lab analyst at a Manhattan hospital. Like many individuals, Salman disappeared on 9/11. Like their families, his, too, frantically searched for their vanished loved one. But what set his case apart from the others was the way in which his disappearance was treated. Once Salman was reported missing, authorities immediately suspected him of being one of the terrorists. His family's home was ransacked by the NYPD, "Wanted" posters featuring him were plastered around his neighbourhood, and the *New York Post* published a photograph of him with the crass headline, "Missing—Or Hiding?" In addition to coping with the crushing uncertainty of what had become of him, his family was also burdened with defending him against spurious charges. Talat was a frantic mother who followed every lead she could in hopes of finding her son, and for a long time, believed that the government was holding him somewhere. It was only after she visited the World Trade Center site and saw the dizzying wasteland before her, that she began to accept that he was gone. A few weeks later, Salman's broken remains were found in the World Trade Center rubble. His family was kept in the dark about the discovery until March of 2002, following which his parents buried "nothing more than a body bag filled with all that was left" of their son (Hamdani 2013).

It was deduced that, from his train to work that September 11th, Salman saw smoke rising from the World Trade Center and went there to help, in spite of the imminent danger. With this explanation, his innocence was declared and the state responded with several apologetic gestures. The US PATRIOT act specifically mentioned him as having acted heroically.[141] He was also given a burial with full police honours, attended by mayor Michael

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[141] Sandwiched between justifications for increased funding of domestic counterterrorism programs is Section 102 of the PATRIOT Act, in which congress attempts to distance itself from anti-Arab and Islamophobic

Bloomberg, police commissioner Ray Kelly, and New York State Congressman, Gary Ackerman. On the first anniversary of the attacks, the NYPD presented Talat with a badge for Salman, to officially recognize him as a full-fledged member of the force. In 2014, the city named the street on which he had lived after him. The street naming ceremony, like his funeral and the PATRIOT Act, involved the heavy use of hero discourse, emphasizing Salman's sacrifice for his fellow citizens. The ceremony was received very well by Talat and her family, not only as a gesture that honoured him, but also as advocacy for Muslim Americans as a whole. Like Park51 (which Talat defended vociferously during the controversy), having a street named "Salman Hamdani Way" embedded Muslims into the city's geography and demonstrated their integral place in it. The Hamdanis and other advocates hoped that it would serve an educational purpose—that curious passers by might wonder who Mohammad Salman Hamdani was, perhaps search for him on the internet, and see how Muslim Americans can appear not just as antagonists in the 9/11 story, but also as its heroes and victims.

Fig 14: City officials and community members unveil Salman Hamdani Way in Queens.

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discrimination. Part 6 of this section reads: "Many Arab Americans and Muslim Americans have acted heroically during the attacks on the United States, including Mohammed Salman Hamdani, a 23-year-old New Yorker of Pakistani descent, who is believed to have gone to the World Trade Center to offer rescue assistance and is now missing." Talat Hamdani is an ardent opponent of the PATRIOT Act, which she feels erodes civil liberties in a way that disproportionately affects Muslim Americans.

Following 9/11, Talat's husband passed away from heart issues. She attributed his death to stress caused by the family's ordeal and his grief about losing Salman. It was plain to see that these losses had taken a toll on her, physically and emotionally. She remained furious that, while other victims of 9/11 were being missed and mourned, her son was simply being criminalized; that, immediately following the attacks, while other 9/11 families had the sympathy and support of an entire nation, hers was left in the lurch, mired in false accusations and investigations, with no room to grapple with its loss. She considered the City's initial treatment of Salman as fundamentally Islamophobic, and expressed to me numerous times that the only reason he was treated as a culprit, rather than as a victim, was "because his name was Mohammed."

For Talat, having Salman's innocence declared was only the first step in redeeming his reputation and combating Islamophobia. Because he was an NYPD cadet, she wanted his name included in the First Responder's section at the 9/11 Memorial, rather than where it was, in a section dedicated to victims loosely associated with the World Trade Center. When I last saw her in the summer of 2015, she was still indignant about the Memorial's unwillingness to move his name to its "proper place." She had just met with a sympathetic city council member about the matter, and had hopes for a resolution. Even as she was optimistic, she cried and spoke disdainfully about decision makers at the Memorial. She feared that they resisted Salman's inclusion in the first responders' section for the same reason that the NYPD had treated him as a terrorist: "his faith." She suspected that their tightly controlled storyline about American heroes and Muslim enemies required Salman's exclusion from the first responders section. She said that the Memorial's explanation, that he could not be categorized as a first responder because he was not on active duty or a full-time employee of the NYPD, left much

to be desired. Flashes of outrage cut through her sadness. "He might have been half-time, but he gave his full life—he did not give *half* his life, did he? He had only one life and he gave all of it! He went in there as the first responder he was, and he gave the ultimate sacrifice!"

Apart from aggressively demanding adequate representation and commemoration of her son, Talat wanted nothing to do with the World Trade Center site. The idea of visiting either the Memorial or Museum turned her insides. She had visited the Memorial once, when it opened, and did so only to be able to call out her son's name publicly during the ceremony. One September 11th, her sister phoned and invited her to visit the Memorial and Museum with her family. She regarded this gesture as tone deaf and extremely upsetting. Her sister, she said, seemed to perceive the place as some sort of holiday destination—the "go to" site on 9/11. But for Talat, it was just a commercialized "*kabristaan*"[142] (cemetery) that sold tickets to largely unaffected parties so that they could temporarily experience a morbidity built on the permanent, inescapable, pain of others like her.

In his study of news media, Brian Mohahan conceptualizes the September 11th attacks as a form of public drama, that is, a mediated production with constituted features and proffered meanings that influence how we make sense of particular issues, events and individuals (2010, 9). Indeed, Talat and other Muslim New Yorkers with whom I spoke commonly experienced the World Trade Center as a site of public drama—a place where knowledge producers, from the media to the 9/11 Museum, had anchored reified narratives of Islamic fundamentalism that positioned Muslims in the role of antagonists.

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[142] The 9/11 Museum is so heavily commercialized that its sincerity is frequently questioned (see Susan Edelman's to-the-point, 2014 article, "The 9/11 museum's absurd gift shop," in the *New York Post*). A prominent example occurred when it began selling a cheese plate shaped like the United States, with hearts marking the locations of the 9/11 attacks on the plate (Chung 2014). While references to the Twin Towers and the attacks are generally accepted on t-shirts, drinking glasses and fridge magnets, trivializing the tragedy on a cheese plate proved too scandalous. Public outrage ensued and the Museum was forced to recall the item.

Azim, who appears throughout this dissertation, had developed close rapport with me and sometimes asked to accompany me during my visits to particular mosques and historical sites. The World Trade Center was one place, however, that he adamantly refused to visit. Like other New Yorkers, he remembered the 9/11 attacks in a deeply personal way, and had no desire for the Memorial and Museum guide his memories of them. He saw the Museum as "a disgusting tourist trap" that he "wanted nothing to do with." He regarded it as a profoundly Islamophobic institution, which informed how people—especially tourists around the World Trade Center—thought of and treated Muslims. "When I walk past the area and I look especially Muslim, [wearing] a *kufi* or something, I feel like I'm getting personally blamed for the Twin Towers by the looks. But maybe that's just me projecting."[143] Similarly, a Muslim friend of mine politely refused to walk through the Memorial with me. Citing reasons very similar to Azim's, she told me more than once that it would make her uncomfortable to be there.

Not every Muslim New Yorker I met felt this way. Iqbal, a 23-year-old marketing professional of Pakistani descent, sat with me rather comfortably at the Memorial for one of his interviews. There, he spoke normally, even loudly, about coming of age as a Muslim after 9/11. While there are some Muslims who would feel uneasy speaking at the site about such subject matter, Iqbal generally spoke without apprehension. One exception occurred when he uttered the phrase "9/11" in a whisper. When I asked about it, he said that he had been completely unconscious of his drastic change in tone. After a moment of reflection, he said,

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[143] Indeed, disdainful looks or other forms of casual degradation go hand-in-hand with the accusation that the target of such microaggressions may be imagining it, "reading too much into it," or projecting their suspicions onto others needlessly.

I guess you never know what the city is like… normally, I'm very open about

my identity. But sometimes, the way I speak might come off as aggressive and

all of a sudden [someone may think], "There's this [Muslim] talking about

9/11 at the Memorial! He's one of those guys I've seen on '24'!"[144]

Overall, Iqbal was a New Yorker whose office overlooked the Memorial, and he appeared

quite at home there. So did the few families strolling around the plaza in markedly Muslim

garb. It was a beautiful summer evening, and they did not seem worried one iota about how

others might have perceived them.

Iqbal predicted that, "As more and more time goes by… this will become a different

place in ten years, in fifteen years. The older that generations get, it'll just become 'a nice

place,'" unencumbered by the unspoken but well known rules of engagement currently

shaping it. Indeed, the atmosphere around the World Trade Center has already changed. A

few years ago, when the Park51 controversy was still fresh in American minds, I knew

Muslims who were somewhat anxious in the area. In fact, I was among those who walked

Lower Manhattan with heightened self-awareness.

In the spring of 2012, two friends and I left Park51 after a Friday service still wearing

our hijabs. En route to the subway, we decided to visit a shoe store next to the World Trade

Center. We crossed paths with a man who hurled Islamophobic vulgarities at us, specifically

threatening sexual violence. My friends, numb to the culture of street harassment in New

York City, carried on relatively unperturbed. Much more difficult for them to ignore was the

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[144] *24* was a popular television series about counterterrorism. The political thriller is widely regarded as Islamophobic, including by its own executive producer, who worried about it being politically incendiary. He had this epiphany upon seeing an anti-Muslim freeway billboard, which said, "They could be next door," shortly after an episode of *24* depicted a Muslim family as terrorists (Hamed 2011).

muttering of two tourists, a father and young son, at the shoe store. "Mozlems," we heard the father whisper in a pronunciation commonly associated with xenophobes and the ill informed. The sound affected us immediately; anxiety shot through our bodies. In a Pavlovian response, we turned around simultaneously to look at the man. He fell silent and continued perusing the store, as if he had never noticed, or spoken of, us. The three of us glanced at one another, left the store, and burst into a high-pitched outrage about having been the subjects of a xenophobic gaze. Feeling extremely self-conscious, I uncovered my hair before boarding the train. My friends, for whom hijab was integral to faith and a sense of self, could not.

Conclusion

I was surprised to find as many New Yorkers as I did underwhelmed by 9/11 commemorations. There was a great disparity between the dramatic, mainstream rhetoric of 9/11, which depicts New Yorkers as unanimously charged up about commemorations, and their actual reactions, which were generally muted. As I wrote in my fieldnotes, "…if I didn't live in New York, I'd have believed it must be 'Never Forget' all day, everywhere in this city on September 11."

In the previous chapter, I showed how the World Trade Center is a contested place of competing meanings and values. This chapter has illustrated such tensions by discussing the perspectives of Muslim New Yorkers, who experience the place as a locus of hegemonic, anti-Muslim values—as a site of public drama in which the tragedy of 9/11 is leveraged to license Islamophobia in the official discourse and also in everyday encounters. These two manifestations are linked in a top-down relationship. The 9/11 master narrative fashioned in no small part by the provocative design of the National September 11th Memorial Museum, as

well as the Memorial's evocative aesthetic of absence, cements dominant representations of the attacks and guides the xenophobic association people make between Arabs and Muslims, and terrorism. Indeed, the new World Trade Center site was fashioned out of distinct ideological and interpretive strategies. As architect Philip Nobel has written, George W. Bush's September 14, 2001 visit[145] to Ground Zero set an Islamophobic tenor early on that inspired the first widely seen proposals for the site (Nobel 2005). Unsurprisingly, then, many Muslim New Yorkers feel unwelcome and unsafe in the area, and some want nothing to do with it. In the next chapter, I continue the conversation about Ground Zero with a focus on the Memorial and Museum, and examine how these sites impact Muslim being and belonging in New York City.

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[145] During his visit Bush uttered what Nobel calls one of the defining lines of his presidency: "I can hear you, the rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear from us all soon!" This message was answered with cheers of "USA! USA!" and "some off-color anti-Arab remarks" (Nobel 2005, 18).

Chapter 5
Spatial Dimensions of Islamophobia and Religious Orientations

I'm telling you I know of any number of mosques in New York where the police are very concerned about them, where there are radicals in there… It was 80 percent back in 2000. Based on the radicalization since then, it has to be -- I have no doubt, I have problem at all in saying it's 85 percent. If it's not 85, it's still 80.

--New York Congressman Peter King, 2006

Azim and I sat in a packed, candle-lit Italian restaurant on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Two young men yelled across their table at each other, trying to be heard over the sound of clattering plates and music. "*Jee-had*?[146] Is that, like, a curse?" one inquired casually. We glanced over our menus to the their table, where his friend explained. "No, when they put a jihad on you, they're calling for your death, like an actual killing." Azim pushed his glasses back up his nose, smirked in quiet resignation and shook his head. I snickered. We said nothing about the exchange, which was clearly Islamophobic in nature. We simply returned to our immediate concern of whether to order soup or salad. It was as if we, as Muslims, were accustomed, as noted by Bayoumi (2008), to being a problem,[147] and the subjects of headlines and dinner conversations among non-Muslim Americans.

This chapter continues exploring Muslims' relationships with particular places in New York City. It shows that Islamophobia haunts in many locations, and that city spaces are

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[146] Jihad

[147] In his book, *How Does It Feel to be a Problem: Being Young and Arab in America* (2008), Moustafa Bayoumi explains how "Arab and Muslim Americans are constantly talked about" and "have become a foreign-policy issue, an argument on the domestic agenda, a law-enforcement priority, and a point of well-meaning concern." He describes the experience as "beleaguering; like living on a treadmill, an exhausting condition" (2008, 5).

navigated through an awareness of the policing and anti-Muslim stereotypes that pervade everyday life in the city. Apart from the World Trade Center, many public places play a role in sustaining narratives about Islamic extremism. Meanwhile, there are places that provide respite and shelter from such stigmatization. For example, this chapter also analyzes the bodily use in various religious places, and how Muslim New Yorkers deployed particular ideas about religious moderation in various locations around the city, demonstrating that their religious subjectivities had a spatial dimension.

Emotional Geography

It is obvious that memories of 9/11 are grounded more forcefully around the World Trade Center and the current memorial. Yet they have also been territorialized around the city. As Adrian Parr (2008) notes, 9/11 suffering turned urban life into an object that was simultaneously managed and also used to produce particular values and laws. What resulted was a paternalistic framework stifling expressions of life and normalizing dread. Parr's claims were supported by my research, as participants told me that they did feel subject to greater discrimination in certain places in the city compared to others. The places where they felt safer were those in which they felt free to look, act and speak as Muslim (habitually uttering Islamic expressions, such as "*Inshallah*,"[148] for example.) By "safer," I do not mean physically safer. Being targeted by violence was a consideration for some,[149] but in general, the people I interviewed and observed were more concerned with the microaggressions, judgments and gazes of others. There were places in which they felt uncomfortable or excessively self-aware, such as the subway, which I will describe later on. More often than

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[148] "God willing."
[149] For instance, women who covered their hair sometimes spoke about the potential of falling victim to "hijab grabbers," meaning, people who attack them to tear their hijabs off.

not, they experienced double consciousness, and were cognizant of how others might see or relate to them as Muslims. Even though the law granted them freedom of movement to venture anywhere in the city, such social pressures could hamper their ability to exist unselfconsciously in certain places, such as the Park51 community center, the subway, or places under NYPD surveillance—three examples which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Comedy clubs became places of solidarity and provided emotional shelter for many who felt bogged down by the weight of blatant Islamophobia or daily microaggressions. I attended the Big Brown Comedy Hour on three occasions during my fieldwork. It was an extremely popular function, with a line of patrons coiling around the block, and always sold out. Organized by The Muslim Funny Fest—a festival starring Muslim standup artists—the event featured "brown" comedians from various religious and ethnic backgrounds. Alongside their Muslim peers, a few non-Muslim, "brown" comedians also took to the stage to share hilarious commentary about being racially profiled, of growing up with parents whose cultural values forbade dating, of explaining their cultures to white people, and other overlapping experiences that resonate with many people of colour in the United States. Sometimes, shows were organized in immediate response to high profile instances of Islamophobia. For example, the last one I attended took place in January 2016, following Donald Trump's claims that Mexicans in the United States were "rapists and criminals," and that Muslims needed to be banned from entering the country. The show, expressing solidarity with Mexican Americans whose experiences with Homeland Security overlapped with Muslims', was titled "Deport Donald Trump!"[150]

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[150] Since both groups are increasingly painted as security threats, there are growing alliances between Mexicans and Muslims. For example, in San Diego, where Mexican groups tour Anaheim's Little Arabia and break bread

The performance took place on Manhattan's Upper East Side in a dimly lit club that regularly hosted Muslim comedy. On such nights, the club accommodated the religious prohibition on alcohol by changing its $20 drink minimum to a "$20 popcorn and unlimited soda" minimum. The desire to laugh off the dread eclipsed the outrageous cost of popcorn and brought together all types of people. Young professionals, old "aunties" in hijab, as well as many African Americans who may or may not have been Muslim, all laughed hysterically at vulgar jokes, and all booed energetically at mention of Trump's name.

That evening, I was accompanied by a Pakistani woman, Sonya, (mentioned briefly in Chapter 2's discussion on moderate Muslims), whose boyfriend was a white Republican from Upstate New York, from a family that was ardently pro-Trump. He knew little about Muslims and shared his family's reservations about dating one. Sonya described feeling vulnerable and wounded around all of them, and believed that a bit of exposure to Muslims would surely alleviate the situation. But rather than taking her partner to Quran discussions or other educational events, she thought comedy was the best medium to teach him about who Muslims were and what their lives looked like. "It's going to be a room full of us. I don't think he's seen that many Muslims in his life," she told me. "And he'll see, *this is us*, our pain, the shit we have to go through." The "shit" she was referring to was Islamophobia, which her boyfriend routinely downplayed or remained oblivious to; it was the focus of the event as comedians repeatedly skewered Islamophobes such as Trump with caustic jokes.

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with Palestinian residents (Do, 2016), or Chicago, where black, Latino and Muslim students successfully organized to stop Donald Trump from visiting the University of Illinois (Linthicum and Lee 2016). However, both Muslims and Mexicans have been targeted in parallel ways long before Trump entered the picture. As California State University professors Alejandra Marchevsky and Beth Baker argue, both groups are denied due process and targeted with double punishment (imprisonment and deportation). While we think of these communities in the distinct categories of "national security" and "immigrant rights," the experiences of both communities are in fact linked by War on Terror policies that tend to criminalize them. For more, see their 2014 article in *The Nation*, entitled "Why Has President Obama Deported More Immigrants Than Any President in US History?"

Indeed, as Dean Obaidallah, one of the organizers, acknowledged in his closing remarks, many of us were in the audience for more than laughs—perhaps for validation, for solidarity, for some sense of empowerment and respite from the tense election cycle. "With everything that's going on… ISIS, the media…we can come together and laugh here, and feel close to one another."

Sonya's boyfriend genuinely enjoyed his night at the comedy club and appreciated the humour, but in the long run, it did little to shift his deeply embedded political beliefs. In a display of cognitive dissonance, he continued exceptionalizing Sonya as a good Muslim while remaining suspicious of most others, including her family members. The gulf between his perceptions of Muslims (and minorities in general) and her experience of being one was not only irreconcilable but also polarizing. After months of feeling agonized, Sonya ended their relationship and vowed never to date (non-Muslim) white men again.

Sonya felt safe in Jackson Heights, Queens, where she was raised since childhood. She felt threatened by white Millennials gentrifying the area and explained, "This is our place. Everything else belongs to them [white people], and this is one place that's ours and reflects our culture." Jackson Heights was one of several neighbourhoods in which Muslim New Yorkers could feel a sense of acceptance and belonging. The west side of the neighbourhood housed a bustling South Asian district. There, on the corner of Roosevelt Avenue and 72nd Street, snippets of Bengali, Urdu and Punjabi could be heard over the thundering rattle of an elevated subway line. The familiar smell of fried goods, barbecued meat, and sweet treats emanated from Kabab King, a large and iconic eatery offering authentic Pakistani fare. Residents milled about the sidewalks, carefully picking through crates of mangoes, jackfruit and other produce.

A battered note taped to an empty jar requested donations for the building of a new mosque. "In my village, in Bangladesh," explained a bearded, elderly man about the project. He was one of many vendors lining the streets and selling religious items, such as prayer rugs, prayer beads, prayer caps, *rahels*,[151] and kitschy decorative pieces, such as Quran verses embroidered on velvet. Women in hijabs and niqaabs, while not in the majority, were common enough that they perused the markets without becoming the object of others' curiosity.

The area of Fulton Street and Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn's Bed-Stuy neighbourhood felt, to many, similarly welcoming.[152] In this predominantly African American (and increasingly South Asian) area, on a stretch of road that was home to two prominent African American mosques, strangers greeted each other with "assalaamu alaikum." There, wearing a hijab was normal and even encouraged by the dense Muslim population. Marking oneself as Muslim invited shows of warmth and fraternity, which transcended race and ethnic boundaries to acknowledge a broader religious bond.[153]

To frame places such as the comedy club or particular areas as "safe" is not to say that participants experienced the rest of New York City as hostile or potentially dangerous. It is only to say that there were certain places in which they felt a greater sense of belonging and ease as compared to the discomfort they felt in certain other places, where they were affected by the scrutiny or disapproval of others. Safe places were usually those in which they felt an

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[151] An ornately carved, wooden bookstand used to hold the Quran.

[152] Yet it could also be alienating for some, for example, women who were dressed "immodestly" according to local standards, and judged with harsh looks or otherwise outcasted. I once watched as a woman wearing a knee-length dress ventured into the men's section of a nearby mosque to ask for directions. Seeing this, Elizabeth (an older, African American, conservative Muslim discussed in Chapter 2) remarked, "She in for a surprise…," referring to the objection the woman was surely about to receive from the men. As predicted, a young man hurriedly escorted her out of the mosque, providing directions with his eyes completely averted from her.

[153] To be clear, there were plenty of racial tensions between African American and South Asian Muslims in Bed Stuy, but these usually manifested in internal mosque politics.

affinity with others.[154] For instance, at the height of the Park51 controversy, a halal food vendor near the center offered me a smile and *salaam*. That passing gesture of warmth momentarily transformed the street corner into a pocket of relief in an area otherwise rife with tension.

Muslim New Yorkers' positionalities were spatialized through ordinary encounters with the city, which taught them much about how others perceived them, about which political narratives others associated with them, and about Islamophobia in general. Kathleen Stewart describes the ordinary as "a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges" that play out in various scenes in life. She notes that the ordinary "throws itself together out of forms, flows, powers, pleasures, encounters, distractions, drudgery, denials, practical solutions, shape-shifting forms of violence, daydreams, and opportunities lost and found… we feel its pull"; that it appears "…in the textured, roughened surface of the everyday" (2007, 29). She links the ordinary to affect, that is, an intensity that is felt before it can be defined. Stewart defines ordinary affects as a charge that "passes through the body and lingers for a little while as an irritation, confusion, judgment, thrill, or musing… its visceral force keys a search to make sense of it, to incorporate it into an order of meaning. But it lives first as an actual charge immanent to acts and scenes—a relay" (39). Steven Feld's puts it well when he states, "as place is sensed, senses are placed" (Feld 1991, 91).

For the Muslims I met in New York, lived experiences were made not only out of the prominent aspects of their lives—their families, their work, their desires—but also of the sights and sounds of their day to day: the restaurant chatter amid which Azim and I sat, for example. Such ordinary encounters with the city were affective experiences that shaped

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[154] Normally, these places included other Muslims, but also non-Muslim people of colour with whom they shared experiences of being othered.

people's senses of place and self as Muslims, especially as memories of 9/11 continued to cast a shadow over the city as well as over their lives.

The Subway

In 2012, Sunando Sen, a Hindu New Yorker, was pushed in front of an oncoming train by a woman who did it because she conflated Hindus and Muslims, and held them responsible for 9/11. Clearly, his attacker was mentally ill and claimed to have committed the crime as revenge for the attacks—not to avenge the victims but because she "liked the buildings."[155] While "subway pushers" tend to strike victims of every background, Sen's case left a lasting impression on many Muslim New Yorkers, who commonly spoke about their vigilance in staying away from the platform edge.[156]

New York's subway is often a place of confrontation. New Yorkers are no strangers to witnessing commuter conflicts over limited seating, electoral politics or any number of issues. The subway was also a site of Islamophobic tensions before and after the pushing incident just mentioned. For instance, following the November 2015 ISIS attacks in Paris, Muslim New Yorkers anticipated a backlash and began circulating safety tips on Facebook. Among other things, such as wearing clothes suitable for running away from an assailant, the list cautioned readers to stand away from the platform edge with their backs against the wall. Subway vigilance became so engrained that I habitually stood as far away from the platform as I could. Sometimes, my mind was polluted with thoughts of the absolute worst happening: being shoved in front of an oncoming train while carrying my infant nephew, with whom I

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[155] See the 2013 CBS report, "Subway Shoving Suspect Says 'Bad Day' Drove Her to Attack."
[156] Not only was subway vigilance a subject that came up in interviews with participants, it was a topic of conversation in Muslim social settings, social media circles, and Friday sermons.

frequently traveled. My sister, who had the propensity to be equally paranoid, preferred I not cover my hair in public, as I did on my commute to mosque on Fridays.

However, instances that threatened one's physical safety were, in fact, few and far between, and the subway was more commonly a place of verbal and other forms of nonviolent tensions. Expressions of Islamophobia were overwhelmingly passive aggressive, taking the form of stares, particular body language and pointed comments, conveying to Muslims that their ways of being were not acceptable. For instance, Fatima, a Dominican woman in her twenties, told me about her commute to and from work while wearing hijab, saying, "It's hard because you have to deal with some people… They'll have their kids on the train with you and they'll move their children physically away from you." Azim, who had a long beard and sometimes wore a *kufi*, described similar experiences. For example, a man once mumbled anti-Muslim profanities at him but walked away when confronted by Azim. In a separate event, two, older Puerto Rican women stared as he read a Quran during his evening commute, mistook him for Arab, and casually conversed in Spanish about his reading "the book of the Devil." He did not interject, and told me that verbal incidents were uncommon. "It's mostly just looks [people give]," he told me.

As in other places, Islamophobia in the subway was shaped by everyday discourse about Muslims. Just as Orientalist tropes were mainstreamed on television screens across the city, so were they underground. Pamela Geller and the ADFI's subway campaign, which represented Muslims as "savages," "Jew haters," and ISIS, was by far the most potent example (see Chapter 1 for a description of these ads). The ads did not go unchallenged and the subway system, like Ground Zero, momentarily became a place where competing messages about Islam and Muslims were displayed. The first of Geller's ads, which called

Muslims "savages" and were placed in some of Manhattan's busiest stations,[157] were almost immediately vandalized. Guerilla artists appropriated them and used them as canvases for anti-racist, counter-messaging. One sign had the word "RACIST" plastered across it. In another, Geller's message was crossed out with red tape and had "HATE SPEECH" stamped over it; still another was interrupted by a bright orange sticker, which cautioned, "WARNING. This is war propaganda. You're the Target." Geller's ads appeared inside train cars as well, where they were also subject to vandalism.

Subsequent ads by Geller exploited the gruesome beheading of journalist James Foley (see Chapter 1) and proved even more outrageous than the first. This time around, however, Muslims had prepared a counter campaign. Fighting Bigotry With Delightful Posters was a crowd funded effort organized by two Muslim comedians, Dean Obaidallah[158] and Negin Farsad. The duo produced a series of subway ads that normalized Muslims and deliberately took up as much physical space as did Geller's hate messages. One of the posters read, "Those terrorists are all Muslims," with the word "Muslims" crossed out in red and replaced with the phrase "Nutjobs (more accurate)." Another proclaimed, "Muslims hate terrorism!" followed by a long list of things they "also hate," including, "That one lady who has to dig through her huge bag to find her Metro Card," "When the deli guy doesn't put enough schmear on the bagel," and "Straphangers who read text messages over your shoulder," among others. These ads used cultural references specific to the city in order to position Muslims as everyday, subway riding, bagel-loving New Yorkers.

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[157] For example, 57th Street and 5th Avenue (a major commercial/retail hub), 23rd Street, 42nd Street (near Times Square as well as Grand Central Station), and 34th Street (near Herald Square).
[158] Obaidallah was one of the leading organizers of the Big Brown Comedy Hour mentioned earlier in the chapter, and produced a comedic documentary, *The Muslims are Coming!* (2013), with Farsad.

Fig. 15: One of the "Muslims are Coming!" posters.

Another Islamophobic subway ad, though subtler than ADFI's campaign, was for the popular television series, *Homeland,* a political thriller about the War on Terror. It depicted the protagonist—a white, American woman in Pakistan—in a bright, red cloak against a black background. I first saw the poster at a train station on Manhattan's East 77th Street, a few blocks from my home. While the poster instantly caught my attention, it was only upon closer inspection that I realized the black background was actually a sea of Muslim women in black burqas. They were not depicted as people, but as props signaling a dark and oppressive "Muslim World" setting. Against them, the main character stood as Little Red Riding Hood, a childlike figure with porcelain skin and wide, blue eyes, cautiously looking over her shoulder

for imminent danger. The ad did not go unnoticed and invited considerable criticism from a

range of social commentators.[159]

ADFI's anti-Muslim missives and *Homeland's* orientalist depictions were not the only

reminders of 9/11 in the city's transit system. Train cars frequently displayed bilingual signs

encouraging citizens to "see something, say something." Coupled with this message (which

has by now become common sense and hardly needs saying) was the sight of heavily armed

NYPD agents throughout the subway system. Heightened police presence and random

searches in the subway dated back to 2005, when New York City implemented the security

measure in response to the London bombings of the same year. As Adrian Parr (2008) notes,

9/11's trauma has been put in service of spatial striation[160], which preceded the attacks but has

since been exacerbated. In other words, 9/11 is used to organize city space around an

emphasis on security and risk management. A decade on, New York's subway policing

existed in a self-affirming fashion, in which the sight of officers and counterterrorism agents

perpetuated the perception of insecurity and a need for even more policing.

Brian Massumi (2010) has described this condition perfectly, noting that threat has no

objective credibility and cannot be legitimated through traditional ways because of its open-

ended nature; it always lies in future. "We can never be done with it," he states, for there is

[159] See, for example, Laura Durkay's article, "'Homeland' is the most bigoted show on television" in the October 2, 2014 issue of the *Washington Post* or Heba Amin's blog at hebaamin.com. Amin is one of the artists recruited by the show's producers to "lend graffiti authenticity" to its set depicting a Syrian refugee camp. Of it, she says, "Given the series' reputation we were not easily convinced, until we considered what a moment of intervention could relay about our own and many others' political discontent with the series. It was our moment to make our point by subverting the message using the show itself." Amin and her colleagues provided Arabic graffiti for the show, which, unbeknownst to the producers, translated to messages such as, "Homeland is racist," "This show does not represent the views of the artists," and "#BlackLivesMatter."

[160] Striated spaces, such as those controlled by the state, are designed to control movement through barriers and enclosures (while smooth spaces are freer flowing, heterogeneous). A grid is emblematic of striated space and post-9/11, the urban grid increasingly includes security structures: drone surveillance, police barriers, security cameras and other modes (even the "see something, say something" sensibility, which puts citizens in the state's service) that permit certain types of movements and actions, while prohibiting others. For more on smooth and striated spaces, see Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980).

"always nagging potential of the next after it being even worse and of a still worse next again after that. The uncertainty of potential next is never consumed in any given event" (2010, 53). Because the logic is that anything could happen, reactions to anything that could happen are always justified. It was in the name of such vigilance that the NYPD's Demographics Unit infiltrated Muslim religious and cultural places throughout the city, influencing the way many Muslim New Yorkers felt, behaved and interacted there. For these individuals, the threat felt viscerally was not one of national security but of the government's power to affect their lives.

Policed Places

Anxieties were high following the 2011 Associated Press exposé of the NYPD's secret surveillance of Muslim places. With hundreds of mosques, restaurants and other cultural centers caught in the police's web, local Muslims developed heightened awareness of being under the watchful eye of law enforcement. Sameera (the Arab activist who was introduced in the Chapter 1, and whose father was incarcerated) reported learning about a bug[161] being found in her university's Muslim Student Association, and shared how shaken she felt by the news; she no longer felt at ease in there and it inhibited her from bonding with "her community" as she normally did. The NYPD surveillance project was so widespread that it was highly likely that most anybody who visited a Muslim communal space, particularly a religious one, was likely to have been surveilled.

This created an atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust among Muslims who reacted in several ways, and often consciously or unconsciously altered their habits to distance themselves from suspicion. Among the Muslim New Yorkers I met, one reaction was resignation and acceptance of law enforcement. This was coupled with the consolation that it

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[161] Minuscule listening device planted by police.

was unlikely that their lives would be directly affected by it, since they were innocent and

"had nothing to hide," so to speak. They regarded it all as a tide that would eventually turn on

its own. This reasoning was more common among older generations I met in mosques. For

instance, a middle-aged, Pakistani woman I met at a midtown Manhattan mosque attributed

the surveillance to a divine test or the will of God—a phase that Muslims had to patiently wait

out, and "God willing," would "get better eventually." NYPD spying did not affect her

participation at the mosque, she told me. She simply came, worshipped, and left, just as she

had for years. Unlike train stations or other places where cameras or police presence were

obvious, there was no observable difference in her mosque. The surveillance was out of sight,

out of mind.

A second reaction, much more common among younger, politically active Muslims I

met who were in their twenties to forties, was to be extremely critical of surveillance. Their

recriminations were often framed in the language of civil rights (see Chapter 1 for a

discussion of CAIR and CUNY CLEAR's work). This was the course Sameera took in

speaking about her father's imprisonment, surveillance at her university, and other ways in

which the legal system marginalized "our community" (Chapter 1). Finally, some of the

people I met displayed self-consciousness and insecurity, which often limited what they said

and how they said it, and held them captive to fears of persecution or prosecution.[162]

For example, in 2012, a Muslim comedian I met inside Park51 cautiously whispered to

me a self-deprecating joke involving *jihadis*. He immediately followed up by explaining that

he had to whisper the joke because, "We all know that if there's any place they've bugged,

it's this place, right?" "They" referred to the NYPD, of course. Although the two of us were

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[162] For more about this and other effects of policing on Muslim New Yorkers, see the ACLU's report entitled, "The NYPD's Discriminatory Surveillance of Muslim Communities" at https://www.aclu.org/other/factsheet-nypd-muslim-surveillance-program.

alone, he was nevertheless compelled to deliver the joke in a whisper, for he was aware that Muslim spaces were under the watchful eye of law enforcement. His follow-up statement about the NYPD was meant to clarify - not to me but to the panoptic agents themselves - that telling the joke inside Park51 (likely a closely monitored Muslim place in the city, given its politicized position) was proof that he had nothing to hide and was not a security threat. Park51's image of being an obvious police target informed this individual's conduct, elucidating the relationship between his sense of place and his sense of self. Although he stood in a mosque, which is supposed to be experienced as a house of God, a haven, a refuge, he was not at ease. This is similar to Iqbal (Chapter 4), whose awareness of himself as a dark-skinned, Muslim man, led him to reduce his voice to a whisper when speaking of 9/11 at the World Trade Center memorial.

More than a decade after the attacks, one did not need to recall them directly to feel affected by them. Racial profiling and policing were legacies that had left an indelible mark on Muslim New Yorkers. The NYPD's project continued unabated, justified by fears of Islamic fundamentalism and the supposed security threat posed by Muslims. Wariness continued to punctuate life in mosques and social spaces, even as many Muslims, such as the Pakistani woman mentioned above, acquiesced to the situation. Among those who felt affected, some mobilized and organized against surveillance and other forms of Islamophobia (Chapter 1). Meanwhile, others produced religious places that challenged Islamic extremism through liberal theologies and practices, and furthered moderate and progressive public images.

Spatializing Moderation through Women's Inclusion

"Shoot a Muslim. Shoot all Muslims. Muslims go home." This was the message that someone had hastily penciled in large letters over Park51's door in 2014. It seemed a well-meaning individual had tried to erase the words, but succeeded only in smudging and dulling them somewhat. What struck me more than this bold illustration of bigotry was everybody's apathy toward it. It alarmed no one, not even me. A Park51 intern and friend of mine laughed it off. "That's just ignorance. Let them be ignorant," she said, dismissing it with a wave of her hand and an eye roll. The incident was met with a shrug by almost all the worshippers who saw it, as if having Muslim places—especially Park51—vandalized by Islamophobes was simply expected.

From its inception, Park51 actively worked to project a moderate image. This representation was built on the explicit anti-extremist stances established by Sharif El-Gamal, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf and Daisy Khan (Chapter 3), and also through Friday sermons, which took an "essence of faith" approach (Chapter 2). It also did so by offering women a place to pray alongside men, with the ability to see the imam and hear the sermons firsthand, rather than in a completely separate room through a PA system, as was the case in many other mosques. In addition to Park51, several Muslim groups around New York City created religious places that complicated orientalist views of Muslims, particularly, as I will show, through LGBT and women's inclusion and values of gender egalitarianism.

My fieldwork showed that concepts of "moderate" and "progressive" Muslim were not just discursive but spatialized and embodied. This happened through the production of religious places in which worship and other faith-based activities cultivated and demonstrated certain liberal ideals and values. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, LGBT inclusion and gender

egalitarianism were key categories by which liberalism was gauged. MPV's tagline, "Allah Loves Us All" was intended to specifically highlight LGBT inclusion.[163] Along these lines, MPV-NY sought to create a religious center that was not just theoretically inclusive of interfaith allies and LGBT Muslims, but also in practice, partly through the group's location in a predominantly LGBT Christian church. A large rainbow flag flew above the church entrance, and the pastor with whom the chapter worked was an openly gay man who supported MPV-NY's mission to be more inclusive of LGBT individuals. MPV-NY was only one of two Muslim religious spaces I found in the city that vocally supported gay Muslims and took a clear stance against homophobia.[164]

Gender egalitarianism and women's inclusion in religious spaces was another central issue that concerned MPV-NY. An important conversation about women's inclusion in American mosques is the *Side Entrance* project, started by activist Hind Makki. The name "*Side Entrance"* refers to the side doors through which Muslim women must enter in many houses of worship, and the project is a Tumblr blog and Facebook page that showcase reader-submitted photos of women's mosque spaces. These places, compared to men's, can be worse in substantial ways: dingy, dark, smelly, moldy, or just extremely small and crowded. Often, women are restricted to basements and secondary rooms within a mosque while men utilize the actual prayer rooms. The entrances through which women gain access are often not main doors, but located in poorly lit areas of the compound.

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[163] Sarah, a young, Afghani-American, queer woman from Brooklyn (briefly mentioned in Chapter 2), was a semi-regular attendee at MPV-NY meetings. She expressed to me her suspicion that MPV, despite the best intentions of its members, was "pinkwashing" (i.e., using queer friendliness as a strategy to gain recognition or popularity). While most others, including myself, saw MPV as doing the crucial work of bringing LGBT issues to the fore in theological conversations, Sarah remained skeptical.

[164] The other was the New York City Progressive Muslims Meetup Group, although the ICNYU's Khalid Latif did, in passing, denounce bigotry against sexual minorities

Makki began her blog with the hope that the more people saw women's spaces through women's eyes, the more likely the situation was to improve. Lesser spaces for women are representative of a larger patriarchal standard in which women have secondary roles in mosque administration or are unable to fully participate in their faith. Of course, there are also mosques in which the women's sections are just as suitable as men's. However, the practice of gender separation, even when such prayer areas were provided for women, regularized male dominance. They were designed with particular assumptions in mind, such as: that women should always care for children in the mosque, even if it distracted from their worship; that within a mosque, female presence among men was taboo; and that in order to preserve the men's religious experience and not distract them, it was acceptable for women to be denied direct proximity to the imam. Patriarchal stances such as these defined conservative Muslim orientations. While Makki used her blog to call attention to the matter, Muslim groups in New York were shaping prayer spaces to be less conservative and more accepting of women. For instance, in addition to using the church as a meeting place in which ideas about LGBT acceptance (among other things) were discussed, MPV-NY members practiced what they preached about gender egalitarianism by using it as a mixed gender, female led prayer space.

Following the example of Amina Wadud (discussed in Chapter 2), female led prayer was extremely important to Ani Zonneveld,[165] MPV's founder. During a visit to the group's New York City Chapter, Zonneveld ended a monthly meeting with a prayer service in which

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[165] At the 2011 MPV retreat held in Manhattan, Zonneveld asked one of the speakers, Daisy Khan [a Park51 planner mentioned in Chapter 3, and the founder of Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE), which is discussed by Lila Abu-Lughod in her book, *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?*], about the importance of female led prayer. Khan's response was not what Zonneveld anticipated: that while it was important to include Muslim women in all religious roles, "our community" had many problems that were a far greater priority for women, such as domestic violence.

she assumed the role of the *muezzin*[166]. She invited *Al Jazeera America* journalists to film the event. We filed into a small room in the church's back corner and laid bed sheets out on the dark, wood floors.[167] Breaking away from the gender barriers of most mosques, here, men and women in the group stood shoulder to shoulder and settled in for worship; the men crossed their arms at their waists and the women at their chests.[168] Zonneveld then recited the call to prayer. *"Allahu Akbar,"* she announced, a cue to begin worship.

Azim, who was an advocate of female led prayer and a fan of Amina Wadud's work, had long criticized MPV's neo-orientalist paradigm, and had doubts about Zonneveld for what seemed like her self-centered[169] desire to be regarded as a trailblazing social justice warrior, rather than to pursue community-centered aspirations to pave better, more inclusive paths for her fellow Muslims. He said the entire prayer service felt forced, overly performative and was distracting. For him, the Al Jazeera cameras magnified the feeling that this communal act of humble worship was little more than a production with Zonneveld quite literally front and center. Though I recognized the merits of publicizing and normalizing female leadership among Muslims, I felt similarly about Zonneveld's disposition. With each of her laboured Arabic pronunciations[170], my concentration on prayer dwindled and my eyes wandered to look at other worshippers, some of whom seemed fidgety, wiggling their toes, trying to conceal themselves from the cameras, or otherwise lacking focus. Eventually, her voice was reduced to a muffle in the back of my mind. In the foreground were realizations about the feigned nature of the prayer service, and the irony of Zonneveld affecting her Arabic after

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[166] The person appointed to recite the call to prayer in a mosque.

[167] These sheets acted as large prayer rugs, which are normally placed between the ground and the worshipper so that prostrations to God are done on a clean surface.

[168] These are standard, gendered prayer postures among Sunni Muslims.

[169] I met several Muslim activists and academics who shared Azim's impression of Zonneveld.

[170] Zonneveld is of Malaysian background and is not a native Arabic speaker. Her artificial Arabic accent is awkward, as is the case with South Asian and other non-Arab Muslim leaders who unsuccessfully accent their prayers in an attempt at proper form, which presumably helps assert their religious authority.

having castigated Muslims for allowing too much Arab influence in their practices (which she viewed as cultural baggage that necessarily inhibited the practice of progressive Islam), and after having insisted that it was "time for an American Islam"[171], which emphasized speaking in English over Arabic.[172]

Following prayers, the event became even more awkward, as Zonneveld began distributing leaflets to everyone. In her endeavor towards an "American Islam," she had penned Islamic hymns, which were English language praise songs modeled after those of American church choirs. Using the handouts, we were to repeat after her and perform the songs in front of the cameras. "Aw, hell no," Azim whispered under a nervous laugh. With the cameras still focused on our group, we huddled behind others so that our lack of participation would go unnoticed. A half-hearted chorus proceeded to repeat after Zonneveld, not always seeing the melodies through to completion. Finally, the event ended. We filed out of the room and down the church stairs toward dinner, as was the norm after monthly meetings.

Criticisms of Zonneveld aside, MPV-NY's mixed gender and female led prayer flew in the face of patriarchal norms within Muslim communities, as well as orientalist tropes of the oppressed Muslim woman, which are justified by such norms. The group went beyond favouring egalitarianism and inclusion as an abstract principle, and actually practiced it.

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[171] "It's time for an American Islam" was the title of an article by Zonneveld, which writer Michael Muhammad Knight criticized for being xenophobic in its Eurocentric perception of what counts as "American." It cemented Zonneveld's reputation as an orientalist among some of her peers. The article's title alone was troubling in its assumption that the many, vibrant forms of Islam that existed for generations in the United States—in African American mosques, for example—were not American. It has since been taken offline.

[172] Neither Zonneveld nor progressive Muslims are unique in their desire to have religious services performed in English, much like their Catholic and Jewish predecessors who shifted from Latin and Hebrew. Muslims around the country, particularly second-generation immigrants, have debated how much English is acceptable in mosques. The discussion usually centers on Friday sermons and the language in which they should be delivered, since the majority of American Muslims do not understand Arabic. However, prayer rituals conducted in Arabic are accepted with much less resistance (in fact, I know that every South Asian youth at MPV-NY prayed in Arabic out of habit).

Members of the New York City Progressive Muslims Meetup similarly embodied

values of gender inclusion. They, too, departed from the norm of gender separation, in which

women often pray behind men or were assigned a different room entirely.[173] At Meetup

meetings, gender egalitarianism was demonstrated not by men and women praying shoulder

to shoulder in a mixed gender crowd as they did at MPV-NY, but in side-by-side groups.

These events took place in the same Midtown building that Sameer used for his Quran

discussions (Chapter 2). Following a Ramadan dinner I attended in 2014, our party of

approximately thirty individuals filed into a back room of the building and covered the floor

with bed sheets and prayer rugs. We were instructed to arrange ourselves with men standing

on one side of the room and women on another, creating a foot-wide aisle between our

groups.

In order to emphasize fellowship that transcends race and class boundaries, Islamic

prayers require close physical proximity and touching. People stand extremely close to one

another, usually shoulder-to-shoulder, and often draw each other close by the hand or arm

before prayers begin. The Meetup group's organizers wanted to demonstrate gender

egalitarianism during prayers, but without pressuring any attendees into a situation that might

be culturally unfamiliar to them, or otherwise become a source of discomfort or anxiety. "I

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[173] It was common for Muslim women to accept and even prefer separation from men during prayer. The efforts of Progressive Muslims had not gone very far in tearing down the (quite literal) wall between men and women in many mosques, in part due to Muslim women's acceptance of the status quo. For instance, an MPV member who organized an annual LGBT retreat told me that he was surprised when lesbian women attending the retreat were "very uncomfortable" praying alongside their gay peers, and preferred a prayer space of their own. Because gender separation is based in the presumption of sexual attraction between the sexes, and because it is inherently patriarchal, he did not understand their positions.

understand that women don't want to have their butts looked at by men,"[174] explained one of the evening's organizers, a woman in her late twenties. She elaborated:

> We aren't going to force people to stand touching anybody, or in any way they don't want to, but we aren't going to put women behind men either because women get squeezed out that way. If there's not enough room [after the men fill up starting from the front], women are just expected not to pray. Also, some women don't want to be in the back of the room. They want to be closer to the imam or muezzin. So it's a compromise.

At the Islamic Center of New York University, too, the prayer room was organized to depart from patriarchal norms of gender separation. Located in Greenwich Village, in a building alongside the university's Catholic center, the ICNYU prayer room was a large, empty space overlooking Washington Square Park. Following the design of most mosques, the floor was completely bare to provide seating. The largest objects in the room were a small podium, which usually went unused as most speakers preferred sitting on the floor alongside worshippers, and a tri-fold room divider, which usually rested folded up against a wall. The divider served as a customizable gender barrier. Those who wished to separate themselves could sit behind it, while the vast majority of women and men did not use it. It was also utilized to make more space for women. In many mosques, women were restricted to smaller, lesser spaces than men. Gender divisions were often made concrete by walls, permanently limiting the number of women that could be accommodated.

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[174] Her assumption was that women would be self conscious when bending over to prostrate in front of men, which three female attendees I spoke to said was true for them (while two others said that they were not at all concerned about this).

On the ICNYU's busiest days, women moved the divider to expand space for themselves as needed, forcing men to make room for them no matter how crowded the room. The men, who were mostly comprised of youth in their twenties, obliged, scooting en masse to concentrate themselves closer to one another, sometimes moving into the margins by the door. Expecting that women could make do with less room would go against the prevailing sensibility cultivated by Khalid Latif, which obligated his male followers to treat their "sisters" with the same respect and consideration they would want for themselves. In a widely shared Facebook post,[175] Latif spelled out the need to reflect positive Islamic values through women's inclusion. He said,

> Someone asked me recently how Muslims can combat Islamophobia on a local
> level. I told them that looking at how their mosques treat Muslim women
> would be a good start.
> A big criticism that people have around Islam is the treatment of women…
> People see and make note of things like prayer areas and spaces, or the lack
> thereof, for women. They can tell where there is no female leadership or
> advisement present in the construction of community, events, services,
> programs and space… All of those things make a big difference when someone
> is trying to understand how things like honor killings, domestic violence,
> sexual assault and forced marriage relate to Islam.
> I've been to mosques with my wife where she enters from dark alleyways
> through doors that are surrounded by garbage bags while I'm ushered through a
> well-lit door into a large open prayer space… We have to live our Islam and
> the values that we claim Islam teaches… It's clear to see that those

[175] Posted on Khalid Latif's Facebook page on January 9, 2017.

communities on a local level that thrive in terms of diverse voices speaking out

against Islamophobia usually are communities that women are treated well and

acknowledged as a vital part of overall growth. But Islamophobes and bigots

will continue to leverage our mistreatment of women to influence the minds of

many… we can stop doing the things that they use against us so that they no

longer have anything to say.

Another mosque that conspicuously lacked gender partitions was the Moslem Mosque

Inc. in Brooklyn, the oldest standing mosque in New York.[176] Instead, a folded, three-panel

divider stood to one side of the large prayer room as an option for female worshippers who

preferred separation. Now, only one elder from the mosque's founding family chose to sit

behind it. The adjustable gender barrier was symbolic of the flexible religious paradigm

cultivated by the family, which both recognized orthodox aspects of Islamic tradition and

allowed for generational modifications in devotion and religious practice. For instance, when

I attended an Eid Al-Adha prayer service with the family, women stood behind men, but their

level of cover varied generationally: the oldest member covered all of her hair in a

conventional manner, the middle generation wore loose scarves and even hats, and the

millennial generation did not cover hair at all.

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[176] In 1907, Russian and Baltic-region Tatar immigrants in Brooklyn's Williamsburg area acquired a public hall, which was once used by the Democratic Club of the Thirteenth Assembly District. There, they founded the American Mohammedan Society in 1907, which established the Moslem Mosque Inc. two decades later, in 1927. Today, Moslem Mosque Inc. continues to stand on a quiet, working class neighborhood characterized by old trees and post-war houses, and serves as a monument to the city's longstanding Muslim history. For more about this, see the article "New York City's 'First' Mosque" (2016) in Anthropology News.

Fig. 16: Inside the Moslem Mosque, Inc. The folding barrier is on the left.

The mosques mentioned so far contrasted with many others in the city, including the iconic Islamic Cultural Center of New York. The Center was a beautiful place; one had to pass through large, well-manicured lawns to enter it. Inside, men prayed under a large chandelier that encompassed the concave underside of the mosque's dome. A balcony, which served as the women's section, overlooked the main area. It offered a vantage point from which women could see the imam and male congregation without being seen. The mosque seemed to be designed for acoustic (and affective) resonance. When I attended *Taraweeh*[177] prayers there, the collective uttering of "*ameen*"[178] took on a musical texture, and the rumble of a thousand bodies going into prostration was felt physically. Yet, the mosque's captivating

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[177] The Taraweeh are additional nightly prayers performed by Muslims during the month of Ramadan.
[178] Equivalent to "Amen."

design did little to quell concerns about its conservative orientation. Najma, a Pakistani woman in her 50s, who I met through the Meetup group, told me that the Islamic Cultural Center of New York "turned her off," adding that if the mosque's leadership did not like the liberal values of American society, "Why the hell did you come here [to the US]?"

The Center, colloquially known as "96th Street" for its location on Manhattan's 96th Street and 3rd Avenue, was a conservative mosque and its orientation was clear in the patriarchal way it organized its space. Women entered through a separate door and if they didn't, they were often directed to the side entrance by male worshippers, who themselves used the front entrance. I attended *taraweeh* at 96th Street in 2014 with two female friends who expected that the crowded service would have them packed like sardines in the narrow balcony above. Anticipating a thick crowd throughout the mosque, they decided to play dumb and move fast to camouflage their entry into the spacious men's section, where they planned to pray behind the men. We were immediately intercepted by watchful men, who directed us to the crowded balcony above.

Masjid at-Taqwa in Bed Stuy was similar in how its conservative orientation was cultivated and performed through patriarchal norms, including gender separation. Men and women congregated in separate rooms, and entered the mosque through separate doors. Men who delivered sermons and other talks to male supplicants sitting in the men's section, while women sat in the women's section, watching via CCTV. This strict partition reflected the beliefs of at-Taqwa's leader, Imam Siraj Wahhaj, for whom gender segregation was part of proper religious practice. For instance, upon finding my then-fiancé waiting for me outside the mosque one day, the Imam took him inside the men's section, confirmed his intentions to

marry me, then came out to instruct me not to hug or touch my partner until we were married in an Islamic ceremony (*nikah*).[179]

It is crucial to note that while gender separation may be one of the characteristics of conservative Muslim spaces, this in no way rules the Islamic Cultural Center or Masjid at-Taqwa out of the moderate Muslim category. Insofar as a moderate characterization is defined by nonviolence and the denunciation of violent extremism, both mosques (among many other conservative ones throughout the city), met the criteria. Both were involved in campaigns that sought to build bridges between Muslims and non-Muslims. In addition, pertaining to Muslim women's issues, Imam Siraj Wahhaj spoke about domestic violence among African Americans and Muslims. He used a booming tone reminiscent of the Black Christian tradition[180] to lambast any abusive men in his congregation. This was indeed an unconventional topic for an imam to address on Friday service, and was met with many an "uh huh!" by the female congregants who heard it over CCTV.

While Imam Siraj Wahhaj showed definitive regard for women, the ICNYU and so-called progressive groups concerned themselves with dismantling patriarchal understandings of Islam, which only buttressed stereotypes of Muslims as oppressive men and oppressed women. Groups such as MPV-NY and the New York City Progressive Muslims Meetup worked toward gender egalitarianism not only by deploying associated, liberal rhetoric, but by shaping physical spaces that reflected those values and included women. This was one of the

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[179] I felt conflicted during the exchange. On one hand, I felt condescended to. On the other, the Imam's beaming face and his sincere desire to guide me conveyed only love. Such is the nature of religious patriarchy, where men's charge over women is often framed as an expression of duty and care on their parts.

[180] Like many African American Muslims, Imam Siraj Wahhaj came from a Christian background. Before joining the Nation of Islam, he attended church consistently and worked as a Sunday school teacher in a Baptist Church. Several African American imams I heard during my fieldwork channeled the affective tones of the Black church, which was sometimes lost on non-black Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, a sociologist and new arrival from Germany, doing fieldwork at Masjid at-Taqwa, asked me, "Why does he [the imam] yell so much? It's a little bit scary."

features that set them apart from conservative Muslims, and added to the diversity of persuasions within New York's Muslim community.

Conclusion

Muslims navigated New York City spaces through their affective responses as places of comfort, ease, belonging or risk were all emotionally detectable. Everyday places became coloured by feelings of stigmatization. Beneath the streets, fears of falling victim to subway pushers translated into the bodily act of vigilance and standing far from the platform edge. In subway ads, the AFDI's emotive representations of Muslims expressed ideas about perceived danger and difference, and added to feelings of apprehension. Above ground, too, legacies of the 9/11 attacks affected Muslims' feelings and behaviours, as some lived with a hyperawareness of NYPD surveillance in their mosques and community hubs.

Certain Muslim neighbourhoods provided respite and were experienced as sites of belonging. Additionally, mosques and other religious places were consciously shaped to emphasize acceptance of, and inclusion for, all. These were places of pride, for they broke from norms that were difficult to work against. Through egalitarian religious practices, not only did they thwart patriarchal and heteronormative standards within Muslim communities, but also Islamophobic generalizations that continually essentialized Muslims as misogynistic and homophobic.

Final Thoughts

Food. Ice Cream.
CB Fry. Pop   5.99 11-4
Muslims Get Out
Open All Year M-Sat
                        --Fast food restaurant marquee in Lonsdale, MN.

In September 2016, Dan Ruedinger, the owner of Treats Family Restaurant in

Minnesota, made headlines with the above marquee demanding that Muslims leave the United

States. He defended his right to free speech, noting, "I've had enough and I'm standing up."

He was careful to clarify that he was not a racist because his words weren't targeting any

particular race but "had to do with a religion of hatred that preaches violence" (Collins 2016).

The evening news reported that Ruedinger was forced to hire additional staff to keep up with

the sudden influx of customers who began patronizing the restaurant to reward him for his

message and for not submitting to "political correctness." On that note, which surely

depressed many Muslims like myself, the newscaster restored enthusiasm in her voice and

moved on to a happier segment. Islamophobia was newsworthy, yet, like many local news

items, it was also made quotidian, normalized, and even tacitly celebrated.

As I have established, orientalist perceptions and representations of Muslims are not

new and have long predated 9/11. Anti-Muslim tropes were exacerbated after the attacks and

mainstreamed with great force and efficiency through a lucrative industry of far right figures,

as well as through media and government. I have discussed the current "state of exception" in

which Muslims live, with policing and surveillance often shaping individual and collective

life. Government policies that tackle religio-political difference through profiling and the

legalization of otherwise illegal forms of control have noticeable ramifications in

multicultural societies such as New York City, where panopticism was decried by some Muslims, passively accepted by others, and always a part of communal atmospheres.

The normalization of Islamophobia is demonstrated by the behaviour of citizens who act upon their anti-Muslim prejudices without apprehension: a man who attacks a Muslim woman on an airplane, or a restaurant owner who feels comfortable—even emboldened—to display his hatred on a marquee intended to advertise soft drinks and ice cream. This has a noticeable effect on the subjectivities of American Muslims. Many who feel its impact strive for acceptance and position themselves using the rhetoric of religious moderation, which is based on a dominant paradigm of assimilation and modernization. Others, such as Azim, resist identifying in such hegemonic terms. In the accounts I collected during my fieldwork, it was clear that regardless of the participants' views on how to best combat Islamophobia, all felt deeply and personally affected by it.

In this dissertation, I have shown how New York Muslims' religious positions, subjectivities, affective senses, and spatial perceptions are shaped by situations of intense stigmatization. In Chapter 1, I explained how Islamophobia is not a mere "fear" of Muslims in the ordinary sense of the word, but an ideological and affective formation that is deployed by those in power and embodied by everyday citizens. In Chapter 2, I showed how dominant notions of "moderate" Islam manifested in the political stances, religious practices and other behaviours of Muslim New Yorkers. Many Muslims I met—such as Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Imam Shamsi Ali, and those who identified as progressive—relied heavily on Islamic hermeneutics, which are in continuous flux today as American Muslims (and, indeed, Muslims globally) try to better understand their faith and face criticisms against it in an informed manner (Cainkar 2009). The Muslims I met sought to counter not only the

interpretations of violent militants who claim to be operating according to Islamic principles, but also conservatives in their own communities who reproduced patriarchal and homophobic norms.

The bulk of this dissertation—three out of five chapters—was concerned with the role that tensions and conflicts play in the production of certain places, and how senses of place influenced the individual and group subjectivities of participants. After all, our bodily activities are shaped by our memories. Our recollections, as well as the perspectives that result from them, are attached to specific places.[181] In other words, there is always a place in which we are situated and from which our views and bodily actions arise. This embodiment means that we occupy spaces from which "we both undergo given experiences and remember them" (Casey 1991, 182). In my research, Ground Zero was an obvious example of a place that haunted Muslims, not only with memories of the attacks but also of the resulting experiences of prejudice and exclusion. I have detailed in Chapters 3 and 4 how, for many Muslim New Yorkers, Ground Zero evoked a feeling of struggle, double consciousness and alienation. Other places in the city, such as the subway and mosques, which have also been major sites for Islamophobia, were navigated through similar emotional maps.

Memories of 9/11 abided in visual cues that inundated the city and hit close to home. For a period of time, I could scarcely go a week without seeing a counterterrorism officer in the checkout line of my neighbourhood drug store. An old, sun-bleached sign hung in the window of a bank across the street: "If you suspect TERRORISM call the NYPD." My Metrocard, too, was inscribed with caution: "If you see an unattended package, don't assume

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[181] As Edward Casey articulates in his book *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study,* "…the lived body puts us in touch with the psychical aspects of remembering and the physical features of place… it can relate at once to the movable bodies that are the primary occupants of place and to the self-moving soul that recollects itself in place… the lived body traces out the arena for the remembered scenes that inhere so steadfastly in particular places" (2000, 189).

it was left by accident." AFDI's hate campaign hung in the subway station a few blocks south

of my home, while *Homeland's* depiction of Muslim women hung in the station a few blocks

north of it. Ironically, as Brian Massumi (2010) has noted, such a threat environment

reproduces a feeling of insecurity, which is the very thing it claims to work against. But the

logic of threat remains convincing because of how it is felt, so viscerally. At the Muslim

Protagonist event (Chapter 1), a young, Hindu man articulated feeling "double victimhood."

First, he experienced the same shock, loss and insecurity that everybody else did as a result of

9/11, but he was also dogged by Islamophobia. Indeed, Azim, Talat Hamdani (who lost her

son in the 9/11 attacks), and many others I interviewed or observed also described feeling

such a two-fold threat: victimized as Americans by Al Qaeda and other extremists, but also as

Muslims by Islamophobes.

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I began this project with little more than my own sense of double victimhood, a gut

feeling about the reality of Islamophobia, and a hunch about how it functions systemically and

affects people. At the time, in 2010, most of my knowledge dealing with my inquiry

amounted to my own experiences of hurt, and anecdotes that I had gathered in passing: stories

of Muslims being racially profiled at the airport, of women in hijab being accosted in public,

of brown men (Muslims and non-Muslims who appeared Muslim) falling victim to violent

hate crimes, or the virulent protests against Park51 and the building of a mosque in

Murfreesboro, Tennessee.[182]

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[182] In 2010, about the same time as the Park51 issue erupted, the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro became the
subject of very similar and highly publicized protests. After the Regional Planning Commission of Rutherford
County approved the construction of the 52,000 square foot center, hundreds of protesters wielding flags and
Christian crosses appeared at the commission's meeting, claiming that Islam was a violent faith, that "everybody
knew" that Muslims were "trying to kill" them, and that they had to "take this country back" (Broden and Davis,
2010).

Regarding the past 6 years of study, I am frequently asked, usually by non-Muslims, "Well, what have you found?" There is an expectation that I must have arrived at a crystal clear conclusion summarizing how American Muslims must feel and why—in essence, a "Muslim mind" interpretation. But there has been no such "aha!" moment. What I have found instead is ambiguity, and lots of it. Generational, ethnic, racial, economic, and other differences translated into dissimilarities, and even polarities, between Muslim New Yorkers. There were paradoxes in the ways individuals interpreted the Quran, often contradicting their own religious claims and practices. There were cultural gaps between collectivities of Muslims that resulted in different worldviews and priorities, intergroup conversations with varying degrees of disagreement about the meaning of the Quran, divergences in opinion about the value of certain religious rituals and embodied expressions of faith, and tensions about assimilation into American culture or about how to address extremism among coreligionists. Of course, there were also many convergences: a seemingly unshakable belief in the core principles of Islam, a fundamental love for their faith, a salience of "Muslim identity", and a general desire to protect American civil liberties, to name a few.

There were also political interactions that brought together Muslims from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. These addressed social ills such as hunger, racism, and of course, Islamophobia. A good example of this was the 2013 CAIR-NY banquet entitled, "Faith in Freedom," in which Imam Siraj Wahhaj delivered the keynote address to a diverse audience comprised of South Asian, Arab, African American, Latino and white Muslims, and among them, first and second generation immigrants. Such involvement was framed in religious terms, as a Quranic injunction to do good and stand up for justice; this civic engagement united Muslim New Yorkers who otherwise hardly interacted with one another,

and generally confined themselves to their respective mosques.[183] These points of convergence among them produced a sense of ummah, fractured as the community was in other ways. Moreover, the second generation's understanding of an American ummah, and of belonging in the US, was built in no small part on appropriating the histories of coreligionists, such as Black and Tatar Muslims, who long preceded them. Meanwhile, the older, first generation immigrants remained largely unconcerned with these pasts.

My research focused largely on "moderate" and self-identified progressive Muslims, the practices of those who identify as such. In addition, I examined the role of place in the construction of these subjectivities. I contributed to the growing body of scholarship on American Muslims not only by showing how their religious orientations are spatialized and embodied, but also by analyzing the spatial dimension of Islamophobia and its capacity to haunt Muslim New Yorkers in particular places. Haunting is the bodily sensation through which Muslims come to understand how they are perceived, how to behave, and how to position themselves religiously and politically.

During the course of my research, there were also some topics I felt were worth examining in depth, but which I could survey only briefly, or not at all, in this dissertation. Here, I would like to mention three as directions for future research.

The first is the impact of social media in the making of moderate and progressive theologies. During my fieldwork, I found that progressive Muslims in particular relied on internet forums to connect with each other globally; to share social ills from their localities and engage in deep, often tense, dialogue about how to approach these issues from an Islamic perspective. For instance, a clip shared on MPV's Facebook page showed a Muslim bride

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[183] In her book, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion and Hip Hop in the United States,* Su'ad Abdul Khabeer provides a pithy discussion of segregation and the "indigenous-immigrant" divide among US Muslims.

sitting uncomfortably on a wedding stage. While remaining poised and behaving modestly (hands folded in her lap and gaze lowered), her body was tense in response to being aggressively hugged and kissed by her husband, who had clearly been a stranger to her until this moment. The video resulted in a thread of conversation that lasted several days, in which group members discussed the problem of forced marriage in some Muslim societies, as well as permissions and prohibitions against such a practice in Islam. Many of the conversations about what it meant to be a progressive Muslim, similar to those I have described in Chapter 2, also took place in online forums.

Chapter 2 also described how Muslims in the United States started Twitter campaigns to address disputed reductive, orientalist representations of their group in public discourse. A deeper discussion is needed about the impact of social media on self-representations and self-perceptions of Muslims, and its role in the continuous (re)formation of the moderate category. A recent example of such social media work occurred in response to Donald Trump's suggestion that Muslim women are voiceless. Specifically, he flippantly remarked that Ghazala Khan, the mother of a slain Muslim soldier, "maybe wasn't allowed to say anything" during the 2016 Democratic National Convention in which she quietly appeared on stage alongside her husband. Hearing this, Muslim women shared their many accomplishments, and opinions of Trump, with the hashtag #CanYouHearUsNow.

Another issue came to my attention after attending monthly vigils outside the Metropolitan Correctional Center, the federal detention facility in Manhattan. The vigils, as mentioned in Chapter 1, were organized by the No Separate Justice campaign, and cast light on some key cases involving Muslim men who were imprisoned in relation to the War on Terror. The question that grew out of my observations was how human and civil rights abuses

affected the theologies and religious positions of such prisoners, who are incarcerated in federal units, often in solitary confinement and at length without charge or due process. I intend to make this inquiry the focus of my post-doctoral work.

I became interested in this topic because I was impacted by letters that prisoners had written to the No Separate Justice campaign, in which they described the tribulations of being Muslim in prison, and the solace provided by Islam in prison struck a deep chord with me. One man wrote about Ramadan from a solitary confinement facility, which he referred to as "Gitmo North" for its location in upper midwestern United States. He described the prohibition placed on congregational prayers within the prison, which were seen as having the potential to spread religious influence and lead to Muslim radicalization. He then cynically described the month-long lift on the ban:

> …in Ramadaan, Gitmo North staff have apparently concluded that it is safe to let us pray together. Somehow the radicalization aura which is supposedly emitted from us when we pray together does not work during the Islamic holy month devoted to fasting and worship, so the ban is lifted. It is an amazing blessing which we all take advantage of.

Another prisoner, who described his solitary confinement facility as "unfit even for animals not just humans," described his Ramadan experience in prison using terms of love, misery and appreciation:

…as time gets closer to Iftar, [we]…start preparing the small snack for the

brothers' Iftar. Tomorrow, I will be adding…a special Palestinian sweet called

Kunafa with a special touch of love…The heat has been a major

problem…Sometimes I feel dizzy and have to sit down and cool off…It is very

difficult to pray and have any kind of khusoo' (peace and tranquility) with such

an intense heat. One of the big fans in the unit broke down over three weeks

ago and they still have not fixed it yet…This is a real test in worship. When I

pray…I have two fans pointed at my face and body and I also soak my clothes

with water... This situation is extremely difficult… brings me to remember of

the Prophet Mohammad…They did not have any of these luxuries that we

enjoy now and yet it never affected their worship... I have been in prison for 4

years and this has been the most difficult and trying Ramadan for me…I know

that the reward for worship increases as the difficulty increases, and I ask

Allah to reward all of us for this hardship.

Despite the restrictions placed on their religious practice and the intense heat, all of the

prisoners fasting during the summer of 2014 remained extremely pious, when one might

expect them to just as easily struggle with faith, or abandon it entirely, in such dark and trying

periods.

Hamja Ahsan, whom I met through No Separate Justice as he was fighting for the release

of his brother, Talha Ahsan, had a particularly strong effect on me. Talha was a British citizen

accused by the U.S. of supporting terrorism. For having visited an Islamic news site that was

considered an extremist publication, he was arrested in his home in the U.K. and imprisoned

without charge or trial for 6 years. He was eventually extradited to the U.S., where he had

never before set foot. I met Hamja when he visited the U.S. to appear in a Connecticut court and hear his brother's fate. The judge released Talha based on time served after he entered a plea bargain with the U.S. government. Still, the experience continued to haunt and scar his entire family. Apart from what Hamja shared with me about his brother, it is evident from the poetry Talha wrote while incarcerated that faith played an enormous role in his life as a prisoner.

Finally, it is worth investigating in depth the recent pattern of young American Muslims allying with other minority groups that struggle against state powers. #BlackLivesMatter was a turning point through which relatively privileged, "model minority" South Asian and Arab Muslims began confronting anti-black racism within their religious communities, as well as in wider American society. Racial justice groups such as the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative were formed during this phase. Shows of solidarity are also organized with Native Americans. In New York City, Native individuals spoke against the Israeli occupation of Palestine at rallies, and buses full of young Muslims departed to be with members of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota, in protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Solidarity work such as this is framed as a religious obligation, but it also has the practical benefit of increasing political clout through partnerships with other marginalized groups.

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It is too early to know what the ramifications of Trump's presidency will look like. It will be unclear for some time how Muslims (and, of course, other minorities) can resist or best neutralize the impending threat to their communities. What is clear is that Islamophobia has now been forcefully validated both as government policy and a feeling for citizens to harbour.

The need for further scholarship on American Muslims could not be more pressing, and I

have written this work as a small and humble contribution toward that goal.

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