Religious Debates Doth Not a Community Make

North American Muslim Counterpublics and the Limits of Community

by

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Abstract

In the face of a sustained political rhetoric that constitutes Islam as the proverbial 'other,' Muslim communities face external pressures of geopolitical proportions. Within these communities too, however, a vibrant and sometimes tense internal discourse has shaped the ways Muslims see authority, identity and belonging. This study seeks to elaborate structural tensions in North American Muslim communities and the frameworks informing the creative responses to them. It connects these tensions to a historical shift toward transnational pan-Islamic paradigms borrowed from twentieth-century Islamist movements. Informed by anti-colonial discourses and methodological debates in the anthropology of Islam, this study argues against conflating the notions of 'counterpublic' and 'community.' Through a mixed media comparative case study of two North American Muslim organizations, Ta'leef Collective and the el-Tawhid Juma Circle/Unity Mosque, this thesis employs the model of religious economy to analytically map perceived tensions and their responses. The study concludes by developing a new conceptualization of Muslim community that distinguishes between *intentional communities* and *de facto communities*, demonstrating that a more localized vision of community might better address perceived tensions.

Keywords: de facto community, el-Tawhid Juma Circle, intentional community, mosque community, Muslim community, Muslim counterpublic, religious economy, Ta'leef Collective, Unity Mosque

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Farooq Maseehuddin. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Like One Body: Exploring Structural Tensions in Muslim Communities", No. Pro00059000, August 21, 2015.

Acknowledgements

This project has been a personal marathon through which I have been profoundly distracted. On my way to the finish line, I inexplicably stopped several times and, upon eating many a Twinkie, entirely forgot that I was, in fact, running a marathon. Periodically, a bystander would point to my race bib, which would, in turn, cause me to run erratically before… I stopped again for another Twinkie. This cycle continued until, a group of well-wishers stood around me, pointing me in the direction of the finish line, insisting that I could finish what I had started.

Moved by their unconditional support, I began to slowly jog and then sprint to the end. The marathoners who began with me have long ago crossed the finish line and are now at home resting, but here with me at the end is that group of supporters who, despite my many divergences and false starts, saw within me the possibility to finish.

Over the course of my five years of graduate studies, I have found one myth entirely unwound before me: the myth of the self-made person. It is my pleasure to offer a few words of acknowledgement below, but I wish there were even more prominent ways to demonstrate this. In traditional cultures, a person's given name does not stand on its own; it is followed by the names of his or her ancestors and predecessors. For such a person, a name highlights one's tribe and people, and it affirms that there is a complex network of people in the background supporting and shaping the individual.

If academic conventions were not essential for the presentation of this study, I would officially list all of the people here (and so many more not listed below) as co-authors. Some have offered deep and critical feedback on the work itself, and others may know very little about this study's contents. Nevertheless, I make no exaggeration by saying that without their support, I would have never crossed the finished line:

My supervisor, Dr. Makere Stewart-Harawira, who patiently endured my wayward graduate studies trajectory and whose whole-hearted commitment to meaningful learning facilitated the genesis of this thesis.

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My mother, Azra Sabir, whose boundless affection, gentle care, and generous patronage have sustained me in far more than just my graduate studies.

Finally, my wife and life-partner, Salwa Elladen, whose unwavering encouragement, unconditional love, and willingness to personally sacrifice made this (and countless other) projects possible.

* * *

Throughout the research and writing of this study, my children - Leena, Musa, and Ilyas - were perpetually at the back of my mind. What will community mean to them? In what communities will they find home? For the many hours I spent away from them working on this project, I hope one day they will have the patience to be amongst the few people who actually read this thesis. It is to them that I wish to dedicate this study.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction
Encountering Community **1**
Researcher Location: My Evolving Inquiries 1
Problematizing 'Community' 3
Study Rationale 6
Study Overview 7

Chapter 2 - Literature Review & Historical Context:
Transnational Localities **8**
From Mosque Community to Counterpublic 8
Black Religion, Proto-Islam and Immigrant Islam 16
The Umma and the Jama'a 21

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Frameworks:
Postcolonial Exchange **25**
Anti-Colonial Backdrop 25
Islam as a Discursive Tradition 27
Religious Economies: An Analytical Model 32

Chapter 4 - Methodology:
Approaching a Discursive Tradition **45**
Ontological and Epistemological Stances 48
Research Design 50
Data Analysis 53

Chapter 5 - The Case Studies:
Confluent Tensions **57**
The Founding Narratives 58
Thematic Threads 68

Chapter 6 - Discussion:
Disrupting Functional Monopolies **80**
Religious Impresarios: Inheritors and Disrupters of Tradition 81
Religious Debate Doth Not a Community Make 82
Functional Monopolies 88
Agents of Exchange 98

Chapter 7 - Conclusion:
Toward Concentric Communities **101**
Study Summary 101
Visions for Future Research 102
A Final Thought 103

References **106**

Appendices **114**
Appendix A: Participant Information Letter and Consent Form 114
Appendix B: Participant Information Letter and Consent Form 116

List of Figures

Figure 5.1 - The Outward Push 70
Figure 5.2 - The Inward Embrace 76
Figure 6.1 - Concentric Communities 97

Chapter 1 - Introduction:
Encountering Community

Researcher Location: My Evolving Inquiries

In high school, I was so enthralled with semi-academic critiques of mass schooling that I eventually left brick-and-mortar school, opting instead for online distance learning. Moved at that same time by notions of 'traditional Islamic learning,' I speculated that an educational panacea for Muslims in the West would require the convergence of classical Islamic pedagogy and 'unschooling approaches.' I was unclear on the specifics of the project, but I was certain that I would encounter the necessary details at some point in my research. At the time, my talking points were easy to repeat: education and schooling are not synonymous, mass-schooling in prison-like institutions[1] is the wrong way to approach learning, and the answers we need can be gleaned from the archives of Islamic tradition. When I was pushed for details, I would offer assurances that we could outline the mechanics from classical texts that dealt with Islamic learning, we only needed enough resources and time to make it accessible to the Muslim community. I decided to train as a teacher, in large part, because I assumed accessing the corridors of the schooling-industrial-complex would allow me to critique its structures from within.

It was not until I took a job at an alternative program in the Edmonton Public School Board that I realized the futility of my long-standing research aim. As a teacher and resource developer at Sakinah Circle, I hoped the program would be a fertile space to theorize and implement Islamic educational models in a public institution; however, crafting approaches deemed approvable by all of the program's stakeholders proved virtually impossible.

The Sakinah Challenge

Sakinah Circle's conceptual genesis could be traced to the 1970s, with the emergence of the "Islamization of Knowledge" project proposed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (b. 1931). Al-Attas describes Islamization as a process whereby "knowledge must be scrutinized so that there is nothing that contains the germs of secularization, or the germs of tragedy in it, or the germs of the dualistic vision of reality—because all these spread, are

[1] At this point in my journey, I had not yet read Michel Foucault's invocation of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*.

scattered around in the branches of knowledge, in the entire body of knowledge" (al-Attas 1989, p. 10). Al-Attas' call is for educators to complicate received models of colonial and Western education with reference to traditional Islamic forms of holistic pedagogy that were directed at shaping the human person simpliciter. The Islamization of Knowledge project would eventually lead to the establishment of Islamic institutions of higher learning, including the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) and the International Islamic University of Islamabad (IIUI). Within this broader context, Sakinah Circle is unique in embracing the 'Islamization of Knowledge' project for early childhood education.[2]

Soon after the Muslim Education Foundation published its first book, *Concentric Circles: Nurturing Awe and Wonder in Early Childhood* (2004), administrators who read the book at the Edmonton Public School Board asked what it would mean to initiate an alternative program for the thousands-strong 'Muslim community' in Edmonton. With several existing alternative programs already based in the public school system, offering a program to the 'Muslim community' seemed a logical progression. After three years in a pilot phase, Sakinah Circle was eventually ratified by the Public School Board trustees in March 2010. Five months later, the program began its first day at an elementary school located across the street from a Sunni mosque. Once this recognition was achieved and the space created within the public school system, Sakinah Circle was then faced with the challenge of actually implementing its unique pedagogical vision (of delivering mandated content through the 'Qur'anic worldview') within the constrictions of a regular public elementary school. The day begins with a bell, students are categorized by age into classes, reports cards are considered "sacred" by educational experts,[3] and there remains a state-mandated curriculum that presupposes many things about early childhood development and cognition. Al-Attas' vision assumes a pedagogical latitude that many educational institutions simply do not have, forced as they are to depend on state or other funding.

In retrospect, Sakinah Circle as a project was conceived in a difficult space: it was theoretically developed as a certain kind of Islamization project but situated in a public school system that demanded that it engage the entirety of the local 'Muslim community'. The Muslim community, as understood by the public school board (and reinforced by Muslim constituents), is a single entity, so a single "Islamic" program should be able to meet the needs of the entire community. This logic was extrapolated to assume that if Muslims desired

[2] Memon (2009, p.198) highlights other early childhood educational initiatives attempting to translate the Islamization of Knowledge project into K-12 settings.
[3] Conversation with an Edmonton Public School Board consultant, February 2012.

an "Islamic" program, Sakinah Circle would meet that desire, and so succeed and even multiply.[4]

While working at Sakinah Circle, I was also grappling with my involvement with Muslim community organizations and spaces. On social media and elsewhere, I noticed coreligionists debating authority, gender, the nature of communal spaces, and more. I was invested in all of these debates, but few of them touched on the particularities of my educational research at the time. These converging intellectual, social and religious experiences have led me to the research of this thesis. For years I announced to my friends and family, my teachers and students, that my formal graduate-level research would delve deeply into the theoretical underpinnings of classical Islamic pedagogy and alternative Western educational methods, and then somehow emerge with a commentary of how the two may coalesce. The aim of this thesis, however, is markedly different, and I am sometimes asked why, after twelve years of working with a single academic interest, I chose to change focus.

I respond by insisting that before we can talk about educational reform in the Muslim community, we must first address the notion of the community itself: Where does the community begin and end? Who should be entrusted to lead it? What are our common interests? (Do we even have common interests?) This study marks the convergence of my communal, academic and professional pursuits, so I am very invested in the arguments I describe as well as those that I make. Nevertheless, while this project is deeply personal, it is my hope that it is beneficial to any reader seeking insight into some of the internal tensions about community and structure facing Muslims in North America.

Problematizing 'Community'

In July of 2012, Usama Canon spoke about the notion of community to a group of young Muslim activists in Edmonton. At Ta'leef Collective, where he is Founding Director, he says their approach emerges from clearly defining the community's borders.[5] If we know the bare minimum for membership - the first pillar, the shahāda (testimony of faith), perhaps - then we'll stop excluding those who do not match our idiosyncratic faith practice.

I watch intently as Canon draws circles on the board that are supposed to represent the body of community. He is asking the young Muslim activists to challenge the subconscious

[4] EPSB proposed a second Sakinah Circle site in 2014. The proposal was abandoned due to low community interest and student enrollment.
[5] I discuss Ta'leef's conceptualization of community in Chapter 5.

boundaries they've drawn around them. Perhaps if we ask the question - 'Who is included? - we'll be more consciously inclusive.

One of the activists puts up her hand to problematize the conversation: "Can there be scenarios in which, despite a person's shahāda," she asks, "they just can't be part of the community?"

"Help me understand what you mean," Canon requests.

"People who say very vulgar things about the Prophet, for instance. Like..." The activist pauses and looks inquisitively at the ground, wondering if she should specify further. She chooses to proceed, "like, Michael Muhammad Knight, for example; he's said some pretty hurtful things about the Prophet. I understand the idea of a 'public minimum' in theory, but in practice, with someone like Michael Muhammad Knight, it seems more difficult..."

Canon has been listening intently, nodding as the activist shares her confliction.

"You know, Mike Knight has been to Ta'leef..." he says before briefly sharing the friendly relationship he and Knight have.

As engaged as I was with Canon's conceptual overviews of community membership, his nonchalant disposition to Knight redirected my attention. I did not know of the specific grievances the activist had with him, but I knew enough about Knight to guess. Knight is a well-known convert to Islam with a varied career.[6] In his debut novel, *The Taqwacores*,[7] the characters he writes into the story speak about the Prophet in ways many Muslims would consider deeply offensive. I recall reading Knight's articles in high school, on the upstart progressive Muslim website (now defunct), MuslimWakeUp.com. I was partially fascinated (but otherwise unsettled) by Knight's freewheeling narrative through Muslim communities in which he would eventually self-identify as an "ex-Muslim or pro-heresy Muslim or simply a bad Muslim" (Knight, 2015, p.36).

Knight has been writing about one of Usama Canon's teachers, the popular Muslim public intellectual Hamza Yusuf, from nearly the beginning of his career, writing in terms that range from ambivalent (Knight, 2013) to disparaging (Knight, 2009, p. 154). In his novel *Osama Van Halen* (Soft Skull Press, 2009), he depicts Yusuf "as a shape-shifting *djinn*" (Knight, 2013).[8] On the other hand, Knight takes pride in his association with another

[6] More recently, it has taken an academic turn: he received a Master's in Theological Studies from Harvard University in 2011 and a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2016.
[7] *The Taqwacores* was initially self-published in 2003. It was republished under Soft Skull Press in 2009.
[8] Knight continues, "I met Yusuf a couple of years ago at an academic conference…. Over the years, I've written some harsh things about [Yusuf]…[and] for the things that I've written about him, he would have every right and reason to shun me. But Yusuf showed kindness, and I took a lesson from our encounter." (Knight, 2013)

Muslim public intellectual, Amina Wadud, whom Knight refers to as his "convert hero" (Knight, 2013). For many, Knight and Wadud are situated in the broad 'progressive Muslim' camp, though Knight no longer endorses that label (Knight, 2015, p. 25 - 27). Nevertheless, when Amina Wadud participated in a widely-covered female-led prayer in 2005 at which Knight was present, his fictional depiction of a woman leading prayer years earlier in *The Taqwacores* was cited as an inspiration for the actual event (2015, p. 26). Around the time *The Taqwacores* was published, another figure who will be important for this study, El-Farouk Khaki, organised a 2003 conference for the queer Muslim community he founded. At the conference, Khaki arranged for another female academic, Dr. Ghazala Anwar, to fly in from New Zealand to perform a woman-led prayer (Khaki, 2016). Both Khaki and Knight contributed chapters to a book dedicated to Wadud's work (Ali et al., 2012).

"Come as you are to Islam as it is," is a common refrain at Ta'leef (Canon, 2015), but Michael Muhammad Knight, a self-identified deconstructionist, "no longer believe[s] that 'Islam' exists as a category" (Knight, 2015, p. 211) . Nevertheless, if Knight is nearby, he is sure to visit Ta'leef: "Whenever I am in the San Francisco Bay Area - the planet of Muslim hipsters - I try to visit...the Ta'leef Collective. They create a good experience at Ta'leef, an endearing and inspiring simulation, and I consider Ta'leef head Usama Canon my friend and brother" (2015, p. 338).

Shaping the Research Question

Are El-Farouk Khaki, Usama Canon, Amina Wadud, Michael Muhammad Knight, Hamza Yusuf and the young activist whose question began this section all part of the same Muslim community? What makes a group of people - as disparate as that list - part of a single collective? There are many ways to approach this question - one might consider their ideological or political affiliations, national or ethnic identities or religious genealogies. Alternatively, one might seek to delineate particular 'orthodox' or 'heterodox' interpretations that could define the limits of a community. Rather than approaching the question through any of those determined prisms, however, I have chosen a different point of departure. I begin with the broadest definition possible - namely, the criterion of self-identification. Physical structures are self-contained bodies that can withstand external and internal forces. Sometimes, however, they can encounter a tension with noticeable effects. By investigating the specific causes and effects of a tension, the physical structure's limits and contours are made clear, as are solutions to relieve the pressure. Given how common the phrase 'community building' is invoked in these communities (and others), my research questions

are significantly informed by this metaphor. I thus complicate the criterion of self-identification by inquiring into the community's 'structural' tensions.

Study Rationale

Through qualitative research, this study investigates the internal dynamics that have shaped unique organizational articulations in North American Muslim communities. This imperative is grounded by three research questions:

1. What are the perceived structural tensions in North American Muslim communities?
2. What frameworks inform the responses to these tensions?
3. What implications for the future of Muslim communities accrue from these tensions and responses?

To investigate these questions, I employ a comparative case study of two Muslim organizations currently active in North America. Ta'leef Collective is a US-based nonprofit organization that seeks to "provide the ideal experience for anyone curious to learn about Islam and offer a safe and friendly environment for newcomers and old friends" (Ta'leef Collective, 2017). The el-Tawhid Juma Circle/Unity Mosque[9] is a Canadian-based Muslim organization that is "a gender-equal, LGBTQI2S[10] affirming, mosque, that is welcoming of everyone regardless of sexual orientation, gender, sexual identity, or faith background" (Juma Circle, 2017). As I explain more fully in Chapter 4, these two case studies are important for both their intrinsic value as well their symbolic representation of broader Muslim communities. I approach Islam in North America through the anthropological methods modeled by Talal Asad (1986), framing Islam as "a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present" (p. 14). Asad's framework recognizes the heterogeneity within Islamic tradition, as does the model of religious economy, which I use to further investigate the nature of exchange occurring in the case studies' contexts. Data from the two case studies originates from audio interviews to video vignettes, and from published academic books to blog posts. The model of religious economy was employed to help index and triangulate the array of data to produce a thematic analysis.

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[9] "Unity Mosque" is general moniker used by organizers to describe a number sister-institutions in North America that are "gender-equal, LGBTQI2S affirming" mosques. The el-Tawhid Juma Circle (ETJC) is the local articulation of the Toronto Unity Mosque. I use the Unity Mosque and el-Tawhid Juma Circle interchangeably throughout this study.

[10] LGBTQI2S is a an acronym for people who identitify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, or two-spirited.

Study Overview

In the following chapter, I conduct a literature review by gleaning relevant themes and questions recurring therein. I also explore emerging conceptualizations of the Muslim community within a historical context that connects us to early twentieth century America and the Muslim-majority world. Chapter 3 considers the two overlapping theoretical frameworks - both of which sit within an anti-colonial paradigm - that inform the project's analysis: Talal Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition and the sociological model of religious economy.

In Chapter 4, I explore the nature of this qualitative study by specifying its delimitations and limitations, ontological and epistemological stances, and justifications for the case selection. The findings reported in Chapter 5 offer the founding narratives of both Ta'leef and el-Tawhid. The chapter organizes the data from the case studies around the five apparent themes that emerged after indexing: three tensions (senses of *exclusion*, *cultural dissonance* and *spiritual dislocation*) and two responses. Employing the model of religious economy, in chapter 6 I show how the founder of each organization was at once an inheritor and disruptor of Islamic tradition. I then extend the model to intervene in the current discourse about Muslims in North America by arguing against conflating the notions of community and counterpublic. I conclude by analytically unmapping two 'functional monopolies' stifling Muslim communities: the institutional monopoly of the mosque and the social monopoly of the de facto community. The chapter closes by offering a new conceptualization of concentric communities that, when combined with productive exchange, might relieve persisting tensions.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review & Historical Context: Transnational Localities

Both the structural tensions in Muslim communities and the creative responses to those tensions have been shaped by intricate histories. Literature on Islamic tradition and Muslims in general is plentiful, but there is less sustained work that addresses the set of questions I seek to explore regarding community formation, claims to authority and generative inter- and intra-religious exchanges.

This chapter, divided into three sections, surveys the field by gleaning relevant themes and questions that recur in the literature. It first explores the genealogy of the term *mosque community* vis-à-vis the first purpose-built mosque in North America, the *Moslem Mosque of Highland Park* and the religious 'entrepreneurship' of its first imam, the Ahmadi missionary, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq. Here I consider the impact of post-1965 immigration on Muslim communities, leading to the formation of nationally and transnationally focused "umma institutions" and the emergence of Muslims *counterpublics*. The second section of this chapter historicizes Muslim community dynamics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the conceptualizations of 'Black Religion', 'proto-Islam' and 'Immigrant Islam.' Finally, in the third section, I briefly survey conceptualizations of 'community' and 'community development' and the Islamic notions of *umma* and *jama'a*.

Much of of this chapter is dedicated to two monographs: Sherman A. Jackson's *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford University Press, 2005) and Zareena Grewal's *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (NYU Press, 2013). As complementary commentaries on Muslim life in North America, these texts respond to questions that are most closely linked to my own, and each offers unique sets of arguments regarding authority, identity and knowledge in Muslim communities.

From *Mosque Community* to *Counterpublic*

The Origins of the "Mosque Community" Notion

It is difficult to identify the first exploration of the term "mosque community," as its use throughout the literature does not seem to be the result of a landmark paper or research project. The first attempt to root the notion of a mosque community in social theory seems to be Earl Waugh's opening chapter in *The Muslim Community in North America* (University of

Alberta Press, 1983). This edited volume is an oft-cited reference, perhaps because it is a relatively early attempt to capture the 'Muslim community' as a single analytical category. Waugh seeks to elucidate the historical connection which the notion of "mosque community" in North America has to the Muslim-majority world. To do so, he presupposes the religio-cultural impact of a Muslim immigrant's country of origin on his or her expectations for religious life. "Immigrants from the Middle East, especially from Lebanon, whose ancestors lived under the Ottoman empire," Waugh writes, "had had experience of a society where...a 'parish' system once flourished" (1983, p. 22). The parish system Waugh is referring to is the *millet system*[11] in the Ottoman Empire which allowed religious communities a limited sphere of autonomous jurisdiction, in which they could deploy their own personal and religious laws. Waugh argues that "while no such system per se [exists] in North America," the Muslim community in North America is a re-enactment of millet system because of its "geographic cohesion" and the "religious functionary, the imam" (1983, p. 23). Drawing a contemporary parallel between Muslim communities in North America and church parishes for the same reasons, Waugh then offers the term "mosque community" to denote these forms of Muslim collectives.

There are several issues with Waugh's conceptualization of Muslim communities in North America. First, besides the minority status they each share, it is difficult to see any defensible comparison between the two. The *millet system*, after all, was a specifically state-mandated legal construction instituted for religious minorities, not a form of social organization that grew spontaneously from the collective itself.[12] Second, Waugh's suggestion that there is"geographic cohesion" amongst Muslims is, on the surface inconsistent with the racial, ethnic and economic diversity amongst Muslims. Waugh cites an unpublished local politician as the source for this assertion (1983, p. 32). Finally, the supposed importance of a mosque imam is, at best, a circumstantial detail that bears little consequence on the cohesion of a collective of Muslims. By virtue of the many roles a prayer leader fulfills, including presiding over weddings and funerals, Waugh argues that Muslims connected to a single preforming imam are part of a single 'mosque community.' It's unclear

[11]"The military of Turkey operated a millet system (Arabic: milla, 'religious community'), the chief instrument by means of which the multi-religious empire functioned." (Shah-Kazemi, 2012, p.22)

[12] Saba Mahmood (2012) further complicates comparisons between the Ottoman *millet system* and the modern state's constitutional device of 'minority groups.' She notes that the *millet system* "was different from the liberal model [of pluralism] in that each religious community's autonomy was justified not in terms of groups versus individual rights, but in terms of a political order in which difference was paramount."

how the imam's role in special events - the significance of which is highly contestable - parallels the millet system, but this seems to be Waugh's core argument.

Though Waugh's notion of a mosque community as a form of modern *millet* system is undertheorized, he does touch on an element of early to mid-twentieth century Muslim community dynamics that is less contestable: the centrality of the local. Kambiz GaneaBassiri's *History of Islam in America* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) notes that prior to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 in the United States, Islam in America formed outside the purview of anti-colonial Muslim movements in the colonized and decolonizing world. Throughout North American cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Muslim identity alone was enough to connect coreligionists from disparate sectarian affiliations in ways that were unfathonomable in the Muslim-majority world. This is no more evident than in the case of the first purpose-built mosque in the United States, which stood but a few hundred feet from the iconic Highland Park Ford Plant in Detroit.

North America's First "Mosque Community"

The story of the *Moslem Mosque of Highland Park* is addressed in several recently published and important scholarly texts which, aside from GaneaBassiri's monograph, include Nile Green's *Terrains of Exchange* (Oxford University Press, 2015), Mucahit Bilici's *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam is Becoming an American Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), and Sally Howell's *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (Oxford University Press, 2014). On the one hand, the Highland Park mosque is historically significant simply because it is the first purpose-built mosque in the North America - but it is not just its chronological primacy that makes it such an important case study. Rather, the mosque's leadership is emblematic of the unique colour of Islam in America prior to 1965.

The Highland Park mosque was funded by Syrian/Lebanese[13] real estate investor Muhammad Karoub, who covered the $55,000 needed to establish the mosque in 1921 (GaneaBassiri, 2010, p.188). Karoub, whose younger brother Hussein was a classically trained Sunni imam, had an ambitious vision for Detroit, imagining that it would one day

[13] There are conflicting reports on where the Karoub family originated. Some sources suggest that Muhammad Karoub and his brothers, Hussein and Osman, were immigrants from Damascus, while others refer to them as immigrants from modern-day Lebanon. Sally Howell (2014, p. 257) notes that while Hussein Karoub trained in the Suleimaniyyah Mosque in Damascus under Shaykh Bader Deen, the family is originally from the Marj al Angar village, which is in the Bekka Valley of modern-day Lebanon.

become “the hub of Muslim life and pilgrimage in the United States” (Howell, 2014, p. 52). As the mosque was nearing its inauguration, news came to the Karoubs that a learned Muslim scholar from India had been detained upon entering the United States because of his missionary intentions (2014, p. 49). When he was finally released, the Karoubs invited the missionary, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, to Detroit and held a dinner for him with “the chief of police of Highland Park, the head of the Ford Motor Company’s English School, the head of a local bank, the main Arabic language assistant in the Highland Park Schools, journalists from the English and Arabic press, and Syrian community leaders representing both Muslim and Christian establishment in the city” (2014, p. 49). The Mufti’s missionary ambitions, education and his command of English would eventually propel him into an imam position at the mosque (2014, p. 50). While Karoub’s Levantine and Sadiq’s Indian backgrounds might indicate a unique intersection, it is their divergent sectarian affiliations that is most striking: Sadiq was a prominent Ahmadi, a sect of Islam that holds its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, as the messiah and a prophet. For Sunni Muslims, Ahmadiyya belief is heterodox enough to deem the group out of the normative fold of Islam, which makes Mufti Muhammad Sadiq’s presence as the imam of the first mosque in North America, Sunni-founded no less, that much more unique.

In the model of religious economy (developed further below), as Nile Green (2015) argues, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq was a preeminent religious ‘entrepreneur’. Sadiq was inherently familiar with religiously diverse terrain (India was far more religiously diverse than Europe at the time), the use of print media to disseminate and publicize his polemics, public debates to impress people en masse of his religious persuasion, and his specific “outreach to the urban industrial lower classes” which “was a originally a strategy pioneered by Christian missionaries.” (2014, p. 221). Eventually, Sadiq’s Ahmadi affiliation would confront the Karoub brothers directly and their patronage and support would be removed (Howell, 2014, p. 54). Nevertheless, the Highland Park mosque is an important antecedent to the development of Muslim institutions and communities because it is emblematic of the local and distinct color of Muslim religious activity prior to 1965. Aside from Sadiq, Hussein Karoub was one of the only Muslims in the Detroit area with formal religious training (2014, p. 145), so the local Muslim community allowed for a type of communal convergence that is unfathomable after the influx of Muslim immigrants, post-1965. Moreover, while Sadiq’s efforts as well as those of the entire Highland Park mosque institution had national ambitions (2014, p. 52), its work was predominantly local: Sadiq was open to challenging local religious leaders to debates (Green, 2015, p. 227) and Muhammad Karoub was engaging

local donors and powerbrokers (Howell, 2014, p. 47). The mosque was the religious hub for the nascent Muslim community in Detroit and built for the immigrants who had begun to call the city home (2014, p. 56), so, in a sense, the Highland Park mosque's centrality for Muslims in Detroit affirms Waugh's (1983) notion of the *mosque community*. On the other hand, the mosque's opening occurred well after the establishment of the Detroit Muslim community itself: the institutional inauguration did not launch the Muslim community of Highland Park, it only further cemented it. The sectarian discord that would eventually propel the mosque's closure (Howell, 2014, p. 55) further problematizes the *mosque community* conceptualization.[14]

The *Moslem Mosque of Highland Park* is also emblematic of the specifically local focus of Muslim religious activity pre-1965. The enactment of immigration acts (Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, in the US; and the Immigration Act of 1976, in Canada) would effectively open North America to people from Muslim-majority countries who came at least partially disposed toward the West and westernization, shaped by decolonial milleus. GaneaBassiri (2010) notes:

> Since almost the entire Muslim-majority world had been under direct or indirect colonial rule during much of the first half of the twentieth century, most of the Muslim immigrants who came to the United States after 1965 had already experienced some form of "Westernization" in their own countries. Many were also participants in independence movements at home and had been exposed to leftist nationalist and Third-Worldist ideologies that sought to affix a "native" cultural identity for development countries between western capitalism of the First World and Socialist Communist of the Second Word...as a result of their own experiences with colonialism, most of the post-1965 Muslim immigrants were thus unlikely to willingly change their names, disseminate their religious beliefs, or fogo their cultural practices or identities. (p. 297)

From Local to National and Transnational

New arrivals from Muslim-majority countries would mean a sudden shift in the organizational makeup of existing and soon-to-be formed Muslim institutions. "Soon after their arrival," Ganea Bassiri highlights, "Muslim immigrants began participating in existing mosques and national cultural organizations" (2010, p. 297). These activists, unlike their

[14] An alternative conceptualization of Muslim community is offered in Chapter 6: Discussion, *Functional Monopolies*

predecessors like Muhammad Karoub, were predisposed toward religious activism rooted in modernist Muslim movements: "Muslims involved in building these organizations were generally activists involved in the Islamic revival movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s...they were inspired by a [pan-Islamic organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Jama'at-i Islami] utopian interpretation of Islam." (2010, p. 296). Whether Muslim newcomers were joining existing organizations or forming new ones, their sudden numerical significance had two important shifts in Muslim organizational trajectories.

First, informed by the revivalist movements formed in the emerging anti-colonial milieu of their countries of origin, Muslim organizations would become more ideologically and theologically homogenous - the new arrivals were importers supplanting previously emerging forms of American Islamic religious production with forms vetted by religious power structures in the Muslim homeland. Second, the post-1965 influx of immigrants demarcates Muslim organizational focus shifting away from the local to toward the national and transnational. This is in part due to the pan-Islamic visions of the revivalist and anti-colonial movements from which many of the newcomer activists hailed, but also the emerging need for a national American Muslim identity felt by Muslim World War II veterans (GaneaBassiri, 2010, p. 239). These forces catalyzed the emergence of what Zareena Grewal (2013, p.140) coins "umma institutions," organizations that were ethnically diverse but theologically contained, and whose sphere of concern included Muslims everywhere (the *umma*).

The Muslim Students Association (MSA) first formed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1963, but would quickly grow a national presence, with a network of chapters emerging in universities across the United States and Canada (Grewal, 2013, p. 138). The diversity of the student population and strong sense of community that forms within student groups (not unlike a fraternity or sorority, though less formal) made the MSA an unparalleled "umma institution."[15] Nowhere except perhaps the annual hajj pilgrimage in Mecca were you able to encounter the diversity of Muslims you might see at many MSAs, and that too is an unfair comparison: hajj encounters are brief and infrequent, whereas life in an MSA meant the potential to develop relationships with people of different ethnoracial backgrounds, Muslim affiliation being the only be the other necessary factor. This was most emphatically captured by the prominent twentieth century Muslim academic and activist, Ismail Al-Faruqi (1921 - 1986), who believed the MSA had so impressively formed a

[15] For the duration of my undergraduate career (2004 - 2007) I was an active member of the University of Alberta's Muslim Student Association.

microcosm of the larger *umma* that Al-Faruqi suggested that it afforded him the possibility for his Islamic identity to supersede his ethnic and cultural affiliations: "Until a few months ago, I was a Palestinian, and Arab, and a Muslim. Now I am a Muslim who happens to be an Arab from Palestine" (Ba-Yusuf, 1993, as cited in Grewal, 2013, p. 140). Paradoxically, while the MSA formed a network of local chapters, they "were for the most part autonomous and did not necessarily follow the ideology of many of the national leaders" (GaneaBassiri , 2010 p. 269). Yet, even with their local flavour, MSAs, with their transient and often foreign-born members, would remain a host for the debates and conversations taking place in the broader Muslim community, the Muslim-majority world, and indeed, the entire umma. Other umma institutions would can draw their links back to the MSA, either directly or indirectly: the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) is a direct offshoot that would eventually become the broader umbrella under which the MSA technically sits. The Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), the Muslim American Society (MAS), the Muslim Association of Canada (MAC) all grew from activists who, during their postsecondary careers, were active members of the MSA (Poe, 2012). It is hard to overstate the significance of the MSA and post-'65 immigration on the Muslim organizational context today.

Muslim immigrants were, in some respects, like any other diaspora in North America: they faced the same challenges and opportunities that anyone of their racial or socioeconomic backgrounds faced. Yet, with the particularities of anti-colonial and revivalist movements, tethered to religious authority in the Muslim-majority world, the arrival of post-'65 Muslim immigrants were a disruptive phenomenon to the nascent Muslim communities forming throughout North America. The result was a broadly affiliated network of people connected to each other somehow, but not bounded to any particular territory. If anything, the emergence of the post-'65 Muslim immigrants forever disrupted the notion of geographically cohesive 'mosque communities.' In the ways national Muslim discourse formed, a Sunni Muslim youth in rural Alberta could somehow be connected to a young adult Muslim working in Manhattan. Though the geographic contexts are markedly different, both Muslims are likely engaging in similar forms of identity politics, encountering the same questions (what does it mean to be Muslim and American/Canadian, for instance) and seeking to source the authentication of their religious practice somewhere, either at home or abroad. Uncovering these tensions and debates is one of Grewal's (2013) tasks in *Islam is a Foreign Country.* As an ethnography of Muslim student travellers in the US pursuing religious knowledge and authority through their travel in the Muslim-majority world, Grewal's work

breaks presumptions about geographic cohesion to study transnational debates that connect places as distant as Chicago and Amman, San Francisco and Nouakchott.

The Muslim Counterpublic

"Scholars often over-territorialize Muslim American communities," Grewal argues, "relying far too heavily on demographic variables when dividing Muslim Americans into separate communities, perhaps as a practical concession to their incredible diversity...this "village effect" obscures the fluid and overlapping qualities of Muslim American communities, including their shared investments in distant Islamic places" (2013, p. 50). Interestingly, Grewal uses the term 'mosque community' to refer to her subjects, but her use is markedly different from Waugh's use thirty years earlier: "My use of the term *US mosque community* is not territorial," she notes, "but shorthand for Muslim American counterpublics that are engaged in common religious debates". Grewal builds off Charles Hirschkind's employment of the term in his monograph, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (Columbia University Press, 2006). The notion of a counterpublic, Hirschkind writes, "rests upon a conceptual edifice in which deliberation and discipline, or language and power, are regarded as thoroughly interdependent" (2006, p. 106). Counterpublics aptly describes the broad, heterogenous Muslim collective formed after 1965. Muslims of disparate demographics are connected by little else than their participation in shared debates about Muslim identity, cultural formation, devotional practice, political affiliations, and religious authority. And while the debates are multivocal, layered and sometimes even contentious, "shared debates do not require consensus, only a shared vocabulary" (Grewal, 2013 p. 83). The debate within counterpublics is heightened with the emergence of the internet and social media, further dislodging research away from the local and toward the national and transnational. The case studies in this thesis will factor significantly within the context of these counterpublics. They have not only been *shaped by* the debates, but as I will show in Chapter 5, have been instrumental in *shaping* the debate and the 'shared vocabulary' Grewal refers to. The case studies will also reveal the unintended consequences that result from shifting away from the local community and toward transnational participation in counterpublic discourse.

The notion of Muslim counterpublics helpfully focuses researchers attention on the discursive practices of Muslims instead of their physical location, ethnic origin, or sectarian affiliation. It enacts Talal Asad's insistence that we investigate Islam as a discursive

tradition[16] and allows for the creation of new research paradigms. Grewal (2013) fulfills this task by reframing the ways we think about Muslim engagement of the historical Islamic tradition. Rather than recuperating the familiar dichotomies of traditionalist-reformist, she captures the extensive (at times polarizing) debate about authenticity by offering three paradigmatic orientations toward classical Islamic scholarship in the American context: the *formalist*, the *pragmatist*, and the *reformist*.

> For formalists, the pedagogical form is as important to the transmission of the tradition as the subject material being taught. For pragmatists, their aim is to preserve the core curricular content, but they are open to reforms that are pedagogically efficacious. Reformists see historical Islamic educational systems as in need of serious reforms because they are morally compromised, not just ineffective or outdated as the pragmatists do. (2013, p. 185)

Grewal goes on to situate institutions and personalities recognizable for American Muslim counterpublics her typology. Briefly, a scholar like Nuh Ha Mim Keller is deemed a formalist, both progressive Muslim organizations and Salafi-learning institutions as reformist, and Grewal's own academic mentor, Sherman Jackson, a pragmatist. In Chapter 4, I will explain how this typology is helpful but cannot adequately respond to the questions of this study.

Black Religion, Proto-Islam and Immigrant Islam

The Black Religion of Early Muslim Movements

Sherman A. Jackson's 2005 *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford University Press) is an important work in the field of Islam in America. It provides a critical examination of the encounter between Islam with America, first in the form of early twentieth century racialized movements and then mass migrations from historically Muslim-majority lands. The book's central argument is, in fact, a call to action, for what Jackson calls the "Third Resurrection" - namely, that Blackamerican Muslims become the inheritors, carriers and benefactors of broadly recognized religious authority. This Third Resurrection would follow the earlier "First Resurrection"—the period prior to the death of Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad—and "Second Resurrection"—the period immediately following his death, "under the divided leadership of [Elijah Muhammad's son] Imam W. D. Muhammad and Minister Louis Farrakhan" (2005, p. 6). The

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[16] See Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks, *Islam as a Discursive Tradition*

heralded “Third Resurrection” would emerge from a Blackamerican Muslim mastering of classical Islamic Tradition that would continue its legacy of reconciling “the competing interests of interpretive integrity and intrareligious pluralism” (2005, p. 7):

> to recognize the authority of Sunni Tradition without acquiring competence in it would be to become a tool of one’s own domination. To master it, on the other hand, only to apply it to situations or in ways that reflect the perspective of immigrant or overseas masters would promote the same end. As such, as an ideal, the Third Resurrection refers not simply to the period during which Sunni Tradition gains recognition among Blackamerican Muslims but to the era in which Blackamerican Muslims emerge as self-authenticating subjects rather than dependent objects of and in this tradition. (2005 p. 6)

Islam and the Blackamerican effectively challenged the religious studies tendency to locate research on Islam and Muslim authority strictly in the Muslim-majority world. Because of the significance of Jackson’s monograph, I will sequentially delineate some of his postulations as well as some of the counter arguments that emerged after the book’s publication. Where appropriate, I offer an additional layer of analysis to Jackson’s research by employing the interpretive frame of the model of religious economy.

Jackson examines the historical encounter between Blackamericans and Islam in the United States, arguing that the past, present, and future of this encounter can only be understood in the context of the metanarrative of *Black Religion* whose principle concern, Jackson posits, “is the desire to annihilate or at least subvert white supremacy and anti-black racism” (2005, p. 29). “It might be profitably thought of,” he says, “as the ‘deism’ or ‘natural religion’ of Blackamericans, a spontaneous folk orientation at once grounded in the belief in a supernatural power outside of human history” (2005, p. 32). Grewal (2013, p. 84) notes that Black Religion should not “be mistaken for an umbrella category for all African American religion” and can be identified by its three key features: “the subversion of white supremacy, the revalorization of black origins (roots), and the embodied protest and agitation in the service of black liberation and against oppression in cosmic terms.” To that end, Grewal locates Mufti Muhammad Sadiq and the Ahmadiyya movement as “India’s Black Religion Mission” in the way it revalorized African and Indian roots and challenged white supremacy in word and dress - Sadiq and his followers “walked the streets dressed in robes and turbans, reinforcing Americans’ cliched images of Muslims, the mystical Orient and its grand civilization” (2013, p. 92). Sadiq’s activity in Detroit coincided with another the activity of another significant religious entreprepreneur: Noble Drew Ali (1886 - 1929) and the Moorish

Science Temple of America (MSTA) "combined the language of Islam, Pan-Africanism and the occult into a an appealing synthesis that won many African American converts in the 1920s" (Green, 2015, p. 223).

As Nile Green explores, it seems that Sadiq and Drew Ali were not only connected chronologically as antecedents to Muslim American counterpublics, but were also competing for followers in the Black Religion marketplace (2015, p. 223). The genealogical roots of the Nation of Islam (NOI), the Blackamerican religious and political movements founded in 1930, is commonly connected to the MSTA. That assertion seems indisputable, but as Nile Green suggests, "there is also good reason to suspect that Muhammad Sadiq's appeal to African Americans influenced the conversion of the Nation of Islam founder, Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975), who moved to Detroit in 1923, the same year as The Moslem Sunrise's [Sadiq's publication] outreach to the 'American Negro'" (2015, p. 224). The Ahmadiyya, MSTA, NOI and other forms of early articulations of 'Islamic' Black Religion had beliefs that the predominance of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims would deem fully heterodox - chief among them, belief in new nineteenth and twentieth century Prophets and Messengers of God. It is for this reason that Sherman Jackson (2005) refers to these movements as "proto-Islamic" throughout *Islam and the Blackamerican.*[17]

From Proto-Islam to Immigrant Islam

Packaged within that hyphenated term are several implicit presumptions. Most obvious is that the MSTA and NOI were the first representative bodies of self-identified 'Muslims' in the relatively new nation-state of the United States of America. With regards to the Nation of Islam specifically, Jackson is implying that while it was theologically nascent, its social appropriation of middle-class and genteel American norms might provide a blueprint for Muslim Americans of later generations—and not only Blackamerican Muslims, but also people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds who seek to 'become American' (whatever that might mean) without losing their essential sense of self (Jackson, 2005, p. 68, - 69). For members of the Nation of Islam, this meant that whatever their embrace of genteel norms may have been, the defining characteristic of their modality was protest. This distinguished the proto-Islamic movement from the Black Church, which too adopted middle-

[17] Jackson is not the first to use the term to describe the Moorish Science Temple. Steve A. Johnson uses the term to describe the movement over a decade earlier in his chapter, "The Muslims of Indianapolis" in *Muslim Communities in North America* (SUNY Press, 1994).

class norms, but, as Jackson highlights, did not obviate "its rejection of white America's claim of ownership over it" (2005, p. 158).

There are difficulties in using this term to refer to these early twentieth century movements. Without referring to Jackson directly, Michael Muhammad Knight (2015, p. 347) contends, "...scholars use the condescending term *proto-Islamic* in reference to the Moorish Science Temple and Nation of Islam - which looks to me like a more polite way of saying *pre-Islamic*, which in turn is a nicer way of saying *Jahiliyya*…people who imagine a difference between *Islamic* and *proto-Islamic* are just arbitrarily drawing lines based on their personal tastes." Yet Grewal (2013, p. 95) points out that referring to these groups as "proto-Muslims" is a "scholarly impulse to debunk claims of authenticity" that "reproduce[s] the same normative exclusionary practices" of many Muslims. Instead, Grewal prefers to refer to the MSTA, NOI or the Ahmadiyya as simply *Black Religion* Muslims, all encountering and responding to the hegemony of white supremacy.

However appropriate *proto* is as a prefix to describe these early twentieth century movements, the dynamics on the ground were to soon change post-1965 with the influx of Muslim immigrants and the transition of the NOI toward Sunni Islam under the leadership of the founder's son, W.D. Muhammad. Jackson (2005) captures the confluence of these two phenomena as transition away from Black Religion and a shift in the locus of religious authority. As immigrant Muslims arrived to the United States, Blackamerican Muslims remained primarily objects rather than subjects in the communal intellectual development. The pan-Islamic perspective wielded by Muslim immigrants now leading many local Muslim institutions and most national Muslim organizations coincided with another influx of Sunni Muslims as much of the NOI converted. In Jackson's narrative, this seismic event marks the encounter of a new, Sunni Blackamerican Islam with the even newer "historically informed and culturally specific Immigrant Islam" (2005, p. 4). Jackson coins the term *Immigrant Islam* to describe the 'utopian interpretation of Islam' described by GaneaBassiri (2010) as the dominant paradigm of immigrant Muslims:

> Immigrant Islam embodies the habit of universalizing the particular. It enshrines the historically informed expressions of Islam in the modern Muslim world as the standard of normativeness for Muslims everywhere. In fact, it equates its understanding of Islam itself with a simple, unmediated perception of an undifferentiated ontological reality. On this approach, "true Islam" can only assume one form anywhere it goes. And in this process, Immigrant Islam's interpretations are effectively placed beyond critique via the tacit denial that they are in fact

> interpretations. In short, Immigrant Islam does not interpret; it merely transfers "true" Islam from one location to the next. (Jackson, 2005, p. 12)

A mild but palpable communal tension has built in the years following the publication of *Islam and the Blackamerican*, as (due in no small part to Jackson's work and that of his interlocutors) opponents of Immigrant Islam openly address its hegemony. In the Muslim American counterpublic, this has sometimes been manifested by an outright rejection and open disdainment of all identifiably 'immigrant' modalities. The discourse surrounding the question has for some taken on a dubious tone; they respond, as did one my interlocutors on the matter, that the entire enterprise of 'American Islam' has amounted to a "thinly veiled racist discourse couched in religious rhetoric." Conflating Muslim immigrants and 'Immigrant Islam' to cast American Islam as an inherently racist discourse seems like another problematic manifestation of the Immigrant Islam Jackson calls to counter. That is, it employs a hegemonic authority that, without properly engaging its subject, defines and then dismisses at will. Jackson (2005) contends that,

> Immigrant Islam is not synonymous with immigrant Muslims, especially those of the second and third generations, many of whom are actually opposed to its hegemony. Thus, while a successful Third Resurrection will necessarily attack the false pretensions of Immigrant Islam in general, this does not mean that it must target immigrant Muslims. The Third Resurrection is aimed at ideas not at people. (p. 12)

By separating immigrants from Immigrant Islam, Jackson frames an intellectual space nuanced enough to differentiate ideology from people. But this is difficult, if not impossible work. A broad communal project for the Third Resurrection may conflate the two, not least because this equation is supported by supporters of what Jackson calls Immigrant Islam:

> Still, in the absence of a viable, American alternative, most immigrant Muslims are likely to remain at least provisional supporters of Immigrant Islam, for, if nothing else, the latter goes a long way in preserving their sense of authenticity, identity, and ownership. (2005, p.12)

Nevertheless, for Jackson, there is hope for reconciliation and convergence between immigrant and Blackamerican Muslims:

> As I hope to have shown, there are no insurmountable obstacles to immigrant–indigenous unity. Continued conflict between the two communities will only come of a conscious decision on the part of either to ignore or reject their own or the other's participation in a common history. Even on such a recognition, however, immense effort will be required to sustain a shared historical consciousness. And in the absence

> of the latter, the two communities are likely to continue to meander along their separate paths, coexisting in a pro forma mutual recognition, resigning themselves all the while to the impossibility of bridging their respective pasts, presents and futures. (2005, p. 97)

But it is on this conciliatory note, Jackson reiterates analytically stultifying categories that place label Muslims members of either 'immigrant' or 'indigenous' communities. Michael Muhammad Knight (2013) contends that the division that is implicitly reiterated here fails to capture the diversity within Muslim communities.

> The indigenous-immigrant division problematically freezes American Muslims within categories that may no longer represent them. The "indigenous" label implies that even three generations after an African American embraced Islam in the 1940s, his or her grandchildren are still "converts" on some level, while a third-generation Pakistani American, the grandchild of immigrants, is still marked as belonging to the "immigrant community." Under these terms, an African American Muslim's Islam is deemed "indigenous" even if she follows the rulings of an ayatollah in Iran, and the Islam of a third-generation South Asian American remains "immigrant" even if his religious instruction comes from recorded lectures by Hamza Yusuf. (p. 96)

The questions Knight raises are not just about identification and authority, but they are also about affiliation and belonging. Both Jackson and Grewal foreground important phenomena related to the intellectual history of Muslim counterpublics and, to use Grewal's term, 'crisis of authority' that exists therein. This research intervenes in that conversation seeking to interrogate an important assumption packaged within rhetoric around Muslims in North America: if the histories, terrains, theologies, ideologies amongst Muslims in a single location are so varied, what ultimately ties them together into a single community, like a "mosque community"? More foundationally, what is a 'community'? How do they form, how are they sustained, and what are their limits?

The Umma and the Jama 'a

The term *Muslim community* situates Muslims into a recognizable collective of self-identifying members that can, implicitly or explicitly, homogenize their histories, experiences and futures. The theoretical frameworks explored in Chapter 3 as well as the nuanced untying of Muslim history in North America offered by Grewal and Jackson in this chapter, foreground difference and highlight important questions of inquiry, one of which is the thrust

of my thesis: what makes a “Muslim community” a “community” and what are the social tensions therein that promote creative responses? As the scholars seek to disclose difference amongst Muslims, they continually face theologically embedded internal rhetoric about unity. This imperative for unity and cohesion is more than unity for the sake of unity, or unity because unity feels good (as per ‘sense of community’ discussed above); this is a concept interwoven into Muslim scripture and constructed for temporal aims throughout Muslim history.

The Arabic term often used to denote community is *umma*, found in several verses of the Qur'an, which “signifies a number of different interconnected meanings” (Arsenault, 2013, p. 108). The variant meanings all share the same common denominator: “the sense of a community or a social collective of men and women. It is, however, a fairly elastic term and is also used in the Qur’an more specifically to connte a religious defined community, with each *umma* being distinguished from the others by the degree and content of its collective beliefs and disbeliefs” (2013, p. 108). The vision for a united global and pan-Islamic *umma* was a frequently employed trope used by nineteenth and twentieth century anti-colonial Muslim activists; for some, the notion of the *umma* was a super-collective that transcended colonial attempts to divide colonized populations. In this anti-colonial context, *umma* became a highly politicized term that envisioned a “unified community that would transcend geographical, historical, sectarian, and political difference and unite Muslims of the worked into a network of mutual association” (2013, p. 107). This broadly encompassing and sometimes politicized notion of *umma* would be imported by Muslim immigrants and translated into national organizations that Zareena Grewal (2013, p. 140) terms “umma institutions,” envisioned by its members and founders as microcosms of the global umma.

Another term used to denote ‘Muslim community’, *jama’a*, literally means ‘group’ in Arabic. The term is found in important prophetic sayings that urge believers to be amongst the *jama’a*, the collective. Functionally, *jama’a* has been used to describe congregations praying synchronously together behind one imam or prayer leader or to describe a group of spiritual wayfarers trained under a single spiritual guide (Arsenault, 2013, p. 108). On the surface, it seems that *umma* and *jama’a* generally work in synchronicity, with the former denoting a macro-community and the latter denoting a micro-community. Nevertheless, in the anti-colonial context of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *jama’a* too would also become politicized (2013, p. 108), used by groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami (1941) and the Muslim Brotherhood, which uses the word to self-reflexively describe itself. From their anti-colonial and Islamist organizational roots, the visions for a transnational, transcultural and

transethnic *umma* and *jama'a* were imported post-1965 and became the functioning paradigm through which the new umma-institutions functioned.

This vision for the *umma* and *jama'a* brought with it institutional consequences that have shaped the landscape for Muslim American counterpublics. The institution intrinsically designed to host the microcosm of the umma was the mosque, for, as Michael Muhammad Knight (2013, p. 96) points out, mosques "are often shared spaces for Muslims of diverse ethnic and national backgrounds" to congregate. Once the new wave of Muslim immigrants had settled in the United States, mosque construction was the primary institutional goal. "According to one study" GaneaBassiri (2010, p.297) notes, "the number of mosques established in the 1970s was five times the number of mosques established in the 1950s or the 1960s and the number of new mosques continued to grow, though more modestly (about 25 percent), in the 1980s and the 1990s." This rapid growth of mosques undergirds much of the questions framing this research. Beyond the economic and numerical advantage many immigrants had over their co-religious antecedents, this institutional emphasis on the mosque is an important modern phenomenon. On the one hand, in much of the Muslim-majority world, mosques were either directly state funded or established through managed public endowments, so the role of mosque building settling on the shoulders of immigrants who were private citizens seems like a natural consequence of their residence in North America. Yet the institutional vehicle through which Islam would encounter new lands, historically, was not mosques, but rather Sufi brotherhoods.[18] Sufi brotherhoods were generally quite mobile, adaptive, and elastic in offering Muslims and new converts the sense of social cohesion necessary when part of a religious community.

As Nile Green (2015) demonstrates, the urban terrains into which many immigrant Muslims landed already hosted a competitive Christian 'marketplace'. At the time the *Mosque of Highland Park* was being built, churches in Detroit were competing for visibility on Woodward Avenue, such that when the mosque opened "just off Woodward Avenue and a mere 550 feet from the Ford motor factory, it was an act of architectural competition with the built franchises of these other religious firms for the allegiance of the several thousand factory workers" (2015, p. 221).

The historical context into which my case studies emerge is marked by Black Religion movements facing the import of pan-Islamic visions through the migrations of immigrants impacted by anti-colonial movements of the Muslim majority world. They inherit

[18] See Nile Green's "Sufism: A Global History" (2012, John Wiley & Sons).

the socio-economic consequences of an institutional re-focusing on mosques and away from sufi brotherhoods, and the general conceptual obscurity of the notion of *umma*, *jama'a* and *community*. It can seem a little chaotic (because it is), but this is the generative context in which my research questions have formed. They demand dynamic and carefully constructed approaches that can holistically investigate the questions and the case studies I have selected. The following chapter takes on this task by exploring the relevant theoretical frameworks informing this study.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Frameworks: Postcolonial Exchange

This research project seeks to explore perceived tensions in North American Muslim communities located in settler societies, with participants who are self-identified members and believers of Islam. Consequently, there are two overlapping theoretical frameworks I employ to inform the analysis of this project's data, both of which sit within an anti-colonial paradigm. Talal Asad's anthropology of Islam and his notion of discursive tradition contextualize my subjects' relationship to and forming of Islamic tradition. The sociological model of religious economy further interrogates the nature of the subjects' exchange with entities both within and without Islamic tradition.

In this chapter, I propose that these frameworks are not only theoretically sound but also complementary in the ways they resist hegemonic Western academic discourse and facilitate critical change. This resistance "starts from the premise that those in the west, both within and outside the academy, should take such other knowledges, other perspectives, as seriously as those of the west" (Young, 2003, p. 20). An adequate exploration of postcolonial thought will inevitably explore Edward Said's (1935 - 2003) critique of "European stereotypical representations of the east in the colonial period, of the kinds characterized by [Said] as 'Orientalism'" (p. 80). Said interrogates colonial discourse; his work "was the study of the construction of an object, for investigation and control" (Spivak, 1993, as cited in Young, 2003, p. 8). The theoretical frameworks I lay out in this chapter borrow from Said's postcolonial approach, destabilizing colonial conceptualizations of religious development and exchange.

Anti-Colonial Backdrop

Robert Young (2003) traces the emergence of the postcolonial intellectual movement to the *Tricontinental* journal, launched at the the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Cuba, which for the "first time brought together the writings of 'postcolonial' theorists and activists (Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Jean-Paul Sartre), elaborated not as a single political and theoretical position but as a transnational body of work with a common aim of popular liberation" (p. 17). Regardless of how one's affiliations may influence they way s/he perceives the aforementioned list of theorists and activists, it is clear that postcolonial thought has been, from the very beginning, interwoven with anti-colonial

activity. This connection is reiterated by George Dei and Alireza Asgharzadeh (2001) who argue that,

> a social theory's worth should not be measured solely in terms of its philosophical grounding. More significantly, the relevance of a theory should be seen in how it allows us to understand the complexity of human society and to offer a social and political corrective - that is, the power of theories and ideas to bring about change and transformation in social life. (p. 298)

As noted in my introductory chapter, I am personally invested in the outcomes of this research. These are all, to varying degrees, 'my' communities and and the intellectual tools employed to understand their inner workings must be both critical and contributive - two elements common among the frameworks I have chosen to employ. Both frameworks recognize "the importance of locally produced knowledge emanating from cultural history and daily human experiences and social interactions" and urge that researchers "be aware of the historical and institutional structures and contexts which sustain intellectualism" (p. 300-301) .

For Muslim communities, anti-colonial approaches demand that any analysis consider the broader colonial contexts framing Muslim experience in North America. Regardless of where the Muslim story in North America begins, it faces the domination, imperialism, and hegemony that other, similarly non-settler communities endure. Whether Muslims encountered this land as pre-Columbian explorers, slaves, immigrants, converts, or through any other modality, *Muslimness* is historically situated in ways that necessitate an anti-colonial analysis. European colonialism of the Americas begins concurrently with the onset of the Spanish Inquisition in which Jews and Muslims faced extensive repression in the Iberian Peninsula. Between 15 to 20 percent of the enslaved people brought to the Americas from Africa were Muslim (Diouf, 1998, p.48). The civil rights movement in America is punctuated with the national prominence of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X. Muslims who came to Canada and the United States during immigration influxes of the mid-twentieth century emigrated from Muslim-majority lands historically colonized by European imperial powers. It is not hyperbole, therefore, to suggest that the historical backdrop of Muslim life in North America is colonialism.

The complexity of Muslim communities are often glossed over in Western analytical frameworks; pinning anti-colonial discourses as the backdrop to my study recognizes the intersecting forces imposing colonial power relations:

> Individuals, groups, and communities are situated differently within the structures of power and domination, distinguished from one another by their specificity of histories, complexity of geographies, and divisiveness of designated social categories such as class, race, gender, sexuality, and so forth. The aim of anti-colonial discourse is to provide a common zone of resistance and struggle, within which variously diverse minoritized, marginalized, and oppressed groups are enabled to "come to voice," and subsequently to challenge and subvert the hegemonic systems of power and domination. (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 316)

Religion and spiritual identities may be complicit in social, sexual, racial and other forms of injustice; nevertheless, an anthropology of Islam that emphasizes it as a discursive tradition and the model of religious economy confirm that because religion and spirituality strongly inform adherents' worldview, they can be mobilized in ways that contribute to the resistance and deconstruction of interlocking oppressions.

Islam as a Discursive Tradition

Because my study involves contemporary trends amongst Muslims in the North America, it is necessary to chart the theoretical frameworks informing my notion of Islam itself. As an analytical category, conceptualized notions of Islam have evolved in Western academia. Ovamir Anjum (2007) provides a chronology of the anthropology of Islam. Much of what follows is a summary of the major developments he outlines in his article.

Anjum (2007) notes that in the mid-twentieth century the University of Chicago's preeminent anthropologist, Robert Redfield (1892 - 1958), offered a bipartite conceptualization of all world religions. Redfield postulated dividing each religion into a "great tradition" that is "reflexive, orthodox, textual, 'consciously cultivated and handed down,'" and a "little tradition" that is "heterodox, peripheral local, popular and unreflected" (p. 656). This dichotomization of religion emerged from anthropology's preoccupation with exotic phenomena in localized cultures.

Anjum recounts that the first anthropological conceptualizations of Islamic tradition specifically would emerge a decade after Redfield when Clifford Geertz (1926 - 2006), also at the University of Chicago, would posit a deeply influential textual hermeneutic (2007, p. 650). Geertz's study of religion in Java would help him devise a symbolic and interpretive anthropology that would accommodate the far more varied forms of Muslim practices than orientalist studies helped researchers interpret (Geertz, 1976). Geertz's interpretive approach

would have an impact that stretched well beyond the study of Muslim societies, but what he began to unravel was the orientalist trope of a fixed and universal Islam. Anjum (2007, p. 657) notes that the project to codify the study of Muslim societies was carried forward by Abdul Hamid el-Zein (1934 - 1979), who would come to argue against the dichotomization of tradition proposed by Redfield. According to el-Zein, "all islams, to an anthropologist, were created equal, and anyone who tried to look for any hierarchy or truth-value in various islams was trading in theology, he contended, and not in anthropology. Little traditions were no different from great ones" (Anjum, 2007, p. 657). Though the two frameworks seem congruent, el-Zein would counter elements of Geertz's approach, who, according to el-Zein, "was ultimately seduced by the idea of an essentialized universal Islam" (Anjum, 2007, p. 657). For Geertz, el-Zein contends -

> all expressions of Islam find unity of meaning through two dimensions of these universal conditions: first as expressions of a particular form of experience, religion, with certain defined characteristics such as the integration of worldview and ethos; and second as an historically continuous tradition of meaning in which the original expression and all those following it in time and space do not exist as complete distinct realities but as delicately related development of an initial symbolic base linked by the social process of shared meaning...There is less order than in a trend within a single tradition. . . . Each individual experience contains the universal characteristics assigned to the religious form of experience and those particular shared meanings which recall an entire tradition of Islam. (el-Zein, 1977 as cited in Anjum, 2007, p. 657)

Ultimately, el-Zain would suggest a paradigmatic repositioning for anthropologists: "stop looking for any search for structure or unifying factors among various local islams" (Anjum, 2007, p. 658). Put more plainly, there was no single analytical object of study called "Islam". Instead, there were as many 'islams; as there were Muslims, and each islam is constructed within the mind of each subject. The implication here is the "rather dismal [conclusion]: anthropology of Islam is simply not possible, because Islam cannot be located as an analytical object" (Anjum, 2007, p. 658). Whether or not attributed to el-Zein, the propositions he lays out against the notion of a coherent Islam, have spread widely and are now well-situated in public discourse and echoed by prominent public intellectuals like Reza Aslan. Aslan is arguably the most recognizable media personality on faith presently and his books on religion and religious figures are national best sellers in America. Aslan leads a

public discourse on religion that echoes el-Zein's proposition, hesitant to refer to Islam[19] and all religions in the singular nominative:

> There is no such thing as Christianity. It doesn't exist. There are Christianities and the way that one defines the gospel. The way that one understands Jesus as either the Son of God, or the Messiah, or as, you know, a great teacher to emulate. The way that one places sort of the Christology, or even the creedal formula of Catholicism, has everything to do with where one lives. If you are a Catholic living in suburban Denver with your two and a half kids, and your car, and your house, your Jesus is probably a white, blond haired, blue-eyed, peacenik who turns the other cheek. If you're a Catholic living in the hills of Guatemala, your Jesus, besides being Mexican, is a fighter. A liberator. One who stands up to the oppressor and indeed who takes up arms against oppression. It's the same Jesus. It's the same Catholicism, but the understanding is radically different depending upon where you live. The same of course is true of Islam. If you're a Muslim living in Detroit, then your idea of Islam is a religion of peace and submission and pluralism. If you're a Muslim living in a garbage heap on Gaza, then you're version of Islam is as a religion of social justice.
>
> So everywhere that you go you will see different expressions. Different manifestations of what can be called the same religion, the same faith. (Aslan, 2012)

Aslan is an important paragon for this framework but the broad-based acceptance of el-Zein's approach to religion highlights the importance to interrogate its presuppositions. El-Zein's framework makes room for as many religions as there are believers, as many islams as there are Muslims - alone, that proposition seems to reflect the variance and diversity that Aslan is speaking to. As Anjum notes, however, while el-Zein's "position has been much discussed and often adopted in subsequent literature...both the complexity and limitations of el-Zein's proposal have been underestimated" (2007, p. 658). The internal logic of Western academy, with its own persisting colonial connections, would simultaneously posit the inverse relationship between forms of religious believes and practices and rationality. "Fortunately," as Anjum notes, "several studies in the past few decades in disciplines such as anthropology and philosophy have called into question the modern prejudice that tradition must always be in ontological opposition to rationality and negotiation" (Anjum, 2007, p. 661).

El-Zein's arguments would set the stage for the most significant development in the anthropology of Islam. Besides the disorienting natural conclusion of el-Zein's approach,

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[19] "Dr. Aslan: …I have trouble even saying the word "Islam." I mean, the scholar in me wants to add an "s." Wants to say "Islams."" (Tippet, 2014)

namely the disappearance of Islam as an analytical object, the imperative to study Islam as a cohesive subject remained intact. Robert Launay (1992) notes that "the problem for anthropologists is to find a framework in which to analyze the relationship between this single, global entity, Islam, and the multiple entities that are the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims in specific communities at specific moments in history." (Launy, 1992, as cited in Anjum, 2007, p. 659). It is in response to this problem and in the context of Islam's disappearance as an analytical object that, in the 1980s, Talal Asad intervened to reinterpret tradition and specifically recuperate Islamic tradition. In his seminal work, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (1986), Asad argues for rethinking Islamic tradition as a *discursive tradition* that "consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history." (Asad, 1986, as cited in Anjum, 2007, p. 661). "Asad's critique," Constance Furey (2012) notes, "was a full-throated protest against anthropology as symbolic analysis and interpretation of meaning. Religious symbols, Asad argued, cannot be known without regard to the socially produced disciplinary practices that secure these meanings" (p. 16).

Central to Asad's concern are the colonial underpinnings of contemporary knowledge. Asad argues "that religion as a neatly separable aspect of social life is a modern Western construct and, as such, not an adequate concept to describe Islam, or even premodern Christianity for that matter" (Anjum, 2007, p. 650). It is worth noting that Asad is working in a discipline - anthropology - that is married to the history of Empire and colonialism. In the afterword to an edited volume on *Colonial Situations* (1991), Asad offers the following connection between European power and the entire field of anthropology:

> ...the process of European global power has been central to the anthropological task of recording and analyzing the ways of life of subject populations, even when a serious consideration of that power was theoretically excluded. It is not merely that anthropological fieldwork was facilitated by European colonial power (although this well-known point deserves to be thought about in other than moralistic terms); it is that the fact of European power, as discourse and practice, was always part of the reality anthropologists sought to understand, and of the way they sought to understand it. (Asad, From the History of Colonial Anthropology to the Anthropology of Western Hegemony, p.315)

The anthropologists who preceded Asad, including Geertz and el-Zein, are themselves working against the legacy of orientalism and colonial anthropology, both functions of

European hegemonic discourse. In responding to the homogenizing impulse of colonial anthropology, however, the argument to entirely dissolve Islam as a category undercuts the assertions of Muslims themselves. Counterproductively, el-Zein was treating the notion of Islam as anthropologists once treated the notion of totemism. Totemism, employed by anthropologists for decades to describe exoctic (especially indigienous) cultures, has now been deconstructed as “an artifact of academic discourse rather than of the exotic cultures the anthropologists purported to describe” (Launay, 1992, as cited in Anjum, 2007, p. 658). While deconstructing the idea of totemism was essential, deconstructing the idea of Islam would recast the colonial dismissal of Muslim perspective:

> “Real people all over the world freely identify themselves as Muslims; few, I daresay, call themselves ‘totemists.’” Admittedly, self-identification of subjects is not sufficient to prove a label’s usefulness. But, as Launay points out, the unity of a single Islam is a consciously theological aspect of what Muslims believe, despite the fact that Muslims are at least as aware of the diversity of interpretation and practice of Islam as are Western anthropologists. Launay contends that “for anthropologists to assert the existence of multiple Islams is, in essence, to make a theological claim, one most Muslims would not only deny but, they rightfully argue, anthropologists have no business making. (Anjum, 2007, p.658)

By deconstructing parts of Geertz and el-Zein’s propositions, Asad’s recuperation of tradition more thoroughly recognizes “the importance of locally produced knowledge emanating from cultural history and daily human experiences and social interactions” (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300). Asad’s conceptualizations are fundamentally connected to Michel Foucault’s analysis of subjectivity and power, but, as Scott Kugle (2013, p.5) notes, " ...Asad [tries] to preserve the best of Foucault's theories while shedding his Eurocentric bias and restoring a humanistic concern about the rights of vulnerable persons and communities." It is for this reason that I consider Asad’s notion of discursive tradition complementary to the general imperative of anti-colonial theory.

A discursive tradition is a dynamic engagement of present-day subjects with the past. Tradition is not the benefaction or inheritance of a fixed set of social or cultural norms, practices, texts but instead a "discursive engagement" with perceptions of the past most especially (but not limited to) sacred texts. This engagement itself results in the conditions for the reproduction of tradition. Islamic discursive tradition includes not just the scholarly class, but anyone who has engaged the foundational texts. This may include, for example, an unlettered Muslim recalling a verse of Qur'an to help him or herself make an ethical financial

decision. The discursive tradition's continuous recapitulation makes present-day actors subjects of tradition too. Though their impacts may differ drastically, a present-day popular Muslim YouTube speaker is just as much a subject of tradition as is an eighth-century Muslim theologian. “While one cannot analytically define a particularly Islamic religious experience (as Geertz attempts to do)”, Ovamir Anjum (2007, p. 659) notes, “or Islamic social structures (as Ernest Gellner, for instance, does), one can speak of Islamic discursive constraints and tradition — precisely because one can speak of a set of well-defined and universally accepted foundational texts and interpretive techniques in Islam.”

Asad’s discursive tradition foregrounds questions about the differing sets of circumstances like age, class, gender, knowledge that may influence formations of authority. For my research purposes, this framework calls me to ask questions how the participants in my case studies receive, read and interpret the past, the contributing factors to those differences.The participants in this research project are each adherents and practitioners of Islam, but they occupy personal modalities that set each apart from one another. Their differences make the notion of Islam as a discursive tradition uniquely employable: the framework transcends any fissures that might emerge as a result of theological, jurisprudential, or ideological difference.

The content of this thesis’ data will inevitably include references to divine revelation, prophethood, spirituality, and other subject matter that is generally received suspiciously in western academy. Here too, Asad’s notion of Islam as a discursive tradition resists the the secular academic tendency, and colonial impulse, to demote such knowledge to socially constructed folklore.[20]

Religious Economies: An Analytical Model

Responding to Weberian Approaches

Asad and his interlocutors have shaped the secular academic study of religion, deconstructing inherited Western academic epistemologies. They weave together several social science streams including history, anthropology and sociology. Responding to (i.e. decolonizing) the colonial underpinnings of each of these disciplines as well as lingering Orientalist sentiment demands an interdisciplinary approach, for just as anthropology has its colonial roots so too does modern sociology (Said, 2014, p. 343). Max Weber (1864 - 1920) is rightly considered a founder of modern sociology whose impact is palpable in the

[20] See also Chapter 4: Methodology, *Ontological and Epistemological Stances*

sociology of religion. In an effort to produce a more sound theoretical approach for this study, I will briefly explore notions that undergird Weber's extremely impactful work.

In his famed 1917 lecture at Munich University, *Science as a Vocation*, Weber explored religion and reason as the perpetually oppositional forces. As Bailey (2006, p. 383) cites, in his speech, Weber postulated that there are "no mysterious incalculable forces" in world. For this reason, he previously (*Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905), foretold of the inevitable 'disenchantment' of religious peoples: modernity brought a necessary rise of rationality, and since rationality is a counter stream to religiosity, the latter would decline. (Bailey, 2006, p. 383) . A core notion of Weberian sociology, disenchantment remains a very influential prism to perceive the presence (or absence) of religion, and it is teleologically invested in the perpetual decline and ultimate elimination of religious life. In regards to Islamic studies, Matin-Asgari (2004, p. 299) states, "Weberian norms...permeate the mainstream," despite intentional movement against orientalist trends. As he argues, wherever Islam is perceived to be non-reformist, it is propped up as a foil to Western modalities of modernity:

> Currently much intellectual effort, in academic circles as well as in the larger political and cultural arena, is devoted to probing many of the world's problems in terms of a clash between secular modernity and religious tradition. At the center of this controversy is a critique of Islam, treated as a more or less coherent culture, civilization, or historical tradition. Typically, Islamic 'fundamentalism ' is seen as the prototype of religious extremism. And Islamic 'civilization, ' according to scholars such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel P. Huntington, ha s remained 'backward' in comparison with 'the West,' because 'something went wrong' earlier in 'Islamic history.' (Matin-Asgari, 2004, p. 293)

Weber's study of religion "was part of a sharply ethnocentric vision of history and rationality" insisting that "only the Occident knows rational law… [or] possesses science in the present-day sense of the world…a rational science and in connection with it a rational technology remained unknown to [other] civilizations" (2004, p. 297).

Not only were Weber's ideas eurocentric, as Matin-Asgari argues, Rodney Stark and Laurence Iannaccone contend that Weber's predictions were, in many cases, simply inaccurate.[21] Using Weberian sociological methods, post-industrialization and technological

[21] In his seminal, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), Charles Taylor revisits Weber's secularization narrative, problematizing its implied "subtraction story" that, as Jason A. Mahn (2010) describes,

advancement in Western Europe would have presumably led to religious decline if not disappearance. This, however, is not the case; Stark and Iannaccone (1994) demonstrate this by explicating the dissonance between Scandinavian church attendance and belief in God in the region: a Weberian paradigm might, for instance, deem the 2% weekly church attendance in Iceland in the 1980s as an obvious indication of religious decline, but as Stark and Iannaccone points out, 75% of the country believes in the existence of God, and only 2% self identify as atheist (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994, p. 244 - 245). Religion, it seems, may unpredictably rise, fall and then rise again and the standard Weberian methods to predict religiosity (church attendance, for instance) seem inadequate.

Over the course of several papers, Stark and Iannaccone along with William Bainbridge and Roger Finke would develop a nonlinear sociological model of religion connected to rational choice theory (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994, p. 232). As the model developed, these theorists would begin to borrow the analytical tools of economics and apply them to study of religious phenomena. The model was termed 'religious economy' and it employed concepts, terminology, and frameworks that are usually exclusive to marketplace contexts. Stark and Iannaccone (1994, p. 232) overview it as follows: at its foundation, the theory stood on three distinctly defined terms. First, *religion* itself "is any system of beliefs and practices concerned with ultimate meaning that assumes the existence of the supernatural." Second, *religious firms* "are social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain, and supply religion to some set of individuals." Finally, *religious economy*, which "consists of all the religious activity going on in a any society. Religious economies are like commercial economies in that they consist of a market of current and potential customers, a set of firms seeking to serve that market, and the religious "product lines" offered by the various firms" (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994, p. 232). Weberian sociology is historically connected to the eponym's postulation that Protestantism's rationalizing force was the source of economic prosperity. Ironically, Stark and his interlocutors would employ that connection - religion and economy - and then rearrange the terms and relationships, to offer an entirely a distinct and anti-Weberian sociology of religion.

Marrying religion to an economic metaphor offers several propositions that Stark and Iannaccone present. The extent to which a firm is able to monopolize depends "upon the

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> takes religious belief to comprise an overleaf of superstition, that necessarily drops out as humanity becomes more enlightened…While Taylor tells his own more-complex story about how the lack of religious belief becomes not merely an option, but the default option, of late modern Europeans and North Americans, others with a more functionalist view of religion find it neither waning nor waxing but being disseminated and decentralized." (p. 172)

Rodney Stark is certainly a proponent of the latter.; I outline his model of religious economy in this chapter.

degree to which the state uses coercive force to regulate" (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994, p. 232). Conversely, they argue, the extent to which a religious economy is unregulated will determine it religious plurality. With increased plurality, saturation in an unregulated religious economy would lead to increased specialization, which would in turn feed the emergence of variant religious demands (1994, p. 232). As with a financial economy, regulation and deregulation in a religious economy are rarely absolutes - even in the most laissez faire religious economy, state actors will necessarily install guardrails to prevent pernicious firm activity. The framework suggests that there is usually a dynamic demand base in a religious economy that requires commensurate religious products from 'suppliers,' instead of classical secularization theories that predict people's progressive disenchantment with faith and the devaluation of religion wholesale:

> Past discussions of secularization usually postulate a decline in the demand for religion, claiming that potential consumers in a modern, enlightened age no longer find a need for faith in the supernatural. In contrast, we propose to focus not so much on religious consumers as on religious suppliers. Under what conditions are religious firms able to create a demand? What happens when only a few, lazy religious firms confront the potential religious consumer? More concretely, does the low level of religious mobilization in Scandinavia, for instance, reflect weak demand primarily, or an unattractive product, badly marketed, within a highly regulated and distorted religious economy? (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994, 232)

To codify the model of religious economy, Stark and Iannaccone offer seven propositions to help situate and contextualise societies, collectives, and individuals of interest:

1. The capacity of a single religious firm to monopolize a religious economy depends upon the degree to which the state uses coercive force to regulate the religious economy.
2. To the degree that a religious economy is unregulated, it will tend to be very pluralistic. By pluralistic we mean the number of firms active in the economy: the more firms having a significant market share, the greater the degree of pluralism.
3. To the degree that a religious economy is pluralistic, firms will specialize. To specialize, a firm caters to the special needs and tastes of specific market segments.
4. To the degree that a religious economy is competitive and pluralistic, overall levels of religious participation will tend to be high. Conversely, to the degree that a religious economy is monopolized by one or two state-supported firms, overall levels of participation will tend to be low.

5. To the degree that a religious firm achieves a monopoly, it will seek to exert its influence over other institutions and thus the society will be sacralized[22].
6. To the degree that deregulation occurs in a previously highly regulated religious economy, the society will be desacralized.
7. The relationship between the degree of regulation of the religious economy and start-up costs for new religious organizations is curvilinear - declining as the state exerts less coercion on behalf of a monopoly firm, but rising again as fully developed pluralism produces a crowded marketplace of effective and successful firms. (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994, p. 232 - 235)

The sociology of religion Stark, Iannaccone and their interlocutors develop has been the subject of much debate and critique.[23] I will take up some of these critiques more specifically when discussing the model of religious economy for the study of Islam, but exploring one particular critique of the theory in general is worth covering here. In Chapter 5, my case studies show that questions about gender are significant tensions facing Muslim communities. As I make the case for the model of religious economy as a viable theoretical framework to analytically engage my research questions, it is important to note gendered critiques of the model.

Evelyn Bush (2010, p. 307) affirms that women are a demographically majority religious consumer group, yet even in the most open of markets, religion predictably favours men's interests. In both evangelical Protestantism and Catholicism, Bush notes, reproductive rights are restricted, many faith traditions prefer male symbols (of deities, for instance) than female symbols, interpretive power[24] is predominantly in the hands of patriarchal structures of authority, and leadership is abysmally in favour of males with only 5 to 8 percent of clergy positions held by women in America (Bush, 2010, p. 308). None of these facts seem to support the religious economies model prediction that supply will respond to demand - in what context would a demographic of women 'demand' the aforementioned conditions? Researchers who attempt to explain this phenomenon argue that the most gendered aspects of

[22] "By sacralized we mean that the primary aspects of life, from family to politics, will be suffused with religious symbols, rhetoric, and ritual" (Stark and Iannaccone, 1994, p. 234).

[23] See Bruce, S. (1993). Religion and Rational Choice : A Critique of Economic Explanations of Religious Behavior. Sociology of Religion, 54(2), 193–205.

[24] Asad's conceptualization of Islam as a discursive tradition "frames it in such a manner that it prefigures orthodoxy, by which he means a relationship of power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust *correct* practices and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones. Through reasoning and argument, orthodoxy organizes modalities of discursive power and resistance, Asad argues. Even though Islamic traditions are not homogenous, they aspire to coherence by organizing memory and desire under specific material conditions" (Moosa, 2005, p. 53)

religion are peripheral to women's religious interests, but Bush disagrees, pointing to research that identifies 'this-worldly' benefits of religious involvement including "social support (Ozorak 1996), leadership opportunities (Sherkat and Ellison 1999:368), marital intimacy, fidelity, and respect from their husbands (Gallagher and Smith 1999; Wilcox 2004), and rhetorical affirmations of the roles of wife and mother (Davidman 1991; Stacey and Gerard 1990)" (Bush, 2010, p. 309).

Bush recommends modifications to the religious economies model to address these discrepancies. The first is to reframe the notion of religious capital - already a term captured in the broader model of religious economy - to include "an institutionally sanctioned status as a legitimate authority" coupled with the religious knowledge and competence (Bush, 2010, p. 312). "A priest, imam, or rabbi," Bush argues "to the extent that he or she has this status, would have greater religious capital than would a lay believer, regardless of levels of participation, commitment, or even knowledge" (2010, p. 312). Religious capital is not as egalitarian as proposed elsewhere in the model of religious economy, but is instead held disproportionately by stakeholders in institutions who define the terms and values of religious capital.

Another modification Bush suggests is to revisit the notions of deregulation and competition; in a standard religious economies model, deregulation and competition should propel supply that better responds to changing demands. Yet, markets naturally favour firms with more (religious) capital, while "new entrants who lack these assets will have difficulty acquiring them and will be subject to a 'liability of newness' (Stinchcomb 1965:148-150)" (Bush, 2010, p. 316). Moreover, established producers have the advantage of pre-existing networks "that, in many cases, will have developed their loyalty through generations of exchange" (Bush, 2010, p. 316). Consequently, deregulation disadvantages new producers in religious economies, especially if the demands to which they are responding come from consumers who themselves have little religious capital. Without some intervention, Bush suggests, the interests of marginalized groups within religious economies are perpetually undermined. Entrepreneurs who produce and promote 'female-friendly' religion, as Bush refers to it, are never given equitable opportunity to thrive in deregulated settings. It follows that the same would be true for other disenfranchised groups - if a group is otherwise societally undermined, the same will manifest for its articulation in a religious economy Rather than viewing all instances of state involvement as a hinderance to supply-side diversification, calculated intervention can plausibly contribute to pluralism. Bush does not

provide specific examples where such a marriage between the state and religious economy exists, but conceptually, her propositions seem reasonable.

I find Bush's critiques and modifications important contributions to the model of religious economy. For my purposes, her gendered critiques are relevant since the questions that I explore in my case studies revolve around the role of men and women in leadership, gender relations within religious institutions, and the creation of safe spaces for marginalized and underrepresented peoples. Moreover, her critique contributes to the model of religious economy's analytical possibilities by nuancing some of its key terms. Bush's arguments about deregulation, state intervention, and the flow between supply-and-demand are significant considerations to further the overall soundness of the theoretical framework.

Religious Economies and Islam: *Bombay Islam* and later *Terrains of Exchange*

While the model of religious economy has been an available analytical model since the 1980s, it was not extensively applied to analyze movements within Islam until Nile Green's 2012 book, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840 - 1915* (Cambridge, 2012). In the book, Green, a social historian, explores surprising religious phenomena apparent in the imperial port city of Bombay - an important industrial and modernizing city of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using the rubrics of Weberian sociology, one would expect an increasingly disenchanted Muslim population. Green illustrates, however, that while modern Muslim movements emerged in that nineteenth century Bombay, the forms of Islam practiced in the city were no less 'disenchanted' than previous centuries.

Green looks to religious economy to help think through this phenomenon. The dominant form of historical assessment of this period dichotomizes Islamic activity into 'traditionalist' and 'reformist' categories. From a Weberian perspective, the former is an enchanted, ritualistic practice and vision of the faith while the latter is a more rational and worldly engagement. Muslim reformists are perceived to be more 'modern' and are consequently, teleologically favoured by a Weberian perspective. Given the general favour 'reformists' receive in public discourse, the gaps in this model may not be immediately apparent, but Green highlights two:

First, in many cases, individual actors and collectives do not neatly fall within either the traditionalist or reformist camp: is a Muslim leader employing emerging print press to disseminate classical Islamic texts a traditionalist or a reformist? Is an author who insists on reviving medieval theologically rationalist movements a reformist and traditionalist? Green

argues that reducing the historical discourse to the traditional-reformist categories renders 'tradition' static, and by extension, falls for rhetoric of self-identified reformists. Second, the Weberian model treats Muslim collectives (whether geographic or ideological) as a singular community, mirroring internal Muslim rhetoric about unity.[25] This inadvertent homogenization, however, offers little room to explore variant affiliations and nuances that emerge throughout a single Muslim population.[26]

Consequently, noting the dearth of analytical vocabulary to capture these textures of Muslim religious production, Green reframes the dialogue between 'traditionalists' and 'reformists' as a far more complex multilogue occurring among individual actors and collectives that do not neatly follow the 'traditionalist'-'reformist' dichotomy (Green, 2012, p. 19). Specifically, to capture the complex, multidirectional, almost chaotic exchange occurring in Bombay Islam, Green looks to the model of religious economy to identify and explicate patterns. Religious economy as an analytical tool, Green insists, puts all of the actors on equal footing, rather than favoring the modernist discourse of so-called 'reformists' (2012, p. 19).

Demonstrating the versatility of the model of religious economy, Green followed *Bombay Islam* with another book that uses the framework to analyze several early twentieth century case studies in places as seemingly distinct as Japan and the United States. *Terrains of Exchange* (Oxford University Press, 2015) seeks to track Islamic expansion in new "terrains" that are characterized by productive dialectics among Muslims and non-Muslims. This book offers a full-view implementation of the model of religious economy to Islamic studies. As with *Bombay Islam*, Green reaches beyond Muslim leaders' self-ascribed titles (Imam, Shaykh, Mufti, etc), referring to them as 'entrepreneurs' or 'impresarios' (Green, 2015, p. 12). While acknowledging (and even engaging in semantic analysis of) Muslim collective self-descriptions (organization, movement, association, etc), Green will refer to them as 'firms' (2015, p. 12). Less interested in the nature of debates about tradition, Green instead considers forms of 'adaptation' and 'competition' more consequential for his case studies (2015, p. 16).

Part of Green's project, and his largest oversight, I contend, is the implication that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were somehow exceptional historical episodes for Muslims. Green notes, "...the movements which spread worldwide in the later nineteenth early twentieth century were not heirs to the early modern forms of Muslim globalization

[25] See also Chapter 2: Literature Review and Historical Context, *The Umma and the Jama'a*
[26] See Chapter 6: Discussion, *Functional Monopolies*

across the Old World, not least the orders and other institutions of the sufi brotherhoods. On the contrary, the new globalizing Muslim religious firms of the early twentieth century were new kinds of hybrid organizations that were themselves products of exchange" (Global South Colloquium, 2016). While the particular Muslim encounters were undoubtedly unique, the nature of Muslim religious, social and cultural exchange date back to the very beginnings of Islamic history. As Earl Smith (1972) notes, prior to becoming an architectural symbol of mosques and Islam more broadly, domes were part of the architectural landscape in the Byzantine lands Muslims would rule as early as the seventh century. By employing local craftspeople, Muslims were able to 'adapt' and then ultimately transform domes, a local architectural feature, into a symbol of the faith (1972, p. 43). To use the model of religious economy, one might say the Umayyad Caliph, Abd al-Malik, the patron of the Dome of the Rock, was 'entrepreneurial' in his adaptation of non-Muslim architectural motifs in building this landmark mosque. Productive dialectics were certainly not the exclusive property of the nineteenth and twentieth century globalization. On the other hand, "entrepreneur" is a nineteenth century word, so appropriating it to describe seventh century ruler seems like an anachronism. For Green's purposes, the explicatory power of religious economy lies in the premise of the analogy:

> The general principle of such analysis is that the complexities of religious activities and interactions are *like* commercial activities and interactions in their capacity to be rendered intelligible through the interpretive model of economy. Further, religious economies are *like* commercial economies in that they constitute a market of potential 'customers' or 'consumers', a set of 'firms' competing to serve that market, and the religious 'products' and 'services' produced or otherwise made available by those firms. As a product of sociological thought, religious economy is concerned with the social life of religion, and as such addresses such fundamental questions as why one type of religiosity flourishes in a certain environment and not another, and how different types (or rival versions of the same type) of religiosity compete with one another. (Green, 2012, p.9)

In *Terrains of Exchange*, Green further address the unfamiliar, even uncomfortable nomenclature he is employing, noting its utility:

> While many readers will shirk at the repeated usage of such terms as 'entrepreneur', 'impresario' and 'firm', they are used with the deliberate purpose of defamiliarizing readers—and so creating analytical distance—from social entities ('Islam', 'Christianity') and actors ('Muslims', 'Christians') that readers will assume they

already know. The analytical language deployed here, then, serves as a kind of anti-rhetoric—or perhaps a rhetorical antidote—that helps the reader see familiar things in a new way. (Green, 2015, p.12)

Green is the first to employ the model of religious economy in this way - using the sociological method to write, in part, a critical social history of Islam in the modern world. *Bombay Islam* (2012) and *Terrains of Exchange* (2015) are relatively new monographs, so we have not yet seen extensive critiques on either Green's theoretical approach nor historiography. The one critique that does stand out is Irfan Ahmad's (2013) who criticizes Green's "economistic" terms:

> Integral to this market theory is the notion of a 'neutral, liberal-secular' state because of which competition amongst religious firms thrives. Though its advocates dispute secularization claim in declining salience of religion, they endorse the Church-state separation. The premise is simple. As in a free market, competition leads to production of diverse goods so it does in the market of religion. (p. 497)

"The model," Green counters, "is intended as sociological observation rather than political recommendation." He further insists that "at a personal level, [he] remains[s] agnostic as to whether more of anything - whether commodities or religions - is intrinsically a good thing" (Green, 2015, p. 288). Ahmad further questions Green's seemingly reductionist vocabulary:

> What is the rationale for calling miracle a 'product' when neither its performer nor its audience used that term? Parenthetically, what remains miraculous about a miracle if Green renders it as a product, almost like a Colgate toothbrush? Likewise, why should a Sufi be analysed as an 'entrepreneur' or 'cult' when neither the mystic nor his followers employ that term? What is the ground for classifying organizations and brotherhoods as 'firms' when its founders, leaders and followers possibly called it either taḥrīk or tanẓīm and silsilā? Is Muslim history or culture simply a terrain for gathering data to fit a model like the religious economy? (Ahmad, 2013, p. 499)

Ahmad's criticism here is impassioned but seems misplaced since Green does not seek to offer value judgements on the religious experiences of his subjects, but instead explores the generation of Muslim social life. "Conceived within the social sciences rather than phenomenology," Green notes, "the model and vocabulary presented here are of an *etic*[27]

[27] "Etic" and "emic" are cultural anthropological and social science terms that indicate a researcher's position relative to his or her subject(s). Etic is defined as "designating a generalized, non-structural, objective approach to the study or description of a particular language or culture, typically by an outsider; of, relating to, or involving such an approach. Contrasted with emic" which denotes an 'inside' perspective and often employs internal language ("Etic," 2017)

nature" (Green, 2015, p.10). Green suggests that the self-referential language of Muslim movements has been appropriated within the academy. So too, Green argues, have the aims of that nomenclature shaped academic discourse - namely, unity and normativity.
This internalization of Muslim *emic* vocabulary "has crucially prevented analysts from effectively theorizing Islam as not only a dynamically productive 'discursive tradition', as modelled by Talal Asad, but also as an internally competitive field of social actors and organizations" (2015, p. 10).

As a Muslim living in and between the communities I study, the model of religious economy's *etic* vocabulary is useful. Understandably, the debates within Muslim communities often center around orthodoxy and orthopraxy which both revolve on "a relationship of power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones" (Moosa, 2005, p.53). These are *emic* debates in which parties seek to typecast opponents using scripture, exegetical traditions, historical precedent, contemporary and other source materials to their own ends. Part of my project will require that I navigate questions about both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and in those instances, Asad's discursive tradition will frame those explorations. The model of religious economy furthers my study by prompting me to ask questions about the nature of emerging demands, forms of exchange and the contours of the innovations made in response. It is the *etic* nature of the model of religious economy that both facilitates this line of exploration and affords me the critical distance required for a fruitful exploration. It will also demand that I use *emic* nomenclature knowingly and point me to ask questions that will illuminate broader inter- and intra-communal tensions shaping my case studies' discourse and activity.

Nevertheless, as with Ahmad (2013), the nomenclature of the model initially gave me pause. I viewed the framing of religion in market logic as another failing modern attempt to classify ancient phenomena in metaphors that sacrifice precision for relevance. Other researchers with whom I shared this model found the vocabulary and even the entire paradigm highly reductive.

I had already begun a thematic analysis of my findings when I first encountered the model of religious economy. At that time, I had not yet read a theoretical framework that adequately explained my observations, so while the vocabulary itself was concerning, its analytical traction was evident. My initial outright rejection of the model of religious economy followed by my subsequent acknowledgment of its inductive utility forced me to confront my presuppositions about the nature of economy, capital, entrepreneurs, transaction and any other metaphors employed within the theory. There was something deeply unsettling

about using a model that employed economic terms that touched on the lived experiences captured in my case studies. Of course, my disposition emerges from somewhere. What is it about the economy that makes me feel so hesitant to employ it as a theoretical metaphor?

Malcolm Hamilton (2012, p. 215) notes that "the approach [upholding the model of religious economy] relies very heavily on exchange theory which is based on the principle that all, or nearly all, human interactions can be treated as a form of exchange." Personally, exchange is emblematic of global capitalism - stock exchanges, currency exchange, commodity exchange, to name but a few. Conceptually, however, exchange extends far beyond the symbols of commercial markets.

Exchange and trade are ancient notions that are also recurring scriptural metaphors used for admonition - "they have *bought* error in *exchange* for guidance, so their *trade* reaps no profit, and they are not rightly guided" (Q 2:6)[28] - and encouragement -"those who recite God's scripture, keep up the prayer, give secretly and openly from what We have provided for them, may hope for a *trade* that will never decline" (Q 35:29).

If the notion of trade and exchange can be used for both admonition and encouragement in a text that dates back to the seventh century, why, then, the general apprehension to use the metaphor today? Trade and exchange are so entangled in global capitalism today that they have become containers for a great deal of subtext on power and political dynamics. For instance, Marxist models which have impacted much of the discourse in the social sciences consider trade and exchange highly contested tools of class. The extent to which I have been impacted by leftist ideology (political, economic, or otherwise) is not entirely clear. What is clear, however, is the hegemonic impact global capitalism has had on our discourse about the economy, even when used as a metaphor. Global capitalism has so permeated our personal paradigms about trade or exchange, it has seemingly foreclosed possibilities outside of that context.

Yet, despite our collective entanglement in global capitalism, there are forms of exchanges, products and services that we deem more favourable than others. In that sense, we can hold a perspective that, on the one hand, deems multinational corporations agents of transnational domination, and, on the other hand, a local 'mom and pop' cafe the catalyst for healthy neighborhood community. If, even in the context of global capitalism, we can deem particular suppliers favorable (or at least, less harmful) like a locally-owned cafe, the economic metaphor Green, Stark, and others are offering can be viewed in non-reductivist

[28] All Qur'anic verses quoted in this thesis can be found in M. A. S. Abdul Haleem's, *The Qur'an : a New Translation* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Emphasis in the translations are my own.

terms. As Green himself notes, the model of religious economy is not designed to "reduce religion to solely material or financial forces" but is instead "a product of sociological rather than economic thought. The general principle of such analysis is that the complexities of religious activities and interactions are like commercial activities and interactions in their capacity to be rendered intelligible through the interpretive model of economy" (Green, 2012, p. 9).

Adopting this model, I treat Islam in North America as a large and multivocal space, but ultimately as a single *market*. While Sunni Islam has strong competing claims to authority and much of Shia Islam is inherently hierarchical, neither sect is subject to direct state involvement in the particular doctrines, claims or its movements and organizations. I will denote this particular religious market space as 'deregulated' but I do so reservedly, for as Saba Mahmood (2015) argues, the 'secular state' is far more concerned with religion than its guise of impartiality would suggest.[29] Green himself notes that just as there are no perfectly liberal or command commercial economies, religious economies similarly fall somewhere on a spectrum. The extent to which a religious economy can be considered 'deregulated' is relative and not absolute. Finally, while Green uses the model of religious economy to explore history, I will use it primarily to highlight functions and processes shaping the contexts in which my case studies are forming, and how those contexts are shaping both the individuals and collectives therein.

The individuals featured in the case studies in this thesis are not only inheritors, interpreters and translators of tradition, they are also technological patrons, subjects of public education, producers and consumers of media, and much more. The people whom they serve are themselves subject to the same socio-cultural and historical influences. The theoretical frameworks I employ would need to have the latitude to receive and interpret any of those variables for a thorough analysis. Together, the notion of discursive tradition and the model of religious economy offer a remarkably fertile analytical vocabulary for that purpose.

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[29] In both Canada and the United States, the governments had/have vested interests in the local Muslim discourses. In 2007, the RAND Corporation released a much-publicised report that explicitly identified Muslim movements, ideologies and perspectives that, they argued, the US government should promote and demote. See Rabasa, A., Benard, C., Schwartz, L. H., & Sickle, P. (2007). Building Moderate Muslim Networks. Insight Turkey, 9(1), 56–65.

Chapter 4 - Methodology:
Approaching a Discursive Tradition

If Islam as a lived tradition expresses itself in so many different ways, how can researchers investigate its actors and phenomena with coherence? The literature surveyed in the previous chapter emerges from several disciplines including religious studies, critical anthropology, sociology, history; each study employed varying methodological approaches to elaborate its subject. The research questions I explore similarly demand a multivalent approach. As stated in Chapter 3, adequately exploring the questions of this study will require the convergence of two theoretical frameworks, combining an anthropological approach that treats Islam as a discursive tradition with the sociological approach of religious economy to analyze the actors, interactions, and arguments formed within. Both of these theoretical frameworks sit within an anti-colonial paradigm.

As a researcher, I am inclined to position myself as a third party to the questions I pose and the research I have undertaken to explore them. In my mind, at least, this perceived distance might lend the critical space to intervene objectively into the discourse. As Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005, p. 4) assert, however, writing qualitative work is simply "not an innocent practice." It is important to note at the outset, then, that the design and methodology of this research project is equally about me as it is about the subject. My own preferences, beliefs and understandings are inextricably interwoven into the conception, execution and, now, reflection of this study. As Dawn Snape and Liz Spencer (2003, p. 2) contend, how one carries out research will depend on several factors, including one's "beliefs about the nature of the social world and what can be known about it (ontology), the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (epistemology), the purpose(s) and goals of the research, the characteristics of the research participants, the audience for the research, the funders of the research, and the position and environment of the researchers themselves."

This study is a form of 'qualitative research,' a term that is itself broad and multivalent. Nevertheless, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000) indicate, this tradition of research can be understood within the context of the researcher and the subject:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices ... turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world.

> This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

In this chapter, I attempt to 'locate' myself in the world vis-à-vis this study, for just as with my subjects, my cognitive frames inform the work I do and how I do it. Below, I offer a brief study design summary and its delimitations and limitations. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to an exploration of the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of this study. By considering the prevalent methods and approaches in qualitative research, I argue that the methods of data collection and analysis I have chosen best meet the mandate set by my research questions.

Study Design Summary

This study unfolded over the course of two years during which I surveyed literature on the topic of Muslim communities in North America. What emerged as both a personal interest and gap in the literature was a set of three questions that punctuate my research:

1. What are the perceived structural tensions in North American Muslim communities?
2. What frameworks inform the responses to these tensions?
3. What implications for the future of Muslim communities accrue from these tensions and responses?

These questions build on the existing body of literature by seeking to untangle affiliations according to religious authority and communal belonging. The explorations that result from them may not just contribute to the general field of research but also, as I explain in my introduction, to the organizations and individuals I study and to Muslim communities more broadly.

The method to investigate these questions was through a mixed media comparative case study of two Muslim organizations currently active in North America. Ta'leef Collective is US-based nonprofit organization that seeks to "provide the ideal experience for anyone curious to learn about Islam and offer a safe and friendly environment for newcomers and old friends" (Ta'leef Collective, 2017). The el-Tawhid Juma Circle/Unity Mosque is a Canadian-based Muslim organization that is "a gender-equal, LGBTQI2S affirming, mosque, that is welcoming of everyone regardless of sexual orientation, gender, sexual identity, or faith background" (Juma Circle, 2017). As these brief descriptions illustrate, both organizations use types of inclusive language to describe themselves, albeit with markedly differing tones. It is the ways that they both conceive of themselves and other entities that will highlight the

confluence and difference between them. These two case studies are important, as I will argue in the body of this chapter, not just for their intrinsic value but also for their symbolic representation of broader Muslim communities.

Over the course of the two years of this study, I collected data from newspaper articles, published books, academic articles, social media posts, television interviews, video vignettes, audio podcasts, and blog posts. Additionally, after receiving approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board, I conducted in-depth interviews with the primary thought leaders of each organization. The interviews were shaped by a discussion guide that asked a set of expository questions regarding the thought leader's personal experiences in Muslim communities, the impetus and goal of their their community work, and the response they have encountered thus far. These inquiries were followed by a set of questions designed to ascertain the thought leader's conceptual positions on notions of community in general, the contours of the 'Muslim community' in particular, and the institutional boundaries of the mosque. The transcribed interviews combined with the other sources formed a rich and variant spread of data that was indexed and then thematically analyzed by treating this study's subjects within the Islamic discursive tradition and by placing them within the model of religious economy.

Study Delimitations and Limitations

This research project is delimited in three fundamental capacities. First, I have purposefully chosen two sites (in Canada and the United Sates) as my site of inquiry. Second, I have selected my case studies within the context of Muslim or Islamic *counterpublics*, which is a relatively new way to describe what has been previously conceptualized as the *Muslim community*.[30] Third, I have chosen to only interview the thought leaders of the two organizations I study, instead of also speaking to members, participants and congregants.

Being the two largest countries on the continent, Canada and the United States are often conflated to represent all of North America, when in fact, the continent is additionally comprised of all Caribbean and Central American countries, Bermuda, Mexico, as well as Greenland. My choice of 'North America' as shorthand for Canada and the United States is not meant to exclude the many other nations and states on the continent, but it does denote a partially shared historical encounter both Canada and the United States have with Islam in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Second, given the scope of this project, I have only

[30] See Chapter 2: Literature Review and Historical Context, *From Mosque Communities to Counterpublics*

selected two case studies in North America that I deem to sufficiently capture a large part of the North American Muslim counterpublic. “Nothing is more important,” Stake (2000) highlights, “than making a proper selection of cases” (p. 152). Certainly, not every self-identifying Muslim even in North America would claim an affiliation or inclination to either of my two case studies. Nevertheless, given the public prominence of both, I consider them adequately compelling, if not holistically representative, case studies to engage. Third, my decision to limit my interviews to only the thought leaders in each organization was a conscious choice to highlight the intellectual work behind each organization, though there is great potential for further research that incorporates data from additional personal points of reference.[31]

There are two primary limitations my research encountered. Given the importance of interviews in this thesis, the first limitation was the availability of interviewees. The individuals I chose to focus on in my study are not only leaders within their institutions but also public intellectuals with significant demands on their time. Another limitation I encountered in the course of my research was the variance in the amount and type of current literature available across my two case studies. While both Ta’leef Collective and the el-Tawhid Juma Circle are prominent within and without Muslim circles, el-Tawhid has much more literature - both academic and otherwise - on it and its founder, El-Farouk Khaki. Conversely, Ta’leef has far more self-produced media in the form of videos and social media content, than el-Tawhid. To mitigate these disparities, I have chosen to use interviews as a primary content source.

Ontological and Epistemological Stances

Qualitative research is a broad rubric to describe a number of complementary and competing research traditions. Ethnography, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, grounded theory, constructivism, critical theory are but a few of the approaches found within the literature surveyed in Chapter 2. To contribute to the growing body of literature on Islam and Muslims in North America, I have chosen to employ the tradition of discourse analysis to examine “the way knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts” (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 12). Qualitative studies are often designed around constructivist principles. Snape and Spencer (2003, p. 16) write that constructivism purports that “reality is only knowable

[31] See Chapter 7: Conclusion, *Visions for Future Research*

through socially constructed meanings" and that "there is no single shared social reality, only a series of alternative social constructions." It rightfully challenges the philosophical stance that only the material and the physical are 'real' and that perceptions and beliefs can be reduced to material causes. Though I align with constructivist critiques of materialism, I am not persuaded by its relativism. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, I am ontologically positioned within critical realism that, as a middle path, argues "an external reality exists independent of our beliefs and understanding" but that "reality is only knowable through the human mind and socially constructed meanings" (2003, p. 16).

Impacted by the public policy import of quantitative research, the positivism of the natural sciences has influenced the epistemological rubric of qualitative studies: that "the world is independent of and unaffected by the researcher, facts and values are distinct, thus making it possible to conduct objective, value free inquiry" is countered by interpretivistic contentions that "the researcher and the social world [do, in fact have an] impact on each other." Interpretivism argues that "facts and values are not distinct and findings are inevitably influenced by the researcher's perspective and values, thus making it impossible to conduct objective, value free research although the researcher can declare and be transparent about his or her assumptions" (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 16-17). In general, I am mostly persuaded by interpretivism because positivism is often deterministically and even prescriptively deployed. Nevertheless, I do see merit to using positivistic approaches to help mitigate a researcher's inability to conduct perfectly objective and value-free research. This is not to say that a researcher can be fully objective in a pure positivistic sense, but that there is an epistemological spectrum with a more diverse range than total objectivity on the one hand and total subjectivity on the other hand.

Sitting between positivism and interpretivism, I employ, with some reservations, the model of religious economy[32] which is somewhat positivistic in the way it appropriates economic theory to study religion. The model suggests that religious production is often the consequence of inter- and intra-religious exchange, which - just like economic exchange - has some degree of predictability. It is important to note, however, that this theoretical transfer is performed between two social sciences (economics and religious studies) In its etic approach, the model of religious economy offers a researcher like me some critical distance from my subjects, but it does not purport to offer total objectivity as pure positivism would demand. Moreover, the model of religious economies is epistemologically neutral on questions related

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[32] See Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks, *Religious Economies: An Analytical Model*

to a researcher's impact on the world, thus accommodating my interpretivist stance that a researcher and the social world s/he studies do impact each other. I am, afterall, party to the counterpublic debates I explore here, so I can claim neither total objectivity nor indifference.

Research Design

Case Studies

There are a number of suitable methods available to a researcher investigating the questions of this study, but amongst them, employing case studies demands the collection of data from multiple and varying sources. As a category of inquiry, case studies have recognizable features, but identifying what exactly makes a case study distinct is less discernable. "In essence," Jane Lewis (2003) writes,

> we see the primary defining features of a case study as being [the] multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context (or in a number of specific contexts if the study involves more than one case). Those multiple perspectives may come from multiple data collection methods, but they may also derive from multiple accounts - collected using a single method from people with different perspectives on what is being observed. In these circumstances, the sample design is structured around context(s) rather than around a series of individual participants. (p. 52)

Across modern academic disciplines, researchers engage North American Muslim counterpublics through familiar typologies - the traditionalist-modernist and salafi-sufi are common dichotomies found in the literature. Yet, as I have argued in Chapter 3, the traditionalist-modernist or salafi-sufi contentions are not very helpful analytical categories in the way they recast emic nomenclature that very often favour modernist perspectives. Zareena Grewal's (2013, p. 185) typology that categorizes methods of engagement with classical Islamic tradition - formalism, pragmatism and reformism - are more inclusive and compelling paradigms to frame my research. Grewal's typology, though more analytically useful[33], still offers very broad categories making it difficult to study 'cases' with depth. Consequently, I have opted to study two organizations - Ta'leef Collective and the el-Tawhid Juma Circle - that provide the boundedness required of a coherent case study. These are two very different but equally compelling cases because they represent distinct perspectives within North American Muslim counterpublics that, as I argue, respond to similar structural tensions. Though neither is internally monolithic, they are nevertheless organizations (or, in

[33] I consider this typology in more detail in Chapter 6: Discussion.

the model of religious economy, firms) that are *bounded systems*. It is this boundedness that makes them both viable case studies, for as Robert Stake (2000) notes,

> If we are moved to study it, the case is almost certainly going to be a functioning specific. The case is a "bounded system" (Flood, as reported in Fals Borda,]998). In the social sciences and human services, the case has working parts; it is purposive; it often has a self. It is an integrated system….Its behavior is patterned. Coherence and sequence are prominent. It is common to recognize that certain features are within the system, within the boundaries of the case, and other features outside. Some are significant as context...it is not always easy for the case researcher to say where the [case] ends and the environment begins. But boundedness and behavior patterns are useful concepts for specifying the case (Stake, 1988). (p. 135)

The questions outlined at the beginning of this chapter touch on large phenomena like 'structural tensions' within ambiguously defined 'Muslim communities.' The selected cases, therefore, are important to investigate not only for their intrinsic significance, but for their potential to unearth broader implications that impact not just their own organizations, but other organizations and individuals as well. Ta'leef Collective and the el-Tawhid Juma Circle, therefore are *instrumental case studies* because through careful consideration of their particularities, they

> provide insight into an issue...the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else. The case still is looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps the researcher to pursue the external interest...Here the choice of case is made to advance understanding of that other interest. (Stake, 2000, p. 135)

The research imperative for instrumental case studies is to extrapolate from the particular to the general, but as Gina Grandy (2010, p. 474) warns, this form of qualitative inquiry does not "permit generalization in a statistical sense." Nevertheless, through identifying patterns and themes within and among cases, it is possible to locate the mobility of case findings for consideration in other similar contexts. Since instrumental case studies, unlike intrinsic case studies, are bounded to broader imperatives, the findings reported in the following chapter will focus "less on the complexity of the case[s]" and "more on the specifics related to the research question[s]" (p. 474).

Stake (2000) highlights that a generative case study must be characterized by a researcher "spending extended time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on" (p. 150). Formally,

this study has been an ongoing project for nearly two years during which I have had the opportunity to not only investigate each case with some depth, I was also afforded the opportunity to observe them develop and respond to emerging contexts. Informally, I have been an observer of these cases for much longer - as I mentioned to one of my interviewees, El-Farouk Khaki, I recall hearing rumblings about his community work in my pre-teens. My other interviewee, Usama Canon, I first encountered at a spiritual retreat as a fifteen year-old in 2002. The past two years of formal engagement with each case extends the prior fifteen years of informal engagement. In a sense, this research project reflexively speaks into worlds I inhabited as a pre-teen and teenager, when I first encountered my subjects.

Methods of Obtaining Data

Though an instrumental case study is tightly bound to its research questions, collecting data to adequately represent it is still challenging. As Stake describes, a researcher seeks "to see what is ordinary in happenings, in settings, in expressions of value" and to do so must "accept, develop, and use the distinctive expression (of the particular case) in order to detect and study the common" (2000, p. 150). Even though my familiarity with both cases extends well beyond my formal study of them, the demand for this level of analysis requires that I consider details of the cases I have not casually encountered, and it is by obtaining data through mixed media that will render this an effectual 'study of the common.' The data in each case study surveyed in Chapter 5 come from various sources, including newspaper articles, published books, academic articles, social media posts, television interviews, video vignettes, audio podcasts, and blog posts. Most significantly, however, much of the data emerges from one-to-one, in-depth interviews I conducted with the organizational leaders. Interviews are not just an effective method to construct coherent case studies, but they are recognized as the accepted method to study community in general. "Although the notion of 'community' enjoys the dubious distinction as one the most frequently and variably used terms in social science," John G. Bruhn (2011) points out, "there is a relatively standardized rule-of-thumb methodology used in studying communities ranging from participant observation through interviews and/or questionnaires to the analysis of documents" (p. 13).

Rather than deploying questionnaires or tightly structured interviews to obtain data, I opted for less structured, open discussions. To ensure some level of consistency, each discussion I conducted was preloaded with the same set of initial questions that, rather than dictate a precise course, broadly shaped the dialogue. This was done in hope that it would reproduce "a fundamental process through which knowledge about the social world is

constructed in normal human interaction" (Legard et al., 2003, p. 138). The open interview form is a conversation in the form of a journey. As the interviewer, I am, as Steinar Kvale (1996, p. 3) says, "the traveler…[who] asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as 'wandering together with'" (as cited in Legard et al., 2003, p. 139). Nevertheless, since in-depth interviews have clarity about the objective and the roles of the interviewer and interviewee, this "conversation with a purpose" appears naturalistic, but bears "little resemblance to an everyday conversation" (p. 138).

In-depth interviewing is a prominent form of data collection in qualitative studies. For my purposes it foregrounds both the personal histories and conceptualizations of the thought leaders I interview. Their perspectives on the contours of community, authority, religious exchange, are not just manifest in the common occurrences of the firms they lead, but also in the discourse they present, or in the ideas the hold which have not yet translated into organizational action. Speaking to your subjects and to ascertain their perspectives and personal accounts is

> seen as having central importance in social research because of the power of language to illuminate meaning: [T]he expressive power of language provides the most important resource for accounts. A crucial feature of language is its capacity to present descriptions, explanations, and evaluations of almost infinite variety about any aspect of the world, including itself. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:126). (p. 138)

The interviews I conducted, combined with newspaper articles, published books, academic articles, social media posts, television interviews, video vignettes, audio podcasts, and blog posts, offer a rich tapestry of data to ultimately develop a thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Between the Specific and General: Study Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is its own self-sustaining research tradition, but the apparent verifiability and reliability of quantitative studies do impact the discourse on methodology. This is no more evident than on the question of generalization: while the quantitative research community holds up statistical thresholds before generalizations can be made, qualitative researchers are not subject to a similar set of seemingly rigorous standards. It is evident, of course, that "qualitative research cannot be generalised on a statistical basis" because "it is not the prevalence of particular views or experiences, nor the extent of their location within

particular parts of the sample, about which wider inference can be drawn" (Lewis and Ritche, 2003, p. 269). Stake (2000, p. 140) questions even the impetus for generalizations, suggesting that researchers' preference for instrumental case studies is "as if intrinsic study of a particular case is not as important as studies to obtain generalizations pertaining to population cases." Stake sees the qualitative pursuit of 'scientific theory' undermining the potential to deeply reveal "a valued particular, as it is in biography, institutional self-study, program evaluation, therapeutic practice, and many lines of work" (p. 140). Despite Stake's contention that generalization need not be the a priori objective of qualitative studies, well-designed instrumental case studies and their "content or 'map' of the range of views, experiences, outcomes...the factors and circumstances that shape and influence them...can be inferred to the researched population" (Lewis and Ritche, 2003, p. 269). This extrapolation should not, of course, fall into the philosophical trappings of empiricism and must acknowledge the inevitable variance possible within the parent population, but a responsible qualitative generalization "is at the level of categories, concepts and explanations" (p. 269).

Offering careful generalizations with a level of reliability and validity requires a qualitative form of rigor. A researcher must demonstrate the "sturdiness of a finding, beyond just the study sample, that links questions about reliability to those surrounding generalisation...this is not to question the existence of the phenomena itself but rather to acknowledge that other factors may exist which will affect its potential for replication" (Lewis and Ritche, 2003, p. 272). This study cannot perfectly represent all of the structural tensions nor all of the frameworks contributing to the many creative responses developing in Muslim communities, but the shared histories and debates outlined in the Chapter 2 do suggest that there is enough in common to offer non-statistical observations and explanations.

Case study selection is an important consideration for both reliability and validity: are the cases in question symbolically representative of the range of possibilities within the parent population? On its own, this is a difficult question to exhaust, but it is especially difficult for my study because one of my research objectives is to question the limits of this parent population, namely, the "Muslim community." To mitigate this, I have framed the target population as the previously outlined notion of the 'North American Muslim counterpublic'.[34] Certainly two case studies cannot fully represent every possibility within this dynamic counterpublic. Yet Ta'leef Collective and the el-Tawhid Juma Circle have been prominent objects of debate within the counterpublic for several years, and have been shaped

[34] See Chapter 2: Literature Review & Historical Context, *From Mosque Communities to Counterpublics*

and altered by that discourse. To the extent that they are each dialectically imprinted by the North American Muslim counterpublic, I contend that they are symbolically representative of the parent population.

Thematic Analysis

Just as the methods to obtain data must meet the mandate set by the research questions, so too must the methods of analysis. Qualitative research itself lends itself to the exploration of recurring phenomena and themes, and this study recasts that inflection. A thematic framework

> is used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories. As such, each study has a distinct thematic framework comprising a series of main themes, subdivided by a succession of related subtopics. These evolve and are refined through familiarisation with the raw data and cross- sectional labelling. Once it is judged to be comprehensive, each main theme is displayed or 'charted' in its own matrix, where every respondent is allocated a row and each column denotes a separate subtopic. Data from each case is then synthesised within the appropriate part(s) of the thematic framework. (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 220)

This study uses a variety of data sources, from audio interviews to video vignettes, and from published academic books to blog posts. To receive, assess and then analyze these varying data sources in a way that produced coherent case studies, I indexed and triangulated the array of data. Indexing and triangulation are methods of data organization that not only render the study's findings more comprehensible for thematic analysis, but also further contribute to the study's reliability and validity. Coding is an oft-used term to describe data organization, but I have opted to refer this early stage analysis as 'indexing', because as Ritchie et al. (2003) note, the word

> more accurately portrays the status of the categories and the way in which they 'fit' the data. When applying an index, it simply shows which theme or concept is being mentioned or referred to within a particular section of the data, in much the same way that a subject index at the back of a book works. The term coding, on the other hand, often refers to a process of capturing dimensions or content that has already been more precisely defined and labelled, as in coding open-ended answers in a questionnaire. This level of precision is neither intended nor often appropriate at an early stage of the matic allocation which is why the term indexing is seen as preferable. (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 224)

Once I had indexed the data, I then triangulated emerging themes between data sources. Triangulation is a researcher's relay of nascent themes between various data sources and it "really pays off," as Michael Quinn Patton (2002, p. 566) suggests, "not only in providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding to credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn out of sources" (as cited in Lewis and Ritchie, 2003, p. 276). To analyze the data I collected on Ta'leef and el-Tawhid, I employed both source triangulation, "comparing data from different qualitative methods," and theory triangulation, "looking at data from different theoretical perspectives" (p. 276). Following triangulation, the now more concrete themes were sorted and then were were synthesized into summaries. Much of the following chapter is a the result of this process.

Equipped now with this rich and varied array of thematically categorized data, my observations and thematic gleanings were filtered through the model of religious economy. Ritchie et al. (2003), notes:

> Where researchers are interested in a particular field or body of literature, or where they are committed to a particular theoretical perspective, they may wish to relate their local findings to a broader context and develop 'local' explanations in accordance with their chosen theoretical or analytical framework. For example, the researcher may employ established theoretical concepts such as 'socialisation', 'gender stereotyping' or 'deviance career' to explain patterns within their study. Alternatively, researchers may decide that their study is a particular case of a broader phenomenon and apply theoretical explanations to account for the findings of their own research. (p. 255)

Both Ta'leef and el-Tawhid are instrumental case studies that I investigate in order to analytically respond to the broad questions about North American Muslim counterpublics shaping this study. These are significant questions to me not only academically, but also professionally and personally; the research questions I constructed and my choice to use the model of religious economy illustrate this. "Because the critical issues are more likely to be known in advance and following disciplinary expectations," Stake (2000, p. 140 - 141) argues, instrumental case design "can take greater advantage of already developed instruments and preconceived coding schemes." The model of religious economies is an already developed theoretical model with its own preconceived coding scheme, and this advantageously contributed to the analysis outlined in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 - The Case Studies:
Confluent Tensions

In Ramadan 2011, Aman Ali and Bassam Tariq went on a whirlwind tour across the United States, visiting thirty different mosques in thirty days. Only four days into their 'mosque tour,' they were compelled to visit a place that was, in fact, not a mosque: "I've been to hundreds of mosques in my lifetime, but nothing like this," writes Aman Ali (2011) on his first encounter at Ta'leef Collective. "Almost every person in this room, if they were to step foot inside a mosque, they'd get dirty looks. Heck, if I were in the mosque and saw them, I bet I might even give some of them a look or two. But it was something comforting about this place that didn't make that an issue at all. I had to find out why." A little over two-weeks later, Ali and Tariq were on the other side of the country in Washington D.C. There, they interviewed Daiyee Abdullah, the imam of a 'makeshift mosque' in a public library. Unlike other blog entries, this one begins with a lengthy 'frequently asked questions' piece, in which they justify covering Abdullah and his mosque on the tour - Abdullah is often referred to as 'the only openly gay imam of America' (Khan, 2013) so the post was sure to ignite the Muslim social mediasphere. Tariq preempted the inevitable questions in his FAQ:

> We are looking to share compelling and relevant stories about Muslims in America. We have celebrated those in the mainstream Muslim community and have also highlighted communities that would be considered on "the fringe." It was important for us to meet someone from the Queer Muslim community because they exist and their story is an important one. Do I necessarily have to agree with their beliefs and values? No, but I should respect it. There are countless stories that we have covered this year on communities or people we wouldn't see eye-to-eye with and that's what this year's challenge has been for us. It is for us to step into these difficult conversations and to try to empathize and understand where the other is coming from. That's the only way we can climb out of our own ignorance and celebrate our shared human experiences. (Tariq, 2011)

On their tour, Ali and Tariq sought to capture stories as diverse as the ones they encountered at Ta'leef in San Francisco and the so-called 'gay imam of America.' The aim of this chapter is similar. What does an organization that began as an offshoot of a traditional Islamic seminary have in common with an LGBTQ-affirming mosque in Canada? The following pages seek to address that question.

This chapter is a summary of the data collected over the course of this study's two-

year research process. The findings are organized into two broad categories. First, by piecing together the personal narrative of each founder, I offer the founding narratives of each case study. Second, I explore five themes - three tensions and two responses - that were identified using the thematic framework outlined in Chapter 4. The following pages seek to address the first two questions of this study, namely, 'what are the perceived structural tensions in North American Muslim communities?' and 'what frameworks inform the responses to these tensions?' The latter question requires exploring the genealogy of each organization, itself in relation to the founder's personal narrative.

The Founding Narratives

In my conversations with the founders of el-Tawhid Juma Circle/Unity Mosque and Ta'leef Collective, I encountered narratives that extended well beyond the genesis of the two organizations. Instead, my discussions with them linked me back to personal narratives that begin in post-colonial Tanzania and post-civil rights era America. In Chapter 2, I suggested that the story of Islam in North America is set to an anti-colonial backdrop. The following narratives corroborate that suggestion. In their stories one encounters displaced diasporic communities, decedents of mixed white-indigenous-black american ancestors, LGBTQ activism, and black nationalist movements. Both El-Farouk and Usama's stories have been told in other places - television interviews, published books, podcasts, and web features. Some of the data you will see compiled in this chapter comes from those helpful sources, but my intention here is not to simply retell stories that can found in other places. Instead, I seek to capture these leaders' encounters with 'community,' especially 'Muslim community,' and how those encounters have been absorbed into the narrative that shapes their community work.

El-Farouk Khaki

El-Farouk Khaki self-identifies as "a queer African Muslim man of color, a feminist and an immigrant...brown skinned from Black Africa and...born into a small Muslim community...that has been traditionally marginalized by the mainstream" (Jama, 2011). Khaki was born in Tanzania in 1963, shortly after the country won its independence from Britain. His family was part of a diasporic community of East African Khoja Ismailis[35] but

[35] In general, Ismailis self-identify as Shia Muslims who
believe that the rightful successor to the Prophet Muhammad was his son-in-law and cousin Ali, and therefore only direct descendant of the Prophet were entitled to become Imam - the leader of the Muslim Community. The Shia split over the issue of succession in the eighth-century, following the death of the the fifth imam. The Ismailis recognized Ismail as their sixth imam, while the followers of

his family inclined to Sunni Islam after his father performed *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) a year after El-Farouk's birth. Khaki's earliest memory of life in local Muslim community was marked by exclusion -

> My first memories in Muslim community maybe [is] when I was about 6 years old and it was back in Tanzania. It was Eid al-Fitr and some of the neighbours' kids were going to this place for Eid and they invited me to go along. I remember going to all of [homes] of these different kids' relatives...and they [were all gifted] money and I got nothing. I remember coming home and being really sad. My mother gave me my Eidi [gift on money] as a way to cheer me up, because, you know, of all those houses I went to, nobody even gave me a shilling. And so that is pretty hard for a 6-year-old child to be with other children sort of in their homes or approximately for everybody to be getting something, but you are not getting anything. (Khaki, 2016)

Soon after Khaki's disappointing Eid experience, his family was forced to flee Tanzania. His father, a member of the Tanzanian independence movement, faced the real possibility of repression after the country's transition to a one-party dictatorship (Jama, 2011). Khaki's family moved to Vancouver, BC, where, in his teens, he realized that he was gay: "I grew up in a family that was quite loving and quite liberal," he says, "but I hoped and...prayed it would go way [but] it didn't" (Fanny Kiefer, 2011). Through his family's community work, Khaki's activism would also emerge in his teens:

> My dad was an activist and so as a family we were always engaged in community development: events, planning, event hosting, organising, pulling people together so on some level I would say that my earliest memories of that, of actively helping dad and mom would have been when I was about 10 or 11. I started public speaking when I was maybe 14 or 15, sitting on panels, giving presentations, etc. In 1986 I organised a Muslim service at Expo '86 at the interfaith pavilion. (Khaki, 2016)

In the 1980s, as a student at the University of British Columbia, Khaki and a colleague would revive the university's defunct Muslim Students Association (MSA). At their first organized Friday prayer, Khaki recalls an encounter with 'Immigrant Islam'[36] -

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> what subsequently became the majority 'twelver' branch of the Shi'ite faith followed a rival successor. (...) In the nineteenth century many of the Indian Ismailis known as Khojas migrated to Zanzibar. They had been encouraged to do so by the Sultan of Oman and Zanzibar who was Keen to increase trade with the subcontinent. from Zanzibar many Kohjas Migrated to the mainland of East Africa, establishing communities in Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Kampala and Tanga, where they prospered as business people. (Bowen, 2014, p. 166, 170)

[36] See Chapter 2: Literature Review and Historical Context, *Black Religion, Proto-Islam and Immigrant Islam*

> On the first Friday it just so happened that there was a new shipment; one of the first [arrivals] of Arab students, there was a crew of Libyans that arrived. My name is El-Farouk, it is not John and I [was] one of the two people who put together the Friday prayer. And here I have somebody asking me if I am Muslim because I am not doing *wudu* [washing before prayer] the way that he thinks I should be doing it. When I [said] I am [Muslim], he [asked] me if my father was Muslim. (Khaki, 2016)

Khaki's experience at the MSA was corroborated at the mosques he visited in the city, where he faced the superiority complexes of Arab and South Asian ethnocultural groups:

> When I speak of Arab superiority, it is this kind of ignorance that somehow, if you are not Arabised, you are not authentically Muslim...when you speak of [the South Asia superiority complex] you are speaking of India and Pakistan. [From that perspective] everybody else is out of South Asia. "Oh you are Bengali? Oh you are Sri Lankan? You are not really authentically South Asian" So I would go to the mosque and I would have people tell me that it was unfortunate that I did not speak my mother tongue, meaning that I didn't speak Urdu. It's not my mother tongue, you know. (Khaki, 2016)

While living in Vancouver, Eid prayer was the one Muslim community event in which Khaki found a reprieve from its "suffocatingly patriarchal...setting"

> The Eid's were one place where you actually saw women and they seemed a little bit less suffocated when it came to gender apartheid. And what you did see was a wider mix of people because people who wouldn't normally come to the Mosque would come for Eid prayers. (Khaki, 2016)

As described in Chapter 2, once local Muslim organizations experience an influx of immigrants from the Muslim-majority world, its character and composition shifts. For Khaki, once the MSA "went traditional" he began "to reach out to the misfits, whether they were misfits because they came from the wrong ethnic or racial community or they were misfits because their understanding or interpretations or practice, or because of their sexual orientation or because they were converts or whatever, just people who didn't fit the prevailing or the dominant narrative" (Khaki, 2016). Khaki kept organizing after he moved to Toronto. After meeting LGBT-identified Muslims "who came from a variety of different Muslim traditions" he knew that he was not alone, but socially "that was [his] reality." In 1991, Khaki established a social support network for lesbian and gay Muslims - a bold move, since even the broader discourse about lesbian and gay rights was relatively nascent in the 1990s:

> You have to remember where Canada was in the late 80's, early 90's with LGBT issues. We didn't even have human rights coverage under all the provincial legislation. So even Canadian society [was] in a very different place. It [was] not where it is today. We now have openly queer affirming churches [but] these conversations [in Christian communities] were only beginning in the early 1990's. (Khaki, 2016)

In 1991, Khaki's 'organizing for misfits' precipitated in him establishing Min 'Alaq:

> *"Min 'Alaq"* coming from the verse in 'Alaq [Qur'an 96:2] -"we created you from a clot of congealed blood." But nobody understood the reference. For the first month people, even the Muslims, [were] like 'What's *min alaq* man?' It's my favourite verse, but hey, I guess it's not yours. So I changed it to Salaam within one or two months. I was the only organiser. (Khaki, 2016)

Eventually, Khaki changed the name of the organization to Salaam Social Support Group for Lesbian and Gay Muslims. The genesis of *Min Alaq* and *Salaam* is an important episode in the story of Muslim communities in Canada. Abdullah Hakim Quick, an imam in the Toronto area and especially prominent in the 1990s, once retold the story as follows:

> They called me up at the time when I was Imam in one of the masjids, and they called me and they said 'Mr. Hakim, there's a new organisation, this one is called Min 'Alaq.' Note they always talk about these blood clots, things in min 'alaq. We said, 'what is this organisation?' They said 'it is Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual Islamic support group.' They want a new tafsir of Surah Hud. They want the story of Lut told in another way so it's politically correct. And they said 'What is the Islamic position?' (Islam On Demand, 2009)

"This narrative, that Abdullah Hakim Quick has," Khaki says, "that somebody went to him, and asked for a new tafsir…nobody went to him. I know that because if anyone had it would have been me" (Khaki, 2016). For his part, Quick seems to have been referring to the newspaper that he says contacted him about the Khaki's new organization: "I told them put my name in the paper. The punishment is death and I'm not gonna change this religion" (Islam On Demand, 2009). Quick has since recanted his position: "Many years ago I made hurtful comments against homosexuals for which I have apologized. My views have evolved over the years. I am fully committed to peaceful coexistence and respect among all people" (CBC News, 2016). Still, Quick's initial comments seem to be emblematic of the derision LGBTQ-identifying Muslims saw emanating from Muslim communities in the early 1990s.

Khaki received death threats after he published an article in the University of Toronto's student newspaper about Salaam. This, combined with a lack of volunteer leaders

to help him carry out the organization's mission, led to him disbanding the organization in 1993, noting that there was an obvious need for such work but “it was not the right time” for it to be met organizationally (Khaki, 2016). Meanwhile, Khaki’s Eid experiences were much less fulfilling than they were in Vancouver:

> I remember going to the CNE (Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto) for one Eid and I felt so lonely after that I decided I would never go back there again, because I just didn't know anybody. A few people wished me a happy Eid, but I also got lots of looks, lots of stares and I [thought], I don’t know who anybody is here and I have nothing in common with anybody. 10,000 people...but they are not people that I associate with or that I hang out with, but [there was] just….a warm Eid greeting, but that is all it was. (Khaki, 2016)

Focused on establishing his new law firm, Khaki was relatively less active in the mid-1990s. Finally, with the advent of the internet, a group of Muslims in New York, inspired by the Salaam example, established Al-Fatiha Foundation. For his part, Khaki wanted little to do with it.

> I wasn't really connected, but I caught some glimmers of it and I thought, is this a set up? I was so traumatised by what had happened in 1993, I had actually really pulled myself away from most Muslim stuff. (Khaki, 2016)

Eventually, Khaki would join Al-Fatiha after a chapter opened in Toronto and two years later, reclaimed its original name, Salaam. This time, however, the organization had a new descriptor: Salaam Queer Muslim Community. “I suggested the word ‘community,”’ Khaki notes,

> because it was, and continues to be, an aspiration for the creation of a network of people with a sense of belonging - something I believe to be necessary and vital for people who are often taught to hate themselves in God’s name from early childhood because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. (Jama, 2011)

Salaam has since become a nationwide network ‘community’ for “Muslim queer/trans people who identify with Islam ritually, culturally, spiritually, or religiously.” In 2009, El-Farouk Khaki, with his partner, Troy Jackson, and friend, Laury Silvers, launched the el-Tawhid Juma Circle or Unity Mosque as a local prayer space. A lifelong activist, Khaki preferred to build something new than continue to only discuss and debate about it online:

> To be honest with you, I was just...tired with this liberal, left-centre bellyaching about not having mosques that connect to our values. Not having mosques that engage our culture and our social context. By this time we had Facebook, but it was the same

conversations 'Why are our mosques so misogynist?' 'Why are our Imams so uneducated?' Nobody is going to build a space for you if you are not going to do it for yourself, because clearly, no one has been doing it. (Khaki, 2016)

Usama Canon

Born in Campbell, California, in 1977, Whitney Cannon[37] was raised in a multiracial family in the Bay Area with a white mother and a father with mixed black, Cherokee and Blackfoot ancestry. "Had my parents been married 10 years [before my birth]," Canon reflects, "their marriage and my birth would have been illegal in 16 of the 50 United States" (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013). Light skinned, he grew up experiencing a racial interspace with access to the internal discourse of white America:

> I would hear people drop the "N" word not knowing that my father was black. I saw a side of the underbelly, so to speak, of white privilege as an African American who could [physically] pass by white standards. I think that probably most immediately informs my choice to identify with my black side more than my white side. (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013)

Canon's father grew up a devout Baptist and his mother at one point converted to Mormonism, but by the time they were raising their children they were only nominally Christian. Today, Canon credits his capacity to identify within a faith tradition to the absence of overbearing dogmatism at home: "I never had religion shoved down my throat," Canon recollects. "I don't remember getting told about heaven or hell or you're going to go to hell or God's going to be mad at you when I was a child" (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013). While attending a multicultural suburban high school in the 1990s, Canon first engaged in community organizing:

> The school failed to announce Cinco de Mayo, the famous Mexican holiday [commemorating the Mexican victory over French armies in 1862]...We had a large Latino population, Mexican particularly at our school, Westmont High in Campbell, San Jose, [so] we literally occupied the cafeteria. We marched out of fifth period and...all the colored folk in our school...[got] together and we marched on the school. The dean came and the principal came and they [tried] to...appease this angry colored force at the high school, speaking truth to power. (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013)

[37] Canon's legal name remains Whitney Cannon, though he is publically known by the name he adopted after his conversion to Islam, Usama.

The students' march, in which Canon was a leader, led to the formation of a "Unity Through Diversity" student club that became a

> space for the blacks, Latinos, the mestizos, the mixed people, people of color to have the space to talk about what that meant vis-à-vis a majority, vis-à-vis a power structure. That was my high school experience, and the music we listened to and the things we celebrated were very much socially resistant. (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013)

Canon's youth was marked by the influence of 1990s socially conscious hip hop. His older brother, Christian, who would later become a music producer, was similarly impacted by the movement and eventually became an active member of the Nation of Islam's community in San Jose. To say that Whitney looked up to Christian would, to Whitney's recollection, be "a gross understatement" (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013). Following his brother's lead, Whitney began to identify as a member of the Nation of Islam, unconvinced by its theology but moved by its resistance to the white supremacy that had left an indelible mark on his family. Christian and Whitney's great-grandfather "was lynched by the [Klu Klux] Klan in front of his daughters," Whitney recounts (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013). Still, Whitney was never able to participate fully in the Nation due to his father's strong opposition to its politics. Often, Whitney would attend meetings in secret, but eventually, the brothers' affiliation with the group led to serious tension at home:

> My parents were actually separated at one point because of my mother's support of my brother taking me to the Nation meetings. That's how tense that was for my family. (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013)

"My mother literally picked up, left the house and lived away from my father for several months" Canon remembers, "because of her defense of our connection to the Nation of Islam" (Canon, 2015). Eventually, Christian transitioned to Sunni Islam, taking on the Arabic name Anas. "He said to me," Canon recollects, "remember that your relationship with God is an individual relationship between you and Him" and "everybody has a dual, another, except Allah. Only Allah is One. Ultimately, absolutely One" (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013). Deeply impacted by his brother's monotheism, Whitney began to informally explore Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Rastafarianism; as a freshman in college, Whitney's encounter with another religious seeker, Brian Davis, would eventually lead to their mutual conversion to Islam. Connecting over their common interests, Davis would become Muslim after Whitney shared his brother Anas's (previously Christian) story to Islam and after Davis himself read the Qur'anic birth narrative of Jesus. Davis called Canon on Thursday September 5, 1996 and invited him to Friday prayer. The next day at the Muslim Community Association of the San

Francisco Bay Area (MCA), a large suburban mosque in Silicon Valley, Whitney officially embraced Islam. The conversion was not pre-planned, but in many ways, it was the culmination of a journey that began years earlier in high school. It was Canon's first encounter with a predominantly immigrant mosque. "Looking back on it now," Canon reflects,

> with the way our life experiences colour our memories, I wouldn't have done my *shahāda*[38] at MCA. I would have done it at [the predominantly African American mosque in Oakland], Masjidul Waritheen. Doing it at MCA was perfect in one sense because, God made it happen in the way it happened for a reason. At that time, it felt like a very positive experience. There were so many people there. It was nice, but...had I brought my mom, there's no way she could have walked into the front of the mosque with me. People would have been up in arms. I couldn't see the women. I didn't know where the women were. That's very strange to me now. (Canon, 2015).

A week thereafter, Whitney's close friend from high school and fellow Unity Through Diversity student club leader, John Rhodus, would also convert at MCA.

Beyond their public conversions to Islam, Canon, Davis and Rhodus's experience in the Muslim community was not moderated by mosques in the Bay Area. Instead, they spent much of their time in Muslim homes where they were hosted by community 'aunties' and 'uncles' "who cut apples for you, peeled oranges for you, [fed you] with their hands. [We'd] never seen anyone like these people." Canon recounts being enraptured by "the amount of love, the amount of generosity and the amount of kindness" the elders showed him and his friends (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013). At the home of one the community uncles, an Irish American Muslim, Muhammad Abdul Bari, the three new converts would meet an emerging Muslim leader and scholar (also a convert), Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, who had recently returned to the United States after several years studying abroad. Though Hanson was quickly gaining in popularity as a national Muslim leader, locally he taught 19-year-old Whitney his first lesson in Arabic. Canon still keeps a copy of his first lesson on the Arabic alphabet on his desk today at Ta'leef Collective.

Zareena Grewal (2013) illustrates the huge impact Hamza Yusuf had on the Muslim American counterpublic, inspiring an entire generation of student-travellers to the Muslim-majority world seeking 'traditional Islamic knowledge.' That impact was also felt closer to

[38] *Shahāda* is the first pillar of Islam, the testimony of faith. When used as a direct object, it indicates a person's conversion to Islam.

home when Davis (now Mustafa) and Rhodus (now Yahya) left the United States to pursue Islamic studies abroad. Their absence was felt by Canon:

> All I had [left] was my circle of associates [of] 70-year old Mauritanian shaykhs and 55 year old Irishmen, and 40 year old Syrian engineers. People who, although they were very generous, very noble people, I simply couldn't relate to them, because they were uncles and I was a kid from San Jose. (Davis, 2012e)

As we have seen in El-Farouk Khaki's story, Eid experiences seem to leave an indelible mark on the memories of Muslims navigating through community life. For Whitney, who was now called Usama, this was also true:

> I remember a year or two into my Islam going to an Eid breakfast at someone's house. Then, after we had the breakfast, everybody went with their families to do family stuff. I wasn't married yet. I remember, as the young Muslim bachelor, feeling, 'what am I going to do now?' (Davis, 2012d)

In 1999, Canon followed in the footsteps of his friends and began his own journey through the Muslim-majority world, studying in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. While in Morocco, Canon married the daughter of one his teachers, Shaykh Moulay Hassan Alawi, a student of the renowned Sufi master, Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Habib.

Meanwhile, back in California, Hamza Yusuf's Zaytuna Institute[39] (established in 1996, the same year Canon and his friends converted) had become nationally recognized as a leading institution of Sunni traditional knowledge, and had locally evolved into a sizable community. Today named Zaytuna College, a considerable literature has recently covered America's "first Muslim liberal arts college". What is often glossed over in that literature, however, is the significant community the college's predecessor (Zaytuna Institute) formed in its early years. Located in Hayward, California, Zaytuna Institute functioned simultaneously as a seminary, school, prayer space, publishing house, and digital media producer. Importantly, it also functioned as a community centre. In video archives produced

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[39] For more detailed accounts of Hamza Yusuf and Zaytuna, see Scott Korb's *Light without Fire: The Making of America's First Muslim College* (Beacon Press, 2013) and Zareena Grewal's *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (NYU Press, 2013). Maryam Kashani's Ph.D. dissertation, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims* (The University of Texas at Austin, 2014), "shows how the Islamic discursive tradition is being critically engaged by the scholars and students of Zaytuna College to craft an 'American Islam' based on a shared moral and ethical system that draws from and is relevant to the heterogeneous experiences of diverse Muslims and their material circumstances" (ix). While Kashani's study is primarily an ethnography of Zaytuna College, Kashani coins the term "Zaytuna School" to "to refer to the many institutional formations throughout North America that were influenced by the teachings of Hamza Yusuf in the 1990s towards reinvigorating 'tradition' and focusing not only on the content of Islamic knowledge, but also the form through which it is transmitted" (p. 13). Usama Canon, Mustafa Davis, and Ta'leef Collective fall within that school.

by the Institute, program attendees often described the sense of fraternity and sorority they experienced amongst the people assembled there. The Institute became so central to many of its staff and volunteers that some of them took up residence next door to the Zaytuna grounds.

After returning from his studies abroad, Usama Canon became one of the Zaytuna staff who took up nearby residence. In 2002, he became the director of its outreach program that focused on youth, converts and incarcerated Muslims. Between 2002 and 2005, Canon estimates that he saw around two hundred people embrace Islam after hearing Hamza Yusuf or (resident scholar) Imam Zaid Shakir speak. That growing inflow of new people created what Canon calls "a micro community within [the larger Zaytuna] community" (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013).

When Zaytuna leadership decided to focus on becoming an accredited college in 2005, it had to make the difficult decision to leave the physical grounds and community they had nurtured since 2001. Between all the local and national programming and the significant impact its founders and staff had on the Muslim American counterpublic, "there was a stream within the original Zaytuna experience that was not formally part of the institution," Canon recalls, "this learning Islam by osmosis through just living with the *fuqara'* [spiritual seekers], eating and hanging out" (Canon, 2015). The decision to change direction so decisively toward becoming an accredited college did not sit well with everyone connected to Zaytuna locally, and there was considerable internal opposition to the move (Canon, 2015). For his part, Canon was deferential to decisions of Zaytuna leadership, and at their request he spun the growing outreach program into an independent non-profit. Teaming up again with his friend Brian (now Mustafa) Davis, in 2005 he launched Ta'leef Collective with the expressed objective to

> provide space, provide content, provide companionship that can allow for a healthy understanding and basic realization of Islam. What that means in [plain] English is that we want to make the process of learning about Islam, conversion to Islam, or recommitment to Islam more sustainable in our context. (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013)

For Canon, the word *ta'leef* is a Qur'anic term with a constellation of meanings:

> Ta'leef...means reconciliation. It means bringing hearts together. It means producing that state that is prevalent in the absence of war. It means giving people the ability to manifest goodwill after themselves having experienced it manifested. It means uniting, it means reconciling between that or those two things that appear at first glance to be irreconcilable opposites, which is the state of human psyche and human

souls in a lot of times that we look at ourselves and think, man, I could never get along with this guy. But God in his omnipotent providential power unites people's hearts. (Ahmed and Hasan, 2013)

The narrative that fills the gap between Zaytuna Institute and Zaytuna College made me wonder if Ta'leef may been seeking to capture and reimagine the community that organically formed in that first institution's midst. However, Canon thinks it would be inaccurate to attach those ambitions to the legacy of the Institute itself. "It's at people's homes where the real magic happened...Ta'leef is an attempt to give an organizational body to those very beautiful, very magical experiences that I had in homes with people since I embraced Islam" (Canon, 2015).

Thematic Threads

Over the course of the two years of this study, several key themes emerged that responded to my initial research questions. They were evident in both of the founder's personal narratives as well as the various sources that document their work. The first two questions seek to uncover the tensions and responses in Muslim communities. By indexing both the personal narratives of the case studies' founders as well as exploring their intellectual positions, three confluent tensions and two confluent responses emerged from the data. The tensions identified stem from unmet needs held by a large demographic of self-identifying Muslims, needs that communities and their institutions have misconstrued or, worse, compounded. These tensions are a sense of *exclusion*, *cultural dissonance* and *spiritual dislocation*. Both el-Tawhid and Ta'leef responded to these tensions through *acceptance* and *reimagining Muslim space.*

Tension: *Exclusion*

Of all the themes that emerged in this study, exclusion was the most apparent. Between the founders and their initiatives, they were sometimes discussed in differing ways, but there was much overlap on the topic of gender. Most mosques in North America are deterministically gendered spaces. The mosque is deeply contested and is often the site of many of the tensions covered in this chapter. Its institutional conceptualization will be addressed more directly in Chapter 6, but here it is important to note that it is gendered spaces that favour arrangements for men in which women feel a sense of exclusion. In community debates, this question often leads to arguments about 'separate but equal' spaces that Khaki considers thinly veiled 'gender apartheid':

> Enough of this lie, this same, same, but different, different, you know that is called apartheid...that even in the throngs of prayer, even when we are focused on Allah, we could just turn around and [engage sexually with] a woman that is in front of us or behind us or next to us if she has an ankle showing or if she has got a hair showing. (Khaki, 2016)

Referencing broadly-accepted Muslim cosmology, Khaki wonders aloud how Muslims can consider human beings God's "highest creation" but distrust men's capacity to occupy a non-sexual modality (Khaki, 2016). This sense of exclusion that women experience is evident when women visit the Unity Mosque for the first time:

> A lot of women cry when they come to the mosque, whether they are straight or queer, because their humanity has been so denied in most Muslim spaces - "you go to the basement to pray, pray behind a screen, you have got a hair showing you can't come in here or there is no space for you." (Khaki, 2016)

The Unity Mosque certainly disrupts the conceptualization of a necessarily gendered mosque, but this has yet to translate broadly into other existing institutions. Khaki believes pigeonholing the Unity Mosque as a "gay mosque" can facilitate avoiding the self-critique many Muslim institutions ought to have:

> People calling the el-Tawhid Juma Circle or Unity Mosque the "gay mosque" is actually a way of putting it over there rather than dealing with it over here, which is, there are a lot of straight folk who don't fit, who don't go to mosques...the people that I knew in Vancouver and a lot of the people that I knew initially in Toronto were Muslims who I did not meet at the mosque, I met them in the drama club, in a classroom, in a club, you know, at a party, at a fundraiser for something else, and this is where I met people and a lot of these people didn't even publically identify as being Muslim anymore, because they were so disconnected from the so called visible Muslim community as manifest in our mosque spaces. (Khaki, 2016)

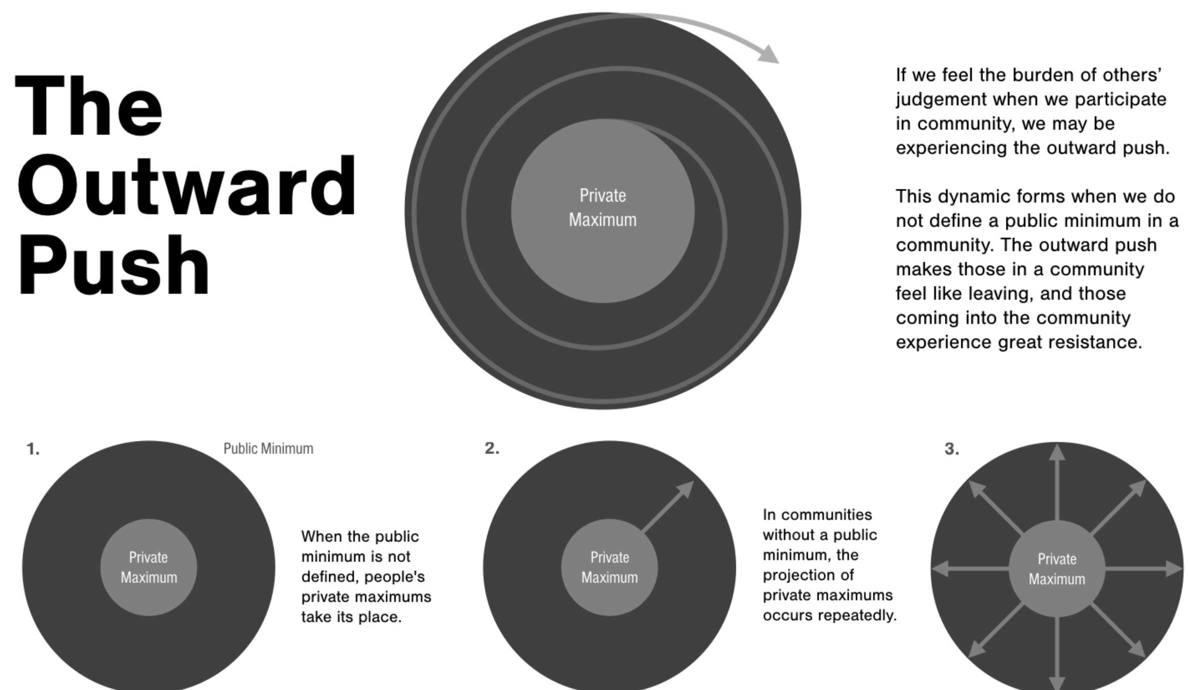
For Usama Canon, the way Muslim spaces in North America are necessarily gendered is also problematic. When I showed Canon an archived video of Zaytuna Institute, he wondered about the gender barrier (moveable, seven-foot high room dividers) in the background of some of the shots. He now considers such a barrier "strange" and simply "doesn't agree with it" (Canon, 2015). Khaki will not "go into any Muslim space [he] feel[s] disrespects women...since most spaces disrespect women as [he] understand[s] disrespect [he doesn't] go into them" (Khaki, 2016). Canon will still enter spaces that are gender separated. He may even teach in them, but he is clear that the predominant forms of gender separation as

practiced throughout Muslim communities in North America is not something he affirms. (Canon, 2015). Canon's perspective on exclusion is informed by his conceptualization of community itself. Citing a presentation by Sherman Jackson to a body of Muslim scholars, Canon and his team at Ta'leef believe that exclusion in the Muslim community has resulted from the undefined borders of that community. Jackson's presentation (informed by legal and political theory, but here pertaining to ethical/communal life) began with the premise that Muslim communities have not defined their border, or "public minimum," which has the effect of falsely universalizing a set of practices to define communities. Over the course of several conversations with Usama Canon, the following Figure (5.1)[40] illustrates the way he and his team view exclusion performing in Muslim communities. Canon and Jackson refer to this dynamic as the "centrifugal force." For simplicity's sake, I have renamed it the 'outward push.'

Figure 5.1: The Outward Push

Tension: *Cultural Dissonance*

Islam in North America has been a project marked by cultural tension. As noted in Chapter 2, whether in dress (members of the Moorish Science Temple and Mufti Muhammad Sadiq donning ostensibly eastern garb) or religious authority (Immigrant Islam universalizing culturally specific forms of religious practice), Muslims have been negotiating cultural norms since well before the 1965 immigration influx. In the case studies, the complexity in



negotiating ethno-cultural, socio-economic, sexual, gender and, of course, religious identities was a recurring theme. This is a tension that is often exacerbated and perpetuated by Muslim community institutions. El-Farouk Khaki points to forms of "cultural domination" in Sunni communities that gave license to the majority South Asian and Arab members whom he would encounter. They would ask aloud, if one could be authentically Muslim without practicing Islam the way it was practiced in their places of origin (Khaki, 2016). For the LGBTQ people he served, this was no more evident than in the early 1990s when he would phone his network to gather for an event. Informed by both religious and cultural understandings of gender and sexuality, Khaki would have tread very lightly when communicating with parents:

> I had a list of [about] 80 people. Every time [we] had an event or reading, somebody would [warn you]: 'this Muhammad Khan, you could phone, but not leave a message, Kareem you could phone, but if his mother picked up the phone and asked if you were gay you had to say no, you couldn't leave a message you could only do this [particular thing].' (Khaki, 2016)

For Usama Canon, he refers again to Sherman Jackson's (2005) work, noting that post-1965, the primary antagonist for Muslims in America shifts from white supremacy to 'the West' writ large. Canon describes the post-immigration reality for Muslims in North America as a "conundrum...because now [these immigrant Muslims were] *in* the West." As for converts, he reflects:

> If African Americans, Latino and white and other converts that are American, American as apple pie, begin to adopt that thinking, it inevitably will lead to some level of...complete confusion. I had a lady ask me in front of a bunch of people, "can you please share with the crowd that it's okay to keep *some* of our American culture?" This is someone who converted to Islam decades ago as a white American convert. And I said, with all due respect, auntie, I would say it's okay to keep *all* of our American culture. The only things we do away with are things that are explicitly prohibited in the Sacred Law. (Davis, 2012a)

Echoing Jackson's distinction between "Immigrant Islam" and "immigrant Muslims," Canon clarifies that this perniciously anti-Western disposition is not empirically limited to Muslims from elsewhere: "[Often], we're not talking about immigrant - convert. A lot of times, it is convert Muslims who perpetuate negative understandings of Islam from their own shortsightedness" (Davis, 2012a). This tension has also presented itself institutionally, in the nature of certain mosques:

> One of the “problems/“challenges” of the masjid is the idea of the ethnic mosque. How often do you go to a place…[and] there’s a Pakistani mosque over here, an Arab mosque over here, maybe an Afghani mosque here, or Fijian mosque [there]. As the lines [in America] become blurred racially and ethnically, that represents a problem for the masajid. Because you have people who established masjids, coming from very specific places with very specific cultures and bringing with them that cultural experience...a lot of times wanting to recreate that. Call it nostalgia, call it return to home, call it an affinity for the religious experience they grew up with...to the architecture, to the smell to the way the imam recites the Qur’an. Not only is it not inherently bad, I think it’s perfectly natural. *Biladi wa in jarat ‘alay ‘azizatu* - my homeland, even if it was was oppressive to me is dear. I think it’s unintelligent and insensitive for people to hate on people for loving their homelands. However, you’ve now come to this place and there’s this new experience and your children are born here. They have different sensibilities, they identify with a completely different experience. You have a generation gap now, where mom and dad, uncle and auntie, our revered elders are thinking and speaking about one thing, and the kids are on this whole other trip, and they’re not really communicating [with each other] a lot of times. (Davis, 2013)

Tension: *Spiritual Dislocation*

One of the texts Ta’leef Collective teaches was written by Usama Canon’s friend and fellow student of Hamza Yusuf, Asad Tarsin. His book, *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide* (Sandala, 2015), is a contextualized guide to normative Sunni life in the West. The book begins by sharing the Qur’anic cosmological perspective on the human story:

> To start at the beginning, at a time before time, every human soul ever created was gathered before God. During that existence, which is detailed in the Qur'an [7:172], God asked us all, “Am I not your Lord?” to which every last one of us responded, “Oh yes! We bear witness.” In the Islamic understanding, each of us has this knowledge on some subconscious level. (Tarsin, 2015, p .4)

The verse Tarsin cites is what Joseph Lumbard (2015, p. 5) calls the “*locus classicus* for the understanding of the covenant in Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam, as well as the Ṣūfī tradition.” Though interpretations of the verse differ, these traditions share a belief that the human soul is primordially connected to the divine. Our time on earth is spent reconciling our distance from that original state.

The challenge that Muslims experience in seeking spiritual fulfillment was a recurring tension that emerged as I indexed my data. Both Khaki and Canon implied that rather than aiding in the process of spiritual reconciliation, Muslim institutions often complicated, hindered or blocked it. I describe this tension as *spiritual dislocation* because it connotes the shared Qur'anic cosmological perspective about the relationship between humanity and the divine, and it denotes the felt disturbance from that original state. Spiritual dislocation is the lack of access to people or spaces that, while promoting 'spiritual progression,' will also receive and embrace people who are 'spiritually digressing.' For Khaki, this begins with the general incapacity for Muslim-identified spaces to receive people as they are, instead requiring that people

> pretend to be somebody that they were not, whether it was in the way they dress or how they present themselves or how they introduce themselves or how they introduce their partners. There are few Muslim identified spaces where there are no gender or other barriers for people's full agency and full participation. (xtraonline, 2014)
>
> I just don't think our Mosques are human friendly, they are not humanist spaces, they are not spaces where the majority of people feel affirmed and validated and feel good about themselves when they leave. (Khaki, 2016)

Khaki challenges the notion that God is so concerned with the minutia of correctness that the divine is rendered "angry" and "tribal" (Khaki, 2016). Nevertheless, as foreboding a theology as that may seem, Khaki sees this rhetoric about God as a mere cloak for power structures within Muslim communities to police behavior:

> We talk about *shirk* [associating partners to God], so what is *shirk*? I have made peace with my God and yet when I go to a mosque I have to hide who I am from [other] humans? So, I am actually more afraid of human beings than I am of God, because I have reconciled with God. When you end a *khutbah* [Friday sermon], you always say 'Allah knows best.' We have to leave the final judgement to Allah, but we create communities and spaces within the Muslim world and in the Muslim community where you are actually more afraid of other human beings than you are of God. And that to me is *shirk*.

The narrative that constructs only specific modalities of religious life as acceptable, Khaki says, not only grants man more power than God, but also makes "Islam a destination rather than a journey" (Khaki, 2016). Usama Canon echoes Khaki's latter sentiments, noting that "Islam is a journey, not an event," but that this reality "can be easily lost in a convoluted

religious discourse" (Davis, 2012b). Canon uses a story to capture both the problem and resolution to the issue of spiritual dislocation in Muslim communities:

> I think every sincere teacher's hope - may God make us sincere - is that they can just be a conduit, they can just be a channel, a means by which God brings about something profound in the people listening or learning. It's not really from them, but it's Allah using them to bring benefit to the people. It's like the man who got up on the pulpit and he looked up around the congregation and just said, "Allah!" and everyone began weeping. That's all he said. Someone came up to him afterward and said, "What's your secret? How do you do it..Everyone was weeping all you did [was look at us and say] 'Allah.'"
>
> [The man responded], "I just looked around the room and realized I was the biggest sinner in the room, I was worse than everyone."
>
> That's a heart that's been humbled. Compare that to someone who thinks they've got the secrets to the universe and they know everything that's wrong with you, and why you're messed up, and they're going to tell you [how to fix yourself]. If you could just be more like them, you'd be saved, you'd be fine. Those are deluded people. A sincere teacher wants to just get out of the way. (Davis, 2012b)

Response: *Acceptance*

To respond to the exclusion experienced in many Muslim communities, the Unity Mosque places no expectation on its congregants. They may be queer or straight, gender-conforming or nonconforming, and even, Muslim or non-Muslim. This unfettered acceptance is the mosque's unique offering. One congregant disclosed how the mosque has facilitated him negotiating his Islam and sexual identity, without disavowing either:

> I came to Canada fleeing another country based on my sexual orientation. Discovering [the Unity Mosque] was so good for me because...not only can I be who I am with my sexual orientation but [I] also [do] not have to leave my religion at the backdoor in order to be who I am. (xtraonline, 2014)

For women especially, Khaki notes, the Unity Mosque is a gender-equal space where, rather than being told to go to the back of the room or underground, they are affirmed through access to the front lines and opportunities to lead prayer (Khaki, 2016).

"Our mantra," reads the Ta'leef Collective website, "'Come as you are, to Islam as it is' says it all. We don't discriminate or judge and believe that dialogue, education and fellowship are integral to individual and collective growth" (Ta'leef Collective, 2017). Khaki and his co-founders of the Unity Mosque, Troy Jackson and Laury Silvers, address the level

of inclusion at Ta'leef in a chapter they co-authored for a book entitled *Struggling in Good Faith: LGBTQI Inclusion from 13 American Religious* (Skylight Paths, 2015). In the chapter, they describe Ta'leef as a "youth-oriented organization" that is "welcoming to queer Muslims. Queer Muslims can attend their meetings with their partners and be open about their identities." This 'welcome,' however, "does not mean the leaders accept them as they are, only that they are making a safe space for them to come and worship" (Khaki et al., 2015, p. 83). This particular form of acceptance[41] is informed by a conceptual framework at Ta'leef that emphasizes the need for a non-universalizing, personal, 'healthy practice' of Islam. Illustrated below in Figure 5.2, the *inward embrace* (the "centripetal force," Canon and Jackson call it) stands in contradistinction to the *outward push* (Figure 5.1). For an *inward embrace*, a community requires a clearly defined 'public minimum' to engender a pull that brings people toward a 'healthy personal practice of Islam.'

[41] Maryam Kashani (2014, p. 99) recounts Canon encountering a question on homosexuality at a Ta'leef gathering:

> One evening at the Ta'leef Collective in Fremont, a future Zaytuna student and recent convert asked Usama Canon, its co-founder about homosexuality in Islam. He prefaced the question with a statement about how his (non-Muslim) cousin had recently come out to him. He wanted to give da'wa to his cousin because he thought he would benefit from Islam as he did, but he was not sure about how his cousin would be received into Islam. Usama responded with a heaviness that displayed his own struggles with this issue that was increasingly relevant in his work with young people and Muslims who felt uncomfortable with the normative spaces of the Muslim community (mosques, homes, and schools, for example). Usama cited the distinction between same-sex desire and the acts of sodomy and adultery, which were unlawful whether committed in a homosexual or heterosexual pairing. He emphasized that there was a consensus regarding such acts, but that this did not condemn the person, nor his desire. Rather it was an opportunity for greater reward in the afterlife should this person be able to refrain from committing such acts. This was an answer I have heard a number of times from different scholars in response to such heartfelt queries. While further discussion of the topic is beyond the scope of this research (and my expertise), I do wonder about alternative ways to consider such issues. Is a reinterpretation of the Qur'an the best strategy for alleviating the stigma and familial and communal limits for Muslims with non-normative gender and sexualities? Are there other possible responses from scholars and Muslim leadership? Also, how can we further distinguish between desire, identity, physical intimacy, and sexual intercourse (which are often assumed to lead into each other in determinate ways) towards other ways of thinking about homosocial relationalities and community?

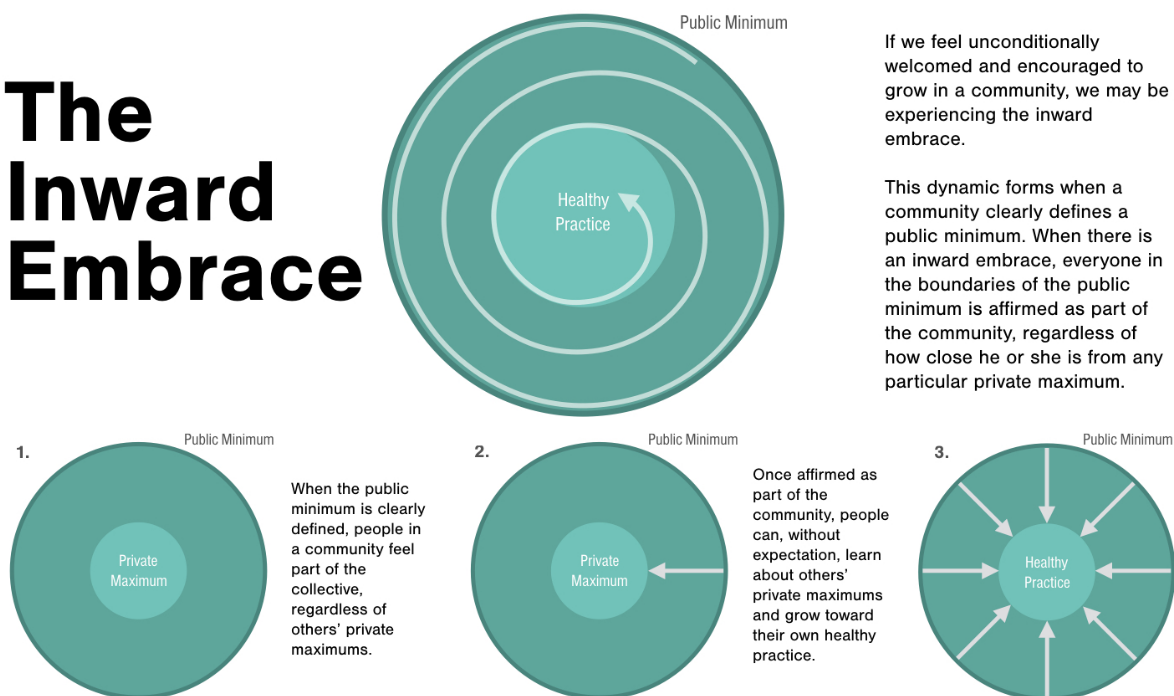


Figure 5.2: The Inward Embrace

"Everyone is welcome," Canon says, "except for an aggressive person" who undermines others' sense of physical and emotional safety (Canon, 2015). At the Unity Mosque, accepting the openness and broad parameters which make it so inclusive seems to be the only expectation. Khaki recounts conversations with several gay Muslim men (usually of Arab origin, he points out) who seek acceptance for themselves but cannot accept praying behind a woman. This differential acceptance is not something Khaki entertains (Khaki, 2016).

The most surprising moment during my interviews was when El-Farouk Khaki discussed sufism. Khaki formally joined a Rifai' sufi[42] community in 2010 (Jama, 2011). The long history attached to those sufi paths, and the acceptance offered within them, offers a layer of authenticity to LGBTQ people's belonging in Muslim community:

> I belong to a sufi community...my shaykh [has a] very low profile, [but there] are other people like Kabir Helminski, Fatima al-Jerrahi, Ibrahim Farajaje who are visible (but are certainly not the only ones who are creating communities that embrace LGBT people). And these are historic Sufi Muslim communities, they are entrenched in a tradition that is over a thousand years old, these are not Western Sufi traditions or so on and so forth, these are entrenched in an Islamic narrative. (Khaki, 2016)

[42] For a detailed account of various approaches to sufism in North America, see Rory Dickson's *Living Sufism in North America: Between Tradition and Transformation* (SUNY Press, 2016).

Response: *Reimagining Muslim Space*

Chapter 2 outlined how 'the mosque' became the religious hub for Muslims in North America. Whenever a locale had a sufficient population of Muslims, the obvious next step was to build a mosque. Mosque building in this fashion was, however, a historical anomaly. In generations past and in other lands encountered by travelling Muslims, other religious institutions such as sufi brotherhoods were the historical means through which Islam spread and was performed locally. In those contexts, mosques were not the first, and certainly not the only, physical space demarcated for community life. For sufis, this often meant dedicated spaces or 'lodges' for their gatherings. Throughout the Muslim-majority world, these 'lodges' had different names but ultimately all provided space for a sufi master, his students and visitors to socially and devotionally gather: *ribats* in North Africa and Spain, *khanqahs* in Central Asia and India, *tekiyyas* in Turkey, *zawiyas* in the Levant.

In Chapter 6, I explore what underpins contestations surrounding Muslim spaces, but here it is important to note that in both of my case studies, reimagining Muslim space was key to responding to the tensions already mentioned in this chapter. For El-Farouk Khaki, this has meant reclaiming the notion of a mosque from the strictures placed upon it by classical Muslim religious authorities:

> Hadith and sunnah [Prophetic tradition] went [incorrect] from being [perceived as] human made to being divine. Well, to me *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence] came about by men. Men who have interposed themselves between God and other Muslims, so this is what God wants and this is what God thinks. I reject that, nobody is infallible. (Khaki, 2016)

By working outside the confines of Islamic jurisprudence, Khaki's approach does not seek to reinterpret the classical tradition, but instead, reimagines the fluidity and openness that he believes characterized the Prophet Muhammad's first mosque in Medina. "The Prophet's mosque, as we know," Khaki says, "was more than just a prayer hall. It was a gathering place, a community centre" (Khaki, 2016) and in that pre-modern sacred space, there were no physical barriers between genders. Nevertheless, as with all spaces, a mosque does have a primary function for Khaki:

> For me, the first and primary function of a mosque is where people can come together to worship and to learn... a prayer space is therapeutic, it is about healing, it is about connecting to your Creator and there is *baraka* [spiritual blessing] in our tradition, there is *baraka* of worship in community. (Khaki, 2016)

It is for these reasons that while Khaki had previously established a 'support network' now called a 'community' (Salaam), he further helped found el-Tawhid Juma Circle and Unity Mosque. A mosque serves a special role in Muslim spiritual life and for Khaki, it is a therapeutic prayer space removed from the purview of Islamic law.

As a student of both Sherman Jackson and Hamza Yusuf, Canon also considers mosques a devotional space, but takes a very different stance on its legal status:

> One of the things that was given specifically to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is that God made the entire earth a place of prayer for him. There are indeed specific places that are...mosques, places of prayer and they have a specific legal ruling within the Islamic tradition. There are certain things that are permissible to do there are [and] there are certain things that are not permissible to do there. There are certain things that are encouraged and meritorious to do in a mosque, and there things that are reprehensible, or frowned upon, or better to be left, etc. But it is primarily intended to be a place of worship, a place of devotion. (Davis, 2012c)

Agreeing with classical Islamic law that constitutes mosques as legally defined spaces, Canon's reimagination of Muslim space is conceptually tied to alternative sacred spaces:

> [The mosque] is not the only place in the world for [devotion]. This is not to take away anything from those places that are specifically dedicated to be mosques, but it's to say, if the whole earth is a mosque, I should actually be, ideally, in a sacred modality wherever I am. As much as we need to create safe sacred spaces, or safe semi-sacred spaces, we also need to create safe social space. Spaces where it can be as hip, as cool, as relevant, as...whatever word you want to use. It can be up to par socially and be completely void of anything impermissible, be completely void of anything predatory, anything poisonous to our souls...I love going to mosques, and I love praying in mosques, and I've prayed at mosques throughout the world. But I don't have a mosque locally that meets my personal, spiritual, social and religious needs in the way that Ta'leef does. And that's not to say that Ta'leef is somehow better than other spaces, [but] to each his own. This is what works for people like me. And what's a person like me? A person who's neither this nor that. I'm mixed, I'm black and I'm white, I'm Muslim but I spent 19 years of my life as a non-Muslim. So when you're not this or that, you want a space that's neither this nor that. It's not totally sacred nor is it totally mundane. (Davis, 2012c)

Though Canon has since stopped referring to Ta'leef as a 'semi-sacred' space (Canon, 2015), what he maintains is the need for devotional and social spaces that are not mosques to

respond to the various tensions explored earlier in this chapter. He is especially inspired by the sufi lodge models previously mentioned, in the ways they combine regular devotion (often in the form of singing sufi poetry), unreserved welcome for guests, and a tireless focus on service (tea and food were often served at the lodges). He sees all of that in the realm of possibilities for a present-day Muslim organizational body like Ta'leef. In fact, in the interim period between the Zaytuna Outreach Program and the official formation of Ta'leef Collective, Canon named his nascent organization, *Zawiya* (Canon, 2015).

Zareena Grewal (2013, p. 185) says progressives like Khaki mistrust much of the content and forms of Islamic pedagogy that sit between contemporary Muslims and Islam's founding texts. Khaki is unconvinced by arguments that shape a mosque into the formations offered within classical traditions. Canon, sitting on this issue as a pragmatist, sees within the content of tradition the possibility for creative solutions while still adhering to 'normative' positions in Islamic law. Despite their differences, however, both Khaki and Canon argue for the need to reimagine the possibilities of Muslim space.

Chapter 6 - Discussion:
Disrupting Functional Monopolies

Much of Chapter 5 considered similarities between my two case studies, Ta'leef Collective and el-Tawhid Juma Circle/Unity Mosque. In this way, the last chapter responded to the first two research questions that shape this study: namely, the tensions in Muslims communities informing creative responses. Through narratives of its founders and the stories of the organizations themselves, I delineated how exclusion, cultural dissonance, and spiritual dislocation led both cases to respond with acceptance and a reimagination of Muslim space. This chapter shifts focus to the study's final question: what implications for the future of Muslim communities accrue from these tensions and responses? Informed by the model of religious economy, I analyze Usama Canon and El-Farouk Khaki's roles as both inheritors and disrupters of tradition. Interrogating the ways Muslims are often analytically homogenized, I argue against conflating the notions of 'counterpublic' and 'community.' I then explore the functional monopolies that undergird much the tensions relayed in Chapter 5. This contextualizes the development of a new conceptualization of Muslim community that distinguishes between *intentional community* and *de facto community*. The chapter closes with a reflection on the imperative of exchange facing Muslim communities

In this chapter, I will refer to Ta'leef Collective, el-Tawhid Juma Circle/Unity Mosque, and other organizational bodies as 'religious firms,' the founders and leaders of these organizations as 'religious entrepreneurs/impresarios,' and the large, discursively bounded collective of Muslims in locales as 'markets.' In these markets, religious entrepreneurs can "access and deploy the various kinds of resources that substantiate religion, resources that may be human or textual, mechanical or symbolic" (Green, 2015, p. 3). These are all terms borrowed from the model of religious economy, a theoretical framework I explore more fully in Chapter 3. There, I highlight several reasons compelling me to use the model as an analytical tool, but it is worth repeating that the framework's deployment here is not meant to reduce or commodify the religious experiences of my subjects. Rather, by focusing on the social dynamics highlighted by the model of religious economy, I hope to leave the truth claims and religious values of my subjects relatively intact.

Religious Impresarios: Inheritors and Disrupters of Tradition

In the October 2013 edition of *Details Magazine*, the (now defunct) men's fashion and lifestyle magazine ran a full-length feature on Carl Lentz, the lead pastor of Hillsong Church, New York City. Hillsong is an Australian-based megachurch that is sometimes called the country's most powerful brand (Hicks, 2012). Lentz is the 'charismatic but down-to-earth' leader of the New York City campus that boasts visits from celebrities like Justin Bieber, Kevin Durant, Selena Gomez as well as thousands of other weekly congregants in Manhattan. Lentz's own magnetic charisma has made him the focus of several media features, including a lengthy interview with Oprah Winfrey (SuperSoul, 2017). In the model of religious economy, Lentz is the quintessential religious impresario, his own personality a draw for many. Rhetorically, Lentz tries to minimize his significance, quickly shifting focus away from him and his church to a faith in Jesus. As an observer, however, it is difficult to overlook the leader's charisma.

In the *Details Magazine* article that featured Lentz, Usama Canon was mentioned as his Muslim correlative. On social media, Canon rejected the framing: "However concerned I am about us cultivating a meaningful relationship with the Creator in a contextually relevant way, 'hipster Islam' and 'retail religion' is the last thing I'm interested in" (Canon, 2013). In my conversation about the magazine's brief mention of him, he rebuffed the suggestion[43] that Ta'leef Collective was seeking to "explore the boundaries of Islam" (Details Magazine, 2013, p. 143). "This isn't about being cool and being hip," Canon counters, "It's about serving people, it's about making sure people are well. It's about trying to get people closer to their Creator" (Davis, 2015). Nevertheless, as is the case with Lentz, it is difficult for an observer to overlook Canon's charisma as a major contributing factor to Ta'leef's success. However undesirable a religious entrepreneur might find this public attention to their personality, it is often unavoidable. Likewise, in his own community, Khaki is admired for his idiosyncratic appeal. In an April 2017 feature on BuzzFeed, Yara El Safi, a congregant at el-Tawhid said of Khaki, "he's super flamboyant, super outspoken, and I was like, that's [how] I need to be" (Mastracci, 2017).

In this way, and in the ways mentioned in Chapter 5, Canon and Khaki are similar. There are other ways, however, in which they are markedly different as religious entrepreneurs. This is most evident in the way Khaki and Canon approach classical Islamic tradition - while both approach it with a critical lens, Canon is far more certain of its general

[43] The article also mischaracterizes Ta'leef as a mosque.

soundness than Khaki. At Ta'leef Collective, there is still a real sense of connection to the classical tradition: its most regular program is a weekly *mawlid* (celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth through communal song) and they teach modified jurisprudence that contextualizes and adapts (as opposed to partially reject and transforms) classical Islamic Law. Echoing his training as a student-traveller, Canon still feels a sense of responsibility to the tradition he inherited: "We have this thing called the Sacred Law….can you do things that are super cool and even really edgy, and not break the rules at all? I believe you can" (Davis, 2014)

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Khaki asserts that much of what Muslims construe today as 'Islamic tradition' is man (not woman) made. He thus rejects the broad spectrum of interpretations he deems patriarchal and heteronormative. Khaki, a lawyer by profession, argues for newly contextualized, modern interpretations of foundational Islamic texts. In a deregulated religious economy, one might assume this counter-dominant interpretive stance would garner significant support. Yet, for Khaki's many years of activism, the congregational size of el-Tawhid is still relatively small. In her gendered critique,[44] Evelyn Bush (2010) argues that religious capital moves favorably in the direction of institutionally sanctioned religious authorities that are historically patriarchal. Thus, Khaki and people of his persuasion face a competitive market that itself partially resists them. Conversely, given his pedigree as a classically-trained student-traveller combined with his general acceptance of classical Islamic Law, Usama Canon enjoys more favorable market conditions. Nevertheless, Khaki's status as a first-to-market religious entrepreneur, who directly engaged questions of gender and sexual normativity well before it permeated dominant discourse, will continue to lend him a sense of authority in the eyes of many.

Religious Debate Doth Not a Community Make

Khaki and Canon are certainly part of a counterpublic, participants in a vibrant debate that largely occurs outside the purview of broader public discourse, only periodically appearing with a short BuzzFeed article or Washington Post article. The notion of the counterpublic also places one of Khaki's religious mentors, Amina Wadud, and Canon's teacher, Hamza Yusuf, in the same sphere of debate. In one sense, Wadud and Yusuf are quite similar: both are American-born converts, important public intellectuals for thousands of self-identifying Muslims in North America, and engaging some of the same source texts.

[44] See Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks, *Religious Economies: An Analytical Model*

The latter places them into a single analytical category of a ‘counterpublic,’ and it is there that their differences are manifest. What a reformist like Wadud might call critical engagement, a formalist like Yusuf might call dismissal.[45] Were public intellectuals with such disparate positions seen within Christianity in North America, one might talk about their denominational affiliation or lack thereof, or perhaps the different church networks in which each thinker was a member. For Islam in North America, however, such different intellectuals are still generally rendered within a single, ambiguously defined, ‘Muslim community,’ a semantic monolith that does little more than highlight Muslims’ status as a minority.

As Zareena Grewal (2013) models, approaching North American Muslims as a ‘counterpublic’ helps illuminate differences amongst paradigms of Islamic tradition. Seeking to approach Islam as a discursive tradition as Grewal does (following Asad), I use her typology of formalist - pragmatist - reformist in this thesis to explain some of my observations. It is one of Grewal’s frequently used shorthands, however, that will help illuminate a conceptual conflation that I contend undergirds much of the tension in Muslim communities in North America. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Grewal says that her “use of the term *US mosque community* is not territorial but shorthand for Muslim American counterpublics that are engaged in common religious debates" (2013, p. 50). True to her word, Grewal does not fall into the trap of earlier studies that over-territorialized Muslims, but her shorthanding counterpublic into mosque community does beg the question: is a *counterpublic* a *community*? The tensions identified in Chapter 5 do not operate primarily on the level of intellectual exchange. Rather, exclusion, cultural dissonance, and spiritual dislocation operate on social, emotional and spiritual planes. None of these function in silos, of course, and even intellectual exchange has some part to play. However, considering the differences between a *counterpublic* and a *community* does raise underlying tensions: Counterpublics are characterized by debates and intellectual tensions, but communities are characterized by relationships and social cohesion. At their best, a counterpublic confirms

[45] Amina Wadud is “an African American Sunni scholar, preacher, and activist. A former student-traveler, Wadud studied Islam at AlAzhar University in Egypt in the eighties. She is the author of a popular, feminist exegesis on the Qur'an, published in 1999 [*Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Oxford University Press], which was widely read in mosque communities in the US and, generally, well received” (Grewal, 2013, p. 317) In her subsequent book, *Inside The Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oneworld, 2006), Wadud revisits Qur’anic verses she deems “patriarchal passages” and makes a case to use “egalitarian passages” to “say ‘no’ to [some of] the text” (Chester Ronning Centre, 2015). Wadud is known in some parts of the North American Muslim counterpublic as ‘the scholar who said no to the Qur’an.’

that an *idea* matters, but a community confirms that *people* matter. What happens when people seek *community* but only find a *counterpublic*?

The Problem of Community and Community Development

Though community is commonly used in the vernacular, its definition is elusive. The so-called "problem of community" is predicated on its lack of conceptual definition. 'Community' can refer to a local neighborhood with a defined geographical boundary or to a global religious movement that transcends nation-states. The fluidity of the term is sometimes co-opted by agents of political and social power to legitimize particular agendas. Raymond Williams (1985, p. 66) aptly describes community as a "warmly persuasive word" that can sometimes be reduced - as Andrew Mason (2000) suggests - into a term that only commends social arrangements that a group of people happen to favor. "There is no single agreed-upon definition of community," John G. Bruhn (2011, p.12) notes, "but generally community implies that there are relationships between a group of people...that are closer than causal relationships because the group shares some common goals, values, and perhaps a way of life that reinforce each other, creates positive feelings, and results in a degree of mutual commitment and responsibility." Bruhn points to an early scholarly attempt to conceptualize community which led one researcher, G.A. Hillery (1955), to uncover 94 distinct definitions, but there are are underlying commonalities:

> Among the many different definitions that have been offered, three characteristics are mutually agreed upon as a minimum, namely locale, common ties, and social interaction. Yet, as Jessie Barnard pointed out this definition is deceptive because there are two different concepts; "community" emphasizes social interactions and "the community" stresses locale (see Bernard (1973), pp. 3-14). The concept of neighborhood is often used interchangeably with notions of community. Some authors have suggested that neighborhood is a subunit of community; others state that neighborhoods create community. (Bruhn, 2011, p. 13)

Given the previously mentioned over-territorialization Grewal contends that scholars make when discussing Muslim communities, my exploration of community necessitates the inclusion of broader, geographically unbound definitions. Mason (2000) differentiates between the *ordinary concept of community* and the *moralized concept of community.* The former refers "to groups whose members share values and a way of life, identify with the group and its practices and acknowledge each other as members." The latter refers to 'community' "used in a way that restricts its application to groups who members are mutually

concerned and do not exploit one another, or behave unjustly towards each other, at least not in any systematic way" (2000, p. 4). What follows is an exploration of shared characteristics between the two concepts presented by Mason and attempts to conceptualize 'community' in relational terms. Highlighting these characteristics will lead to an approximation of a common, substantive meaning of 'community.'

First, a community is composed of individuals who self-identify as members. This self-identification is an important defining characteristic of community and one that external perception plays no role in adjusting. For instance, were a second-generation Canadian citizen, whose parents immigrated from Indonesia, not to self-identify with the Canadian-Indonesian community, he or she cannot be considered an active member, despite the potentially contrary perceptions of those outside the community.

Second, individuals in a community must have a 'sense of belonging' or a 'sense of community'. For McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 9), sense of community is "a feeling that members share of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together." With a well-rooted sense of belonging, strong notions of solidarity naturally emerge. Solidarity, according to Mason (2000, p. 27), is mutual concern among members of a collective; together, this sense of belonging, community and solidarity form the bedrock of social interaction within a community.

Third, communities must have several collective goals that emerge from members' shared social, economic, geographic, intellectual and spiritual realities. Finally, in order for a community to ensure its moral viability, it must not exploit any segment or individual within the group. For the purposes of this study, I refer to this final characteristic as 'safety.'

The four characteristics outlined thus far - self-identification, sense of belonging, shared goals, and safety - comprise what would be facets of an idealized community. Yet empirical 'communities' certainly do not always adequately address all of the four characteristics. For instance, in a community with a number of strained personal relationships (high incidence of divorce or marital dysfunction, for instance), members' sense of belonging and solidarity will likely decline. If a community modality centers on conception of femininity and masculinity, it may, in the process, exploit one of the genders.

The shortfalls of every empirical community invites the critique that such ideal-typical community is contrived, for it is unlikely that there exists any community that actualizes all four of the characteristics described above. Where the threshold for 'community' is too high, the term itself becomes functionally ineffective. Consequently, by this account,

all existing ‘communities’ must be seen in a process of continual development in relation to the four characteristics. The process of refining and developing each of those characteristics falls under the rubric of "community development."

Much like "community," the term "community development" continues to be debated and theorized. The United Nations (1955) defines community development as "a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance on the community's initiate." Notwithstanding its neoliberal undertones, the UN's definition is strongest when it highlights community development as a *process* and neither an end nor an event. Given the discussion above, I propose that community development is a process in which the four characteristics of community are simultaneously and continually addressed. Community development by this account addresses the barriers that prevent members from self-identifying and building a sense of belonging. It should also actively aim to empower members to achieve common goals. Finally, community development must actively identify and address exploitation and injustice. But what happens when a collective asserts its claim as a community, but does not actively engage in this form of community development? For Muslims, this often means encountering the manifested conflation of counterpublic and community.

Communities of Debaters?

The internal logic of many Sunni-led ‘umma institutions’ often exacerbates the counterpublic - community conflation. Of course, the term ‘counterpublic’ is not in the common vernacular, so it is unlikely to hear an MSA member ever use that word. It is very likely, however, to hear allusions to the pan-Islamic paradigms that informed the institution’s founding. Fifty years after the influx of post-1965 immigrants, an MSA president can be heard on public radio insisting that they are *the* representative voice of Muslims on campus (CBC News, 2016a). Within the body of Muslims that the MSA purportedly represents, there is a wide range of ethno-cultural histories, divergent religious interpretations, and varying levels of spiritual devotion. As a devoted MSA volunteer during my undergraduate degree at the University of Alberta, I perceived the over 200 people who would gather for Friday prayer as the single most representative congregation on campus. No other student organization, Muslim or not, was as active as we were, I thought. I believed a single Muslim student group on campus representing and accommodating all Muslims provided the sense of cohesion and unity necessary to navigate a secular university.

There were, however, episodes that pointed to the impossible task my MSA took on as an umma institution. When Michael Frishkopf (2009, p. 6), a professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta, brought a world-renowned *muqri* (Qur'anic reciter) and *munshid* (chanter of hymns) to Edmonton in 2005, my MSA's response "was at first ambivalent, [then] finally negative." Unbeknownst to me at the time, the MSA's president refused to endorse or publicize Shaykh Mohamed el-Hilbawy's visit because he practiced "certain things that are considered innovations in the religion" (2009, p. 7). Reflecting back, it is clear to me now that the "innovation" the president was alluding to was el-Hilbawy's association with sufi brotherhoods in Egypt. Later in my university career, a handful of Shi'i students began a private Qur'anic study circle at the university's interfaith meditation room. When they sought to publicize their circle to the MSA's largely Sunni membership, we fumbled through denying their request. Confronted by the imperative to accommodate religious difference, we were confounded by our own totalizing rhetoric of Muslim unity. Our ambivalence to our Shi'i colleagues' requests was connected to a history of Sunni-dominated resistance to Shi'i activity in MSAs throughout North America (Takim, 2011, p. 125). The MSA's incapacity to accommodate various articulations of Islam has manifested to varying degrees - from our soft refusal to publicize Shi'i events to UC Berkeley's chapter barring Shia students from leading prayer in the late 1990s (2011, p. 15).

As discussed in Chapter 2, MSA chapters are shaped by a member transience that shifts its character every academic year. The students who take up its leadership inherit norms and practices that they either perpetuate or alter, before eventually passing on a newly configured MSA tradition to the next cohort. On its own, this form of transmission is simply a microcosm of the Islamic discursive tradition, but it is the MSA's totalizing rhetoric that can often render it an exclusionary force. Through all of the shifts my local MSA encountered, there was a common imperative that extended back to the chapter's founding in 1982 through to the first MSA at UIUC in 1963 - we were *the* organizational body for the the *umma* on campus. If an *umma* is a universal community of Muslims, the way the MSA constructs its objectives around Sunni normativity makes that task near impossible. Even amongst the Sunnis at the MSA, we (volunteer leaders) differed on issues of spiritual practice, jurisprudence, theology, and more. Before the heyday of social media, our debates were sometimes carried out in person, but preferably over email or in the comment threads of blogs. Our discourse required mutual engagement and that experience dialectically confirmed our membership in the MSA. In that sense, for us self-identifying Sunnis, this counterpublic was, in fact, a type of intellectual community that would inform our engagement with Islamic

tradition for years thereafter. Beyond our small group of a dozen or so volunteer-leaders, however, the social experience cultivated in the MSA was not universally embraced by Muslims on campus.

I recall my surprise whenever I would hear of a Muslim student, especially an outwardly observant Muslim, say s/he did not appreciate the 'social vibe' at our MSA. Having engrossed myself in MSA leadership initiatives and feeling so at home there, I did not understand the disaffection felt by these Muslims. But the MSA is just as much a social club as it is a religious club for many of its members, and this is especially the case for its active organizers. When the tension between Sunni and Shi'i students comes to a head, there have been examples of Shi'i students forming their own Muslim student groups. Although infrequent, when such incidents do precipitate a split they are on sectarian ground.[46]

In a model of religious economy, an MSA functions as the only firm that will/can serve the broadly defined demographic on Muslims on campus. By employing a rhetoric of unity that forecloses the need for alternative Muslim groups, MSAs are what I term *functional monopolies*. Monopolies, by definition, hold exclusive possession of something (in this case, organized Muslim community life). Aside from a long history with considerable name recognition, the MSA monopoly has no heteronomous enforcement obstructing a religious entrepreneur from starting a new Muslim student group. This means that a new Muslim student group need not form around sectarian or ethno-cultural identities - Muslim religious startups could form an identity dependent on the types of services it wished to offer, whether social, religious, or both. Yet, in the local context of a functional monopoly, alternatives are not an apparent solution for a dissatisfied demographic. Consequently, an MSA chapter might then become a highly contested firm with an internal power struggle, the organizational cause for the disaffection of misfitting Muslim students, or both. But MSAs are not the only instances of functional monopolies in Muslim religious economy. In fact, as argued in the following pages, the themes mapped in Chapter 5 are the effective consequence of two sets of functional monopolies: the institutional monopoly of the mosque and the social monopoly of de facto communities.

Functional Monopolies

The Mosque: The Institution of a Functional Monopoly

[46] At the University of Michigan, Shi'i students would eventually establish a Shi'i alternative to the MSA, Thaqalayn Muslim Association (TMA). Initially, there was much tension between the TMA and the MSA, but that eventually subsided. There is now a TMA in several North American post-secondary institutions (Takim, 2011, p. 125 - 16).

As noted in Chapter 2, the emergence of the mosque as the primary institution for Muslim religious and social life was a historical anomaly. In the context of pre-modern Muslim metropolitans, this shift concentrates a set of services that was historically carried by a number of complementary socio-religious institutions including sufi lodges, bathhouses, coffeehouses, libraries, and schools. Formulating a mosque's function to fulfill all of these needs places an inordinate amount of pressure on it. Usama Canon (2015) refers to this phenomenon as the "walmartification of mosques" in North America, the false promise that all religio-spiritual (let alone social) needs can be met by a single institution. He agrees with Khaki (2016), that a mosque's primary function is prayer. Yet this only leads to further questions: what distinguishes a mosque from other prayer spaces? Can a room in one's home, dedicated to prayer, become a mosque? Is a space simply made a mosque after a group of people identify it as such? Is there a formal process through which a space transforms from mundane to mosque?

Over the past two years, these are questions I have informally posed across the North American Muslim counterpublic. The responses I have received from scholars, mosque-goers, "unmosqued" Muslims, and mosque leadership have been profoundly inconsistent. The responses generally employed broad descriptors of a mosque as a 'prayer space' or 'community centre,' but otherwise remained vague. Muslim religious scholars were the one exception, however. They would articulate a mosque's definition in Islamic Law that constitutes Canon's sentiments:

> There are indeed specific places that are...mosques, places of prayer and they have a specific legal ruling within the Islamic tradition. There are certain things that are permissible to do there [and] there are certain things that are not permissible to do there. There are certain things that are encouraged and meritorious to do in a mosque, and there things that are reprehensible, or frowned upon, or better to be left, etc. (Davis, 2012c)

Canon is alluding to his conviction that mosques are sacred spaces consecrated through the strictures of classical Islamic law.

In pre-modern Muslim states, this meant legally deeding a physical space to God, per the Qur'anic (72:18) imperative - "the mosques belong to God, so do not call on anyone except God." A *waqf* (endowment) may have an appointed manager or administrator but it was not privately owned by any human entity; once consecrated as a mosque, the land became inalienable, endowed in perpetuity. Construed within this classical legal definition, mosques are difficult to establish in North America - deeding a parcel of land as such would

face obvious legal challenges. This conundrum made one of the Muslim religious scholars I spoke to share his uncertainty that any mosque in North America could truly (from the perspective of religious law) be a mosque. Offering a jurisprudential departure from that roadblock, Muslim religious scholar and Western academic Khalid Blankinship (2012) argues that there is a way to incorporate a mosque as a non-profit entity that closely resembles a classical *waqf*. He maintains, however, that a mosque should never be sold, citing virtual consensus amongst classical Sunni Muslim jurists. In these legally-defined sanctuaries, there is an observance of purity and propriety deemed necessary, per Canon's allusion to things that can and cannot be done in mosques.

Khaki questions the authority of the legal schools that Canon, Blankinship and many others in the North American Muslim counterpublic are seeking to negotiate. For him, the Prophet Muhammad's own mosque was both a place of prayer and a community centre. This vision for a dual purposed mosque was the resounding sentiment of the film, *UnMosqued* (Eid, 2014).[47] Adopting a term used in Christian circles[48], the documentary narrates the felt inadequacies of mosques in America. The film was a popular topic of conversation in the North American Muslim counterpublic for months. After local screenings, viewers would post appraisals of the film on social media. Critics said the film was emblematic of a young generation's ungratefulness for their predecessors' sacrifices. Supporters were heartened by the film's exposé on questions of gender, competency, and relevance. Whatever one's position on its value, the film sounded a dual-purposed vision for mosques. Similar to the precedent outlined by Khaki, the film implied that the mosque should simultaneously function as a social space and sanctuary. However, the compatability between the notion of a mosque as a sanctuary and a social space is rarely interrogated. Outside the secular framework that differentiates between the religious and social, there is a spatial and functional challenge that emerges: a sanctuary, or sacred space, has a felt sense of sanctity, proprietary and stillness. A social space has a felt sense of conviviality, social engagement and movement. Sanctuaries are still and quiet; social spaces are loud, bustling, and boisterous. Physically, the spaces may not be mutually exclusive, but temporally, they cannot occupy a single space and hold true to their objectives. This evinces the tension in

[47] In my conversation with El-Farouk Khaki (2016), he noted the absence of LGBTQ voices from the entire *UnMosqued* discourse. The film only covers Sunni-normative mosques and he wonders if the narrative unleashed in the North American Muslim counterpublic after *UnMosqued* has made "[only] some people legitimately 'unmosqued."

[48] Evangelicals use the term 'unchurched' to denote people who have never been a member of a local church and 'dechurched' for people who were once a part of a church and then left. Presumably, the filmmakers adopted the term 'unchurched' but were implying the Muslim equivalent of 'dechurch.'

conceptualizing the purpose of the mosque, one's level of (dis)satisfaction commensurate with the set of expectations for that institution.

There is a natural tension when congregants expect that their local mosque be both be a quiet, meditative space and a youth centre simultaneously. As outlined in Chapter 2, Nile Green (2015) argues that the early twentieth century prioritization of the mosque over other institutions was, in part, the result of a generative exchange between Christians and Muslims - responding to active church building initiatives, emerging Muslim communities built mosques in parallel. This historical shift away from alternative institutions and physical spaces like sufi lodges is the antecedent to the functional monopoly mosques occupy today. When a single firm is the sole provider for a particular service, the demands of its demographic pressure it to do more; in the absence of state support, however, a monopoly must find the necessary resources to do it all. As functional monopolies, mosques often struggle to fulfill conflicting demands, leaning to either side of the spectrum, inevitably alienating would-be congregants hoping to find the other set of demands met. Building multiplex mosques, commonly referred to as 'megamosques,' has become the pragmatic solution to accommodate the full spectrum of demands.

At first glance, megamosques can cater to the full range of its congregants' demands. On its campus, a dedicated sanctuary can be a quiet and meditative prayer place, separate from a social hall that accommodates for the boisterous activity of community. The 70,000 square foot Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC) is an instructive example. ISBCC self-describes as "a dynamic cultural center that is designed to serve the entire community. The ISBCC houses a school, a café, a social service organization, a gift shop, a body-washing chamber for funerals, and its multipurpose space is used for various functions and events, including but not limited to interfaith, nonprofit, cultural, and educational organizations. Future planning calls for a library, an exhibition space and a building of an Imam Seminary." (ISBCC, 2017). The contentions exposéd by *UnMosqued* are likely less palpable at ISBCC. One of the Muslim scholars featured in the film, Imam Suhaib Webb[49], was then the imam of that mosque. Sitting in front of the ISBCC, Webb calls 'youth' to action, "the solution is...you young folks need to take over. Take over with class and ethics...you have to begin play a role in shaping the institutional philosophy of these institutions" (Eid, 2014).

[49] Suhaib Webb is a popular contemporary to Usama Canon. Webb was subject of a lengthy Washington Post feature that documents his religious entrepreneurship following his departure from ISBCC. See Bill Donahue's (2017) article, "An Unlikely Messenger Becomes a Guiding Spirit to Young Muslims."

Offering ISBCC as the model mosque further highlights the functional monopoly mosques occupy. The resources necessary to become a local version of ISBCC are astronomical - the 70,000 square-foot centre sits in the culturally iconic neighborhood of Roxbury and costed millions of dollars to construct. It is unlikely that smaller market Muslim communities will be able to find the resources to overcome that financial barrier to entry, unless they are willing to incur significant debt. Only one hundred miles from Usama Canon's Ta'leef Collective, Sacramento's SALAM Islamic Center is a 21,000-square-foot megamosque with a gift shop, library, and its own own school (Magagnini, 2014). It opened in 2011 and costed $5.5 million, of which $2.6 million came from a bank loan. When the mosque opened its new facility, SALAM had an eloquent and dynamic imam, Mohamed Abdul-Azeez (Imam Azeez), who could readily make timely cultural allusions and comfortably switch between Arabic and English. Citing the mosque's growth, Azeez requested that the board hire an assistant imam to help meet the growing congregation's needs. As with any leveraged firm, however, the mosque felt compelled to prioritize repaying its bank loan (which they took after many of its major donors lost capital in the 2008/2009 financial recession) before entertaining new personnel hires (Magagnini, 2014).

Eventually, Imam Azeez would resign from SALAM and pen two articles in which he delineated a "Crisis of Imams in America" (Abdul-Azeez, 2014). Azeez writes as a frustrated imam who served a single mosque for several years, but he also writes as a religious entrepreneur, pointing to opportunities for generative exchange with other religious communities. In his article, he briefly considers the hierarchical church models of Catholics and Episcopalians and then favorably describes "Baptist, Evangelical" approaches of an "independent church model" in which a "pastor is accountable to his congregation and not the board." Azeez ends by calling on Muslim Americans to no longer visit the "most convenient" prayer places and instead "reward and punish" mosques based on their offerings and competence. Azeez would eventually found his own, independent religious firm, Tarbiya Institute, which is broadly self-described as "an Islamic organization" (Tarbiya Institute, 2017). The institute has a physical location in a rented business park, Tarbiya House, "which offers all the services that a masjid offers, but goes above and beyond to provide a safe space for all Muslims to worship Allah in a mosque environment, but also get involved in their community at their own pace" (Tarbiya Institute, 2017). With descriptions like these, it is evident that Azeez and Tarbiya seek to respond to some of the tensions outlined in Chapter 5.

The Imam Azeez and SALAM Islamic Center story illustrates some of the inherent tensions rolled into the functional monopoly of mosques, even after a megamosque structure

is built. In the institutional forms of their responses, both El-Farouk Khaki and Usama Canon have disrupted the functional monopoly of mosques. Distanced from the classical legal interpretations that define mosque formation and function, Khaki looks to recuperate a vision of the mosque he thinks is lost in pedantic interpretations. The tension between sanctuary and social hall are not apparent at el-Tawhid for good reason: the Islamic legal strictures around a sanctuary do not apply. Yet, that tension may still emerge as el-Tawhid grows its congregants, since the social space-sanctuary tension is a functional issue that may manifest outside of the Islamic legal context.

Canon's disruption to the functional monopoly of the mosque is markedly different. Since, unlike Khaki, Canon affirms Islamic law's definitions and restrictions around a mosque, he founded a firm that offers some of the same services sought from mosques, but did so by borrowing from the historical model of the sufi lodge. Again, the functional monopoly of mosques is historically connected to its twentieth-century emergence as the primary institution for Muslim community life. In this context, Canon's recuperation of the sufi lodge has been disruptive. To help conceptualize this modern interpretation of the lodge, Canon initially used the term 'semi-sacred' to describe Ta'leef's Fremont space (Davis, 2012c). On social media, the term was broadly lauded to have disrupted the sacred-mundane dichotomy that the functional monopoly of mosques has sustained. However, popular Muslim poet and rapper, and occasional Ta'leef teacher, Baraka Blue wrote on Facebook that the term semi-sacred "speaks to the level of dis-integration [of] many modern humans experience[s]. Think about being semi-in-love, semi-compassionate, semi-helpful. The semi- prefix really makes the following term feel impotent and only highlights its lack of fullness" (Blue, 2012). Because it is subsumed into secular logic, Blue warns against reenacting the dichotomy the term 'semi-sacred' seeks to undermine. Eventually, Canon would stop readily referring to Ta'leef as a 'semi-sacred' space, preferring instead other terms covered in the next section.

In the aftermath of his departure from the SALAM Islamic Center, Imam Azeez reflected that beneath it all, the struggle "was between two generations...the young and the old, the progressive and conservative, people who would like to maintain the status quo and those who would like to break through the roof" (Magagnini, 2014). The social tension[50] Azeez is referring to emerges when the mosque becomes the public minimum[51] of a Muslim community. This is the upshot of the functional monopoly. For all its definitional ambiguity, there is a broad consensus that 'community' has something to do with people in social

[50] See Chapter 5 - Findings, *Thematic Threads (Cultural Dissonance)*
[51] See Chapter 5- Findings, *Thematic Threads (Exclusion)*

arrangements. Regardless of where one might fall in the social space - sanctuary spectrum, the conceptual consensus about mosques is that they are physical spaces, not sets of relationships. With the functional monopoly of mosques, however, membership in a community is correlated to a person's activity in an institution. "*Al-ma'āni qabl al mabāni,*" Canon (2015) tells me, "literally, 'meanings before buildings,' in other words, content must precede form." In the North American Muslim religious economy, however, that is an unlikely sequence when physical space monopolizes collective concern.

De Facto Community: Socialized Functional Monopoly

On September 18, 2015, the Edmonton Journal ran a feature-length article titled, "Imam at Al Rashid a Leader for Edmonton's 90,000 Muslims" (Vlieg, 2015). Below the article online, commenters wondered about the accuracy of that number. "Last count I'm aware of (National Household Survey in 2011) found 43,465 adherents of the Muslim faith in the City of Edmonton," reads one comment. Whether 43,465 or 90,000, the article was making a far more striking assertion: the imam of the city's largest mosque, Al Rashid, was the leader of all Muslims in Edmonton. The article's evidence for the claim is that "Al Rashid is the supervising mosque for all other Sunni mosques in the city," though that notion would be strongly contested by other several Muslims in Edmonton. The community that the Al-Rashid imam was supposedly leading was the entire Sunni Muslim community (as opposed to communities). I shared the title of this article with Muslims in and outside of Edmonton. Laughter and bemusement were the most common responses I encountered. One person remarked that the claims in the article were tantamount to saying that, in 2004, when Facebook launched, Microsoft was the "supervising technology firm" in the United States. But it was the presumption that all Sunni Muslims in Edmonton were affiliated to a single leader that was so plainly false, and that too was bemusing: "there's no Pope in Islam, but now we must have a Muslim Archbishop of Edmonton!"

Nevertheless, behind this homogenizing rhetoric is an insistence from within that Muslims are, in fact one. In turn, this rhetoric conflates the ethical imperative for unity with a demand to accede to functional monopoly. The internal logic this creates for an umma institution like the MSA is that it denies the need for an alternative Muslim student group on any given campus. Off campus, a similar functional monopoly operates, informing the pretext of the Edmonton *Journal* article just quoted: if, according to Muslims' own assertions, there is one Sunni community, would that community not have a single leader? For many Muslims, the answer to this question is yes and no. Yes, there is one Sunni Muslim community (though

there are obviously rifts, challenges, etc) but no, there is no single leader of that community. Instead, there are several leaders and, as a relatively lateral community, the extent to which a people are affiliated to a leader is of little consequence. A community as such has several anchoring institutions, the most important of which is the mosque as previously discussed. There may also be schools, social service agencies and so on.

For many, the *Edmonton Journal* article was so bemusing because of how it configured Al-Rashid and its imam as the steward over thousands of unassuming community members. What was less controversial was how it grouped Muslims into a broadly defined collective, namely "a Muslim community." El-Farouk Khaki (2016) words it this way: "To me, a Muslim community is a community of Muslims, and who is a Muslim is whether you identify yourself as being one." In its original usage, counterpublics are, "by definition, formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment" (Warner, 2002, p. 63). Given a sustained political rhetoric that constitutes Islam as the proverbial 'other,' the Muslim counterpublic spontaneously forms around self-identification. I term the notion of a Muslim community that aggregates all self-identifying Muslims, a *de facto community* - by internal and external assertions, this is a community in fact, but no formal body, Muslim or not, has officially constituted it as such. The conceptualization of a *de facto community* will become clearer once I explore other collective arrangements, but for now, it is important to note that *de facto* community contains anchoring institutions, such as mosques, schools and social service agencies.

A *de facto Muslim community* is just a descriptor for the way the 'Muslim community' is conceived both inside and outside of its borders. However, it is when this conception forecloses additional forms of community that it becomes a functional monopoly. Exclusion was the most recurring theme that emerged from the data covered in Chapter 5. John G. Bruhn (2011) points us toward the way a monopolized conceptualization of *de facto community* can cause this:

> Several authors have suggested that community is a problematic term because of difficulties in defining it. But Paddison (2001) points out that there are other reasons why community is problematic arising from the assumption that it is inclusionary. How the boundaries of a community are defined determines who is included or excluded. Because of their inclusionary nature we tend to think of communities as a good thing. Yet, there can be divisions and conflicts within a community. Therefore, viewing a community as a functioning unit is somewhat idealistic�' concealing

divisions within it. Even within seemingly homogeneous communities there is always a basis for exclusion. (p.13)

If the *de facto Muslim community* seems homogenous on the outside, it can hide the exclusion many on the inside palpably sense. The 'social monopoly of the *de facto community*' is my term to describe the social force perpetuating the sense of exclusion described in Chapter 5. Again, this is a functional (not true) monopoly and it is associated with the institutional monopoly of mosques. Earlier in this chapter, I cited the challenge in defining 'community' - when left undertheorized, it is rendered too ambiguous to be useful. This so-called 'problem of community' was mitigated by a conceptual approximation that identified four constituent characteristics: self-identification, sense of belonging, shared goals and safety. Community defined as such presents an arresting challenge for Muslims: in a community of 90,000 (or 43,465), how does one identify a group of people with whom they have a sense of belonging, shared goals and safety? If the de facto community is the only available social arrangement for Muslims, it monopolizes against other, competing conceptualizations. Often people will return to mosques seeking the sense of belonging, shared goals and safety they require to feel rooted in the community, but, as argued earlier in this chapter, mosques are already overburdened by their own subsisting monopoly.

Returning to the the case studies here is instructive. When Usama Canon recuperates the notion of the sufi lodge at Ta'leef Collective or when El-Farouk Khaki reclaims the definition of a prayer space at el-Tawhid Juma Circle, they disrupt the institutional monopoly of a mosque. In their projects, they have also disrupted the social monopoly of a de facto community. Across North America (across the entire 'West,' perhaps) people self-identify with what Canon, Khaki and their respective firms offer, which is (in part) a sense of belonging, shared goals and safety. These four characteristics define what I term an *intentional* community. As with many terms, the definition of 'intentional community' varies depending on the context of its use, though it is generally associated with planned, specific and cohesive residential arrangements. My use of the term here is not at all territorial, though - I seek to emphasize the *intentionality* behind this collective's formation and membership: intentional communities are intentionally founded and they are intentionally joined. While a member of a de facto community may be unaware of his or her presence in a macro (de facto) community, a member of an intentional community wilfully joins his or her micro (intentional) community. Self-identifying with an intentional community does not exclude one from the de facto community - on the contrary, it situates one firmly within it. De facto

and intentional communities are, as illustrated in Figure 6.1, not just complementary but concentric:

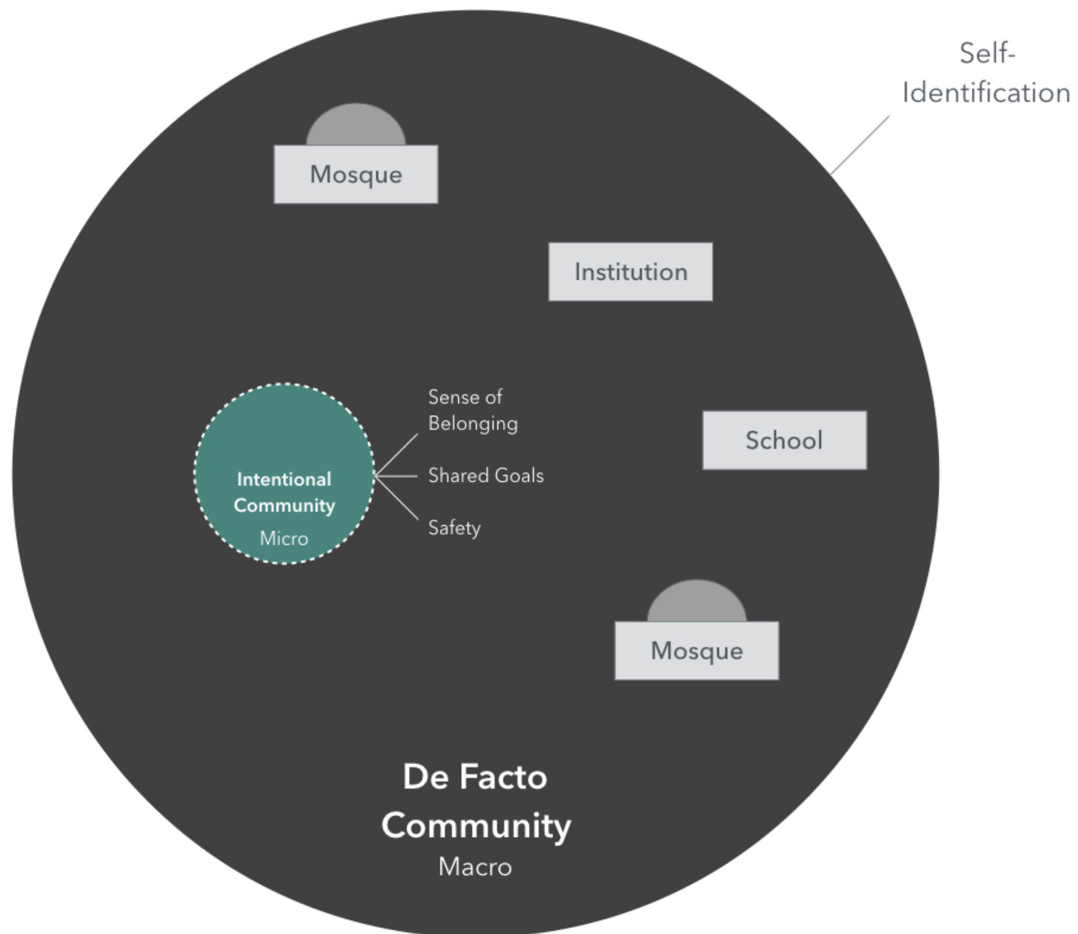


Figure 6.1: Concentric Communities

In a de facto community, membership does not require associating with other people, it only requires self-identification as a Muslim. This self-identification is an act of agency, but one's absorption into the de facto Muslim community is not; such membership results from larger social forces described earlier. So long as an individual self-identifies as a Muslim, that membership in the de facto community will persist. Membership in an intentional community, conversely, is entirely agentive and necessitates an association with other people - sense of belonging, shared goals and safety cannot be construed outside a social context. Ta'leef and el-Tawhid are, to varying degrees, intentional communities.[52] In

[52] Marcia Hermansen (2014, p. 203) suggests that Ta'leef, on its own, "could be considered as constituting a 'counterpublic'...aware of its non-dominant public role while embracing its transformative potential within Muslim and non-Muslim contexts." Hermansen correctly points to Ta'leef's "transformative potential," but by

fact, over the course of this research, and in conversation with Usama Canon, Ta'leef Collective has shifted away from using terms like 'third place' and 'semi-sacred space' and has instead taken up self-describing as an intentional community (Herwees, 2015). Yet, neither Ta'leef nor el-Tawhid has fully realized the sense of belonging, shared goals and safety to their ends. Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that 'community development' is a process in which the four characteristics of intentional community are simultaneously and continually addressed. In light of this definition, both Ta'leef and el-Tawhid are engaged in forms of 'community development,' the measure of which is a qualitative assessment of the characteristics of intentional community. As such, for Ta'leef and el-Tawhid to remain (and grow as) intentional communities, they will need to perpetually be in a state of development. Suggesting anything otherwise would undermine Canon and Khaki's consonant assertions that spirituality is a process, not an end or an event.

Agents of Exchange

In his assessment of the 'crisis of imams' in North America, Imam Azeez refers to an evangelical "independent church model" for inspiration. Frustrated with what he deemed the inept organizational structure at the megamosque he once led, he enacts a kind of generative exchange between Muslims and Christians that dates back to the pre-modern world. Importantly, in his reading of potential models to borrow, Azeez glosses over the definition of 'church.' One of Azeez's (entrepreneurial) predecessors, Muhammad Karoub, evidently influenced by the terrain of vibrant church building projects, funded the first purpose-built mosque across the street from the Ford Motor Company. Nearly one hundred years prior to Azeez, when Karoub drew a conceptual equivalence between a mosque and a church in the context of 1920s America and its localized neighborhood communities, it was a fair parallel, but that equivalence today is less viable: as mosques remain entangled in the debate about delineating physical space, the internal discourse about churches has fully suspended from it. 'Planting a church' for an evangelical pastor does not mean erecting a building; it means collecting a group of people, ideally unchurched people, to begin a new (intentional) community. Andy Stanley (2012), who is ironically the pastor of America's largest megachurch, reminds fellow church leaders of this conceptual distinction:

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framing Ta'leef vis-à-vis the dominant discourse, she reenacts the current trend to focus solely on discursive phenomena within Muslim communities. By referring to Ta'leef and el-Tawhid as 'intentional communities,' I shift that focus to their relational elements. Hermansen refers to the organization as "Ta'leef Connection" throughout her chapter when, of course, its correct name is "Ta'leef Collective."

> you may know, the Greek term translated church throughout the New Testament is *ekklesia*. What you may not know is that it was not a religious term. It could refer to citizens called to *gather* for civic purposes. It was used to refer to soldiers called out to *gather* for military purposes. An *ekklesia* was simply a gathering or an assembly of people called out for a specific purpose. *Ekklesia* never referred to a specific place, only a specific gathering...The word *church* is not a *translation* from the Greek. It is a *substitution* for the Greek.. And a bad one at that. The German term *kirche* [English: church] and the Greek term *ekklesia* refer to two very different ideas. A *kirche* is a location. An *ekklesia* is a purposeful gathering of people. (2012, p. 39-42)

In the remainder of his how-to guide for would-be church leaders, Stanley echoes something church planters already know: the imperatives to plant building-centred church and the imperative to plant people-centred church often flow in opposite directions. To Canon's (2015) sentiment of "*al-ma'āni qabl al mabānī*" (lit., meanings before buildings, or content before form), Stanley adds specifically, *people before buildings*. In the religious market of the evangelical church, religious firms come in all shapes and sizes: Stanley's multisite megachurch has a global network with tens-of-thousands in congregation, while home-based churches gather more modestly in living rooms. In cities like Seattle, EastLake Community Church openly affirms LGBTQ congregants (Dias, 2015) while The City Church accommodates (but does not affirm) them (2016, Handler). As religious entrepreneurs establish new firms (churches) for the unchurched and dechurched, they glean their methods of engagement from sectors of the marketplace. For some, this will mean understanding the way McDonald's can produce the identical consumer experience in Toronto and Tokyo. For others, it will mean understanding the inner workings of an organic, locally-sourced, family-run bakery with a small but devoted and sustaining customer-base. The shape and character of the religious firms that result from each exchange will, of course, be markedly different.

Watson and Scalen (2008) illustrate how this form of exchange has been roundly criticized within and without the church: what is left for the spiritual when a congregant is a 'client' and spiritual community is a 'service'? For critics, the whole enterprise smacks of either sanctioned disenchantment or, worse, a con game. And it is not hard to find examples of charlatans who have instrumentalized their firms for personal gain - these are cautionary tales of spiritual works being co-opted by capitalist drive (as opposed to market models). Yet, even if one were to acknowledge the criticisms levelled against this form of religious entrepreneurship, exchange will remain an immanent reality in the pluralistic terrains of the modern world. This is not to imply an inevitable 'McDonaldization,' to use George Ritzer's

(1996) term, or ‘Walmartification,’ as Usama Canon warned, with both terms evoking deep-seated discomforts with global capitalism. In the model of religious economy, those results are plausible but not necessary, for exchange can just as readily occur with small, locally-sourced, ethical, and creative marketplace firms.

If Imam Azeez, Usama Canon, El-Farouk Khaki and other religious entrepreneurs follow in the footsteps of their entrepreneurial predecessors and engage in a generative exchange with Christian (or other religious) counterparts, they will need to pick up on these nuances. They not only point to opportunities for productive exchange, but they also create pathways to disrupt the functional monopolies stifling Muslim communities.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion:
Toward Concentric Communities

Study Summary

Literature that investigates the internal dynamics of Muslim communities centres on authority and cultural production. Sherman Jackson (2005) and Zareena Grewal (2013) have shaped the discourse around important analytical categories such as 'Black Religion' and 'Immigrant Islam.' Grewal's use of the term *counterpublic* is especially helpful in the way it describes the broad, heterogenous Muslim collective that formed after 1965. While Grewal's project sought to break through territorialized research paradigms that prevent transnational investigations of Muslim discourse, this study sought to reground the notion of counterpublic to local communities by proposing three research questions. The first two asked 'what are the perceived structural tensions in North American Muslim communities?' and 'what frameworks inform the responses to these tensions?' The final question looked ahead to consider the implications for the future of the Muslim community that accrued from these tensions and responses.

The study began with explorations of key terms such as *mosque community, community, community development, umma,* and *jama'a*. It contextualized their meanings within the historical context of the the first purpose-built mosque in North America, the *Moslem Mosque of Highland Park* and the religious entrepreneurship of its first imam, the Ahmadi missionary, Mufti Muhammad Sadiq. Informed by this conceptual and historical foundation, it proposed a theoretical framework shaped by methodological debates in the anthropology of Islam and the model of religious economy. Given the postcolonial moment in which the research questions emerge, the theoretical frameworks were grounded in anti-colonial discourse. The method to investigate these questions was through a mixed media comparative case study of two Muslim organizations currently active in North America: Ta'leef Collective, a US-based nonprofit organization that seeks to "provide the ideal experience for anyone curious to learn about Islam and offer a safe and friendly environment for newcomers and old friends" (Ta'leef Collective, 2017) and the el-Tawhid Juma Circle/Unity Mosque, a Canadian-based Muslim organization that is "a gender-equal, LGBTQI2S affirming, mosque, that is welcoming of everyone regardless of sexual orientation, gender, sexual identity, or faith background" (Juma Circle, 2017). These two

cases were important not just for their intrinsic value but also for their symbolic representation of broader Muslim communities.

After being indexed, data from the case studies showed five apparent themes, three tensions and two responses. The tensions included a sense of *exclusion*, *cultural dissonance* and *spiritual dislocation*. Both el-Tawhid and Ta'leef responded to these tensions through *acceptance* and *reimagining Muslim space.* With these themes outlined, the model of religious economy showed how the founder of each organization was at once an inheritor and disruptor of Islamic tradition. Most significantly, the model helped this study intervene in the current discourse about Muslims in North America by arguing against conflating the notions of community and counterpublic. It mapped two functional monopolies stifling Muslim communities - the institutional monopoly of the mosque and the social monopoly of the de facto community. Finally, by casting a new conceptualization of concentric communities, it raised productive exchange as a key process to relieve persisting tensions.

Visions for Future Research

New Case Configurations

Methodologically, this study was delimited by its case study design, so future research might extend the same set of questions to new case formulations. Within Ta'leef and el-Tawhid themselves, in-depth interviews could be conducted with congregants and supporters (as well as critics or detractors). Doing so would offer an even richer range of data to identify thematic threads. One might also seek to take these questions to other Muslim organizations producing similarly creative responses to tensions. The Noor Cultural Centre in Toronto and the Women's Mosque of America in California are two case studies that a researcher might benefit from investigating. Finally, while this study was territorially bound to North America, future studies could take the same set of questions to other Western sites with Muslim-minority populations, such as the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia. Research conducted on those sites are likely to highlight context-specific tensions.

Generative Exchange and Action Research

In Chapter 6, the study concludes with a reflection on the imperative for critical, generative exchange. There, I suggest that religious 'entrepreneurs' would benefit from (continuing to) engage in productive dialectics within and outside the Muslim community. Taking on this imperative could become the thrust of future research. The 'services and products' that result

from this generative exchange could be adapted and then implemented. Sound action research could then methodologically assess changes to community members' sense of belonging, shared goals and safety. The upshot would be analytically informed disruptions to the functional monopolies that structure possibilities in and for Muslim communities.

A Final Thought

When I was younger, I loved religious debates. Barely into high school, I started piecing together retorts aimed at polemical opponents. As a 15-year-old, I once offered a community reminder about the etiquettes of conduct in the mosque. Afterward, a middle-aged congregant rebuked me for using the word 'mosque' in my speech: "The word 'mosque' comes from the Spanish word for mosquito!" he asserted. "It was used during the Inquisition, because the King and Queen of Spain said...they were going to squash the Muslims like 'mosquitos' in their 'mosques'!" Convinced the gentleman was wrong (but probably more embarrassed by the semi-public correction), I spent several hours that night researching the etymology of 'mosque.' I then wrote the man a letter demonstrating the fabrication behind his assertion and confidently handed it to him the next day. That felt good.

In my free time, I perused online discussion forums loading up on pro-Sufi and anti-Salafi rhetoric, ready to unleash my constructed arguments if verbally confronted. In university, I happily engaged in debates about music, meat, and moon sighting. After graduating, I shared an article about women-led prayer (co-authored by one of el-Tawhid's founders, Laury Silvers) with a handful of friends and associates. When all was said and done, there were 73 emails in the thread. When I first heard Ta'leef's framing as a 'semi-sacred third space,' I wrote lengthy Facebook comments responding to critics.

There is something invigorating about debates. Ideas take on new meaning when they are shared for second and third-party viewing. In healthy debates, the soundest arguments transform into collective wisdom, but remain open to the influence of new ideas. "I do think that ideas count," Sherman Jackson (2010) said at a Muslim community fundraiser in Chicago. "The way that people arrange the furniture in their minds count. The universe of values and meanings and how we arrange those things in our hearts - that counts. So for me, engaging in the world of ideas in an effort to rearrange the furniture in the Muslim and the non-Muslim heart and mind - that's a noteworthy cause for me." And since ideas count, as Jackson says, so do the debates that host and transform them. The religious debates in the North American Muslim counterpublic matter because they grapple with reconciling the

ancient and modern worlds, and this study sought to affirm this significance, but also to warn against treating it as something that it is not: a counterpublic and a community are not one and the same. Healthy counterpublics are about well-formed ideas. Healthy communities are about the wellbeing of people.

When I was younger, it was hard for me to tell the difference. The arguments I constructed in my mind suddenly became more meaningful once offered for public discourse. In some ways, that sense of significance was extended to my entire person - I mattered because my ideas mattered. So, as any young person yearning for significance in the world, I debated a lot. But I was not alone. This posturing for meaning was also modeled more broadly amongst the Muslims I grew up around. In the 1990s "interfaith dialogues" were regularly organized events by Muslim organizers. These were contentious debates in which Muslims and (usually) Christian evangelicals would, on the surface, proselytize to one another. They were less "dialogues" than they were verbal sparring bouts, each competitor seeking to demonstrate his (it was almost exclusively men) intellectual superiority over the other, and then extend that claim to their own faith tradition.

It's been years since I last attended one of these debates in person, but as with most things that were recorded, you can find a full archive online, still attracting thousands of viewers. Much like sporting events, believers flock to interfaith debates not to uncover a truth, but to cheer for their own side. They hope to leave more excited about their team (religious identity) than when they came in. They weren't very good as proselytizing events and they certainly weren't very good as dialogues. The atmosphere of these debates seems foreign to me today, because when we say 'interfaith dialogue' now we in fact mean a conversation about our lives, experiences and, of course, our faiths. These dialogues are smaller, less charged, and probably much less entertaining. They produce an experience that has less to do with revealing the apparent contradictions in the Bible or questioning the infallibility of the Prophet Muhammad. Those latter kind of debates still happen, largely (as is appropriate) to less fanfare and mostly quartered to the internet.

I do not believe this transition occurred because the truth claims of the religious groups or those of its members have dissipated. It seems to do more with the pragmatic recognition that, as traditional Muslim scholars say, *al-'ilm fi-l-sudur wa laysa fi-l-sutur* (knowledge is in human hearts, not in the lines of books). We can learn more by sitting with each other in conversation than we can by interfaith research that seeks to simply map our next debate. Our relationships will then not be reduced to the difference of our truth claims, as mutually exclusive as they may be. This is a calmer, more generative engagement between

faith communities, and while more research would need to be done to confirm this, I postulate that this is true because both Muslims and their interlocutors have become more comfortable and secure within their own communities. This sense of safety *between* faith communities is a function of the sense of belonging *within* those communities.

Tensions within the Muslim American counterpublic have made it difficult for that same level of confident, secure exchange to proceed among Muslims. As this study argues, this is because we have configured positions to one another through the prism of our debates, which can make many within the Muslim community feel very lonely. But there are other ways, besides intellectual discourse, to affirm the presence and significance of another. If we recognize that the health of a 'Muslim community' is the result of multiple expressions of micro-communities, we find safety in intentional communities that are determined more by relational connection than historical affiliation. This does not mean that our truth claims will disappear; indeed, our exchanges will be the more vibrant and generative for it.

***

Usama Canon was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), an aggressive neurological disease with an extremely high mortality rate, just days before this thesis was submitted. Immediately following the announcement of his diagnosis, my social media feed filled with posts conveying shock, sadness, and prayer. This thesis began with an anecdote that involved Usama Canon and Michael Muhammad Knight, their disparate stories somehow interwoven. After learning of Canon's ALS, Knight (2017) also shared his reflections on Facebook:

> In my travels both in physical and digital space, I have encountered Muslims who would not return my salaam. I'm not welcome wherever I go.
>
> But when I would find myself in the Bay, I've always been warmly welcomed at Ta'leef. An embodiment of adab, Usama Canon has always treated me with respect and friendship. Perhaps there are sensitive buttons that, if pushed, would reveal irreconcilable differences between us. But he never pushed those buttons with me, and he always made me feel like a valued guest in his space. He speaks of Ta'leef as a place where people could "come as they are." I'm an extreme case of how sincerely he lives that out.
>
> Peace and wellness to Usama, his family, and community.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

Study Title: Like One Body: Exploring Structural Tensions in Muslim Communities

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I am currently conducting research for my Masters thesis on responses to structural tensions in North American Muslim communities. My research seeks to identify perceived tensions and the frameworks that inform significant responses to those tensions. I have identified [organization name] as an important case study to include in my research. Given your position as the [position] of [organization name], I would like to invite you to participate in the research.

Recently, the emergence of a few but noteworthy cases of Western Muslims aligning, and sometimes joining *Da'ish*[53] has made the inner workings of Muslim communities a matter of public discourse. In the midst of much media spotlighting, often in the presence of Islamophobic rhetoric, an intra-communal dialogue on authority, tradition, institution-building, education, disenfranchisement and more, has been left largely overlooked. This research will attend to the important self-reflexive perspectives that emerge from the Muslim community. Once complete, this thesis should offer insight into some of the Muslim community's self-identified tensions and their possible ameliorations. I hope that my thesis will be conceptually beneficial to other researchers as well as members and leaders of the Muslim community.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in a one to two hour phone interview. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed later. If needed, I may request a second phone interview that will be similarly recorded and transcribed. Data will be kept on a password-protected laptop and/or stored in a locked cabinet for at least five years after the project is completed. If you wish, I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the transcript(s). I will use the information you provide in my thesis and I may also use it in journal articles, book chapters, and conference presentations.

[53] *Da'ish* is often referred to as IS (Islamic State), ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).

Aside from the receiving a copy of the study once complete, you will not receive any personal benefits by participating. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Given your public role in [case study], your name will be included in the study; however, you are free to request anonymity or withdraw from the study at any time before March 1, 2016 (the date I intend to submit my thesis). Should you choose to withdraw at any point, I will delete your information and not include it in the study.

If you have any questions about this research project now or at a later date, please feel free to contact me at 780-729-3523 or mfarooqm@ualberta.ca, or my supervisor, Dr. Makere Stewart-Harawira at 780-492-7616 or makere@ualberta.ca.

Salam,

Farooq Maseehuddin
University of Alberta

I have read and understood the above and provide my agree to participate in this study.

Signature: ___________________________________ Date: _____________

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615

Appendix B: Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

Keywords: God, community, belonging, institution, isolation, spirituality, authority

Expository Questions

- Please elaborate on your earliest memories of participating in the Muslim community
- What significant incidents in your community/ies stand out as moments that helped shape your perception about community? What are some specific incidents (current or past?) that you deem as particularly positive or negative?
- What motivated you to begin your initiative?
- What were/are your “goals” as they pertain to community work?
- Who’s responded? What have been their respective responses? To what degree did they match your expectations?

Conceptual Questions

- How do you define “community”?
- Where does the Muslim community begin and end for you?
- What does the term “mosque” mean to you? How do you define “mosque”? What makes and does not make a “mosque”?