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**SEEKERS OF SACRED KNOWLEDGE: ZAYTUNA COLLEGE AND
THE EDUCATION OF AMERICAN MUSLIMS**

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**SEEKERS OF SACRED KNOWLEDGE: ZAYTUNA COLLEGE AND
THE EDUCATION OF AMERICAN MUSLIMS**

by

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Dedication

To the Seekers

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا
مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ
نَوَيْتُ التَّعَلَّمَ وَالتَّعْلِيمَ وَالتَّذَكُّرَ وَالتَّذْكَيرَ، وَالتَّنْفِيعَ وَ
الْإِنْتِفَاعَ، وَالْإِفَادَةَ وَالْإِسْتِفَادَةَ وَالْحَثَّ عَلَى
الْتِمَسِّكِ بِكِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَسُنَّةِ رَسُولِهِ وَالدَّعَا إِلَى
الْهُدَى وَالدَّلَالَةِ عَلَى الْخَيْرِ وَابْتِغَاءِ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ
وَمَرْضَاتِهِ وَقُرْبِهِ وَتَوَابِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى

Image 1: Imam Abdallah ibn Alawi al-Haddad (d.1720),
Intention for Seeking Knowledge and Study

Bismillah al-Rahmān al-Rahīm.

*Al-Hamdullilāhi rabbil ‘ālamīn wa ṣalla allāhu ‘alā sayyidina Muḥammadin wa
‘alā ālihi wa ṣahbihi wa sallam.*

*Nawaytu al-ta‘alluma wa ta‘līma wa al-tadhakkura wa al-tadhkīr wa al-naf‘ wa
al-intifā‘ wa al-ifāda wa al-istifāda wa al-ḥath ‘ala al-tamassuki bi kitāb illāhi wa
sunnati rusūlihi wa al-du‘ā ila al-hudā wa al-dalālata ‘ala al-khayri wa
ibtighāha’ wajih illāhi wa mardātihi wa qurbihi wa thawābihi subḥānahu wa
ta‘ala*

In the name of the Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

All praise to Allah, Lord of the Worlds. And salutations and greetings upon our master Muhammad and upon his family and companions.

I intend to study and teach, take and give a reminder, take and give benefit, take and give advantage, to encourage the holding fast to the book of Allah and the way of His Messenger, and calling to guidance and directing towards good, hoping for the countenance of Allah and His pleasure, proximity and reward, transcendent is He.

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Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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Abstract: In a time when “traditional” Islam and Islamic education are seen as incommensurable with American society and ideals, American Muslims are mobilizing traditions of Islamic scholarship within liberal arts institutional frameworks to articulate and establish the future possibilities of Islam and being Muslim in North America. This research 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. Based on eighteen months of ethnographic research at Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, and in the surrounding San Francisco Bay Area, this study’s methodological approach is grounded in participant-observation, interviews, and visual ethnography.

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Introduction

It was neither the first nor the last time we sat in a circle on the green grass of the Zaytuna College courtyard. It was mid-afternoon in May 2011, the last day of Islamic History class, and Professor Zaid Shakir indulged the students' requests to sit outside in the sun for the second half of class. Once this decision had been made, I quickly ran from the classroom to the back office cubicles to let Haroon Sellars, the audiovisual tech at Zaytuna know that the class had gone outside. It was a great opportunity to take photographs and do some video-recording. He thanked me for letting him know, finished up what he was doing and eventually joined us on the lawn, with both his recently acquired HD (High Definition) video camera on a tripod, and his smaller DSLR (digital single-lens reflex camera).

While Shakir and the students went around in a circle, reflecting on the semester as a whole, as well as on a few of the specific texts they had read that semester (like Ali Allawi's *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009] and Sylviane Diouf's *The Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* [New York: New York University Press, 1998]), Haroon, despite his imposing frame, unobtrusively maneuvered around the student-teacher circle, filming and photographing "learning at Zaytuna College." Making quick eye contact, I silently reached for his Canon DSLR, yearning to participate in the image-making from my eye-level vantage point in the circle.

While Haroon recorded footage from a wider visual field, incorporating most of us in his frame, I recorded close-up shots of students' notebooks and hands, as well as

medium-frame shots of single students as they spoke or listened to their classmates and teacher.

Shakir asked the students to consider how their contemporary context was similar to or different from Muslim civilizations that they had studied over the year-long course. How should they approach thinking about Islamic futures from the perspective of Islamic history? Zahrah¹ was sitting directly across from me and was one of the last students to speak. As I recorded her response, I hoped that the audio levels across the 8-10 feet that separated us would be sufficient.

I think I would agree with what Aminah and others, who said that our diversity could very well be our strength, whether that's ethnic or class, or in terms of religious interpretation, and it reminds me of very, very early Islam - the Prophet *ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam* (May Allah honor him and grant him peace), people leaving their tribal affiliations to become a part of something that transcends the tribe...²

I remember in the very beginning (of the academic year), Shaykh Hamza was talking about the so-called outlaws in Arab, in that time in Arab society, who were so fed up with all the tribal divisions and with what was thought to be, what was thought to make someone honorable, and all those things that went with belonging to a tribe. And so they kind of outlawed themselves into their own tribe, and to me, I found, sort of, similarities with early Islam, where people were kind of also fed up with what it meant to belong to a tribe. And once they saw the truth of Islam, they could kind of put the two next to each other, and see what was truth and what was falsehood.

And so I think in some ways, we are like them, where we've been broken apart and split from our tribal associations, and we have this opportunity to, I don't know, this is like kind of our Medina, you know? Like we can be more at home here and really make something of our own and really establish ourselves, and

¹ I use pseudonyms for Zaytuna students and community members. In some cases students chose their own pseudonyms or asked fellow students to "name" them. Most Zaytuna teachers are referred to by name as they are public figures.

² *ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam* (May Allah honor him and grant him peace) is often said following the utterance of the Prophet Muhammad's name, whether one is the speaker or listener. It may also be said after referring to him using a pronoun. It is the practice of sending *ṣalawāt*, sending salutations and honoring the Prophet Muhammad. There are different phrases for *ṣalawāt* for other prophets and honored figures within Islamic history.

then go back out, you know, when we've decided who we are. And we can go back out and *inshā'Allah* (by the will of God), spread our message of truth and goodness to all the people.

The above ethnographic account and Zahrah's statement within it demonstrate a number of the themes, methods, and positionalities that inform my research into the role that Islamic knowledge practices play towards producing a "kinship by faith" (Izutsu 2002:59) across difference (racial, ethnic, gender, class, sect, or school of law) in Muslim communities. Higher education is seen as a "charismatic" promise (Starrett 2008), both for "reviving tradition" and "ensuring a future" for Islam and Muslims in the United States, such that what began as an informal set of community classes in a San Francisco Bay Area suburb, within a decade, quickly evolved into an Islamic seminary program and then a Muslim liberal arts college. "Seekers of Sacred Knowledge" examines these historical shifts and contemporary practices towards understanding how "sacred knowledge" is envisioned, organized, and transmitted at and around Zaytuna College and the types of ethical and cognitive capacities and potentialities such efforts gesture towards in producing sustainable Muslim subjectivities and collectivities.

In the following sections, I introduce the key analytical and methodological lenses and literatures that inform my research at Zaytuna College. In "AMERICAN MUSLIMS" I consider issues of Muslim identity, culture, and attachment in North America³ in relation to the anthropological study of Islam as a "discursive tradition" (Asad 1986).

³ While my research is primarily located both geographically and discursively in the United States, much of what I discuss is relateable to Muslims in Canada as well. The RIS (Reviving the Islamic Spirit) Conference that takes places in Toronto every winter is a counterpart to the Deen Intensive and Rihla programs which prominently feature Zaytuna scholars. Through transnational networks of Islamic knowledge, which include such programs as well as geographic and virtual sites throughout the "Muslim world," young North American Muslims meet, study, and come together in conversation. I do not want to occlude critical differences, however, especially in regards to how discourses of race, multiculturalism, and indigeneity play out in the Canadian context. Rather, I emphasize the connections between these English-speaking populations in terms of such pedagogic networks. While the term "American" is likewise problematic in its continental assumptions, I engage it as an analytic in regards to how it is used in the field.

Alternative diasporas and communities “oriented around” (Ahmed 2006b) knowledge and practice-based genealogies are marked by points of friction at the intersections of different race, class, generational, and gender identities. “THREE GENERATIONS OF SEEKERS” thus takes up the intersections of such political and often visibly-palpable forms of identity and religion and the ways that Muslims have historically and continue to be racialized. I elaborate upon the specific ethnographic sites, populations, and methods in this research and the particular historical moment it documents. In “RIGHT TO LOOK,” I discuss the visual field as both a methodological and theoretical space that orients my research towards the relationship between the senses, knowledge, and power. The visual also references the collective, and at times contradictory, imaginary of scholars and students, partially constituted by mainstream and Islamic mediascapes. In “OUTLAWS IN MEDINA,” I begin with the words of Malcolm X to locate the ethical, political, and spiritual impulses of the Zaytuna project and its relationship to the sociopolitical history of the San Francisco Bay Area. The “turn to ethics” that currently occupies debates in American colleges and universities, as well as anthropological literature, is taken up here as I address Zaytuna’s situatedness as an American higher education institution and a space of ethical striving shaped by Islamic discursive tradition. An outline of dissertation chapters follows these discussions.

AMERICAN MUSLIMS

I often refer to myself as an AMERICAN MUSLIM. Folks have tried to correct me and say “No brother, you are a Muslim American; your religion comes first.” English lesson: American Muslim describes the type of Muslim I am (putting the emphasis on the religion). Muslim American describes the type of American I am (putting the emphasis on my culture). #TotallyMisguidedReligiosity

-‘Mustafa Davis’ Facebook Status, September 10, 2011 at 2:44pm⁴

Islam is how you kill the meat. Culture is how you cook it.

-‘Tawheed is Unity’ Facebook comment on above status update,
September 11, 2011 at 3:48am⁵

In the San Francisco Bay Area and globally via the Internet, there are debates about the relationship between one’s American-ness (or respective cultural identity or nationality) and one’s Muslim-ness and how that relationship should be articulated when using a language entrenched in American identity politics, state formations, and world religions. The limitations of such language and the intensity with which individuals engage in discourse about them speaks to the real concerns Muslims have about how such relations matter and potentially impact their everyday lives.⁶ There is a wide spectrum of rejection, ambivalence, critique, and commitment regarding one’s relationship to the nation-state, one’s ethnic or racial group, one’s diasporic entanglements, and one’s relationship to “Islam,” per se.

The Bay Area, with its diverse and ever-shifting populations, reenacts the historical encounters of Muslims perpetually in movement, whether journeying as far as China for knowledge, or across seas, lands, oceans, and archipelagos for trade, politics,

⁴ Mustafa Davis’s Facebook page, accessed September 11, 2011.

<https://www.facebook.com/cinemotionmedia>

Mustafa Davis is a South Bay-based American Muslim who co-founded the Ta’leef Collective in Fremont. He was born to an African American father and a German American mother, and he converted to Islam in the mid 1990s. He studied abroad in Mauritania, Morocco, and Yemen, and he works as a filmmaker and photographer, running his own studio. He has a large international following on Facebook and frequently posts provocative statements and questions that stimulate a transnational dialogue.

⁵ Ibid. This comment refers to the *ḥalāl* (lawful) manner in which one slaughters an animal to be eaten within Islamic tradition. One can make Southern fried chicken or Pakistani chicken biryani; as long as it is *ḥalāl*, it is Islamic.

⁶ Facebook “friends” who verbally attacked other “friends” were removed from Mustafa’s profile, and the conversation/thread continued online for days following his original post. Commentators included Muslims who lived outside of the United States and non-Muslims as well. The differences of experience between European Muslims and American Muslims accounts for some of the differing points of view on the thread in regards to one’s relationship to the state and empire. Such conversations also happen face-to-face in the Bay Area.

and labor.⁷ Throughout the history of Islam, knowledge and textual practices were a critical part of conceptualizing the self as a Muslim within a myriad of affiliations, whether it was a homeland, a tribe, an occupation, a school of law, or a blood line. This research explores the particularity of an American landscape in which racial and ethnic identities conspicuously matter, and where narratives of American exceptionalism and traces of empire mark everyday Muslim life.

“American Muslim” or “Muslim American” identities take many forms, and there are critical debates in the Bay Area about “the cultural imperative” of Islam (as exhibited in Davis’s emphasis on “American culture”), which involves producing an Islam that is “indigenous” to America, in the sense that it is “natural, envisioned, and born from within” (Abd-Allah 2004:9, Jackson 2005). As opposed to an attitude conveyed by a “culturally predatory Islamist ideology” (Abd-Allah 2004:2), Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah calls for Muslims in America to fashion “an integrated cultural identity that is comfortable with itself and functions naturally in the world around it” (9).⁸ This American Muslim culture would not be homogenous, but would have particularity in regards to different geographies, ethnicities, and cultural legacies. While invoking a multicultural intra-Muslim pluralism, such arguments inadvertently essentialize and circumscribe “cultures,” (particularly racial and ethnic cultures) discounting their iterative, porous, and contingent nature.⁹ It is a reverse kind of “culture talk” and culturalism, usually directed towards Muslims from a critical outside, that assumes an

⁷ I discuss the hadith regarding traveling to China for knowledge in Chapter One.

⁸ Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah is an Islamic scholar based in Chicago, Illinois. A white American convert to Islam who studied traditionally overseas, he also received a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies at the University of Chicago under Fazlur Rahman. His writings and scholarship are well-regarded amongst American Muslims who are also receptive to the teachings of the “Zaytuna School.”

⁹ Abd-Allah does acknowledge anthropological contentions with his instrumental use of “culture,” articulating this aside in a footnote (See Abd-Allah 2004:13 n.4).

essence with concomitant politics and ways of being (Mamdani 2004, Visweswaran 2010).

How then does one speak about such a thing as “American Islam”?

Following Talal Asad, I examine Islam in the territorial United States, and specifically in the San Francisco Bay Area, through the lens of the Islamic discursive tradition, which is “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” (Asad 1986:14). Instead of assuming that Islam is an explanatory blueprint for the things that Muslims do and say, I seek out the ways in which “Muslims are inducted as Muslims” into the discursive tradition by way of an “instituted practice set in a particular context, and having a particular history” (15). While I emphasize practices around cultivating difference and heterogeneity within Islam, this does not negate the “efforts of practitioners to achieve coherence” (17). How coherence and unity within the *Umma* (community of believers) are imagined and worked towards are essential aspects of this study.¹⁰

In addition to the framework of the discursive tradition, I also conceptualize this research through Asian American, African American and Diaspora, and transnational American Studies. Incorporating an analysis of ethnicity and race that is both transnational and diasporic enables me to consider how “historically shared and discontinuous experiences of racism” (Mimura 2009:xiii) impact pan-ethnic and multiracial Muslim collectivities in the American landscape. Thinking through “Afro-Asian” connections in an expansive notion of the Muslim world, with a consciousness

¹⁰ Jamillah Karim (2009) explores “Umma ideals” in her ethnography of African American and South Asian Muslim women in Atlanta and Chicago. Such Umma ideals enable ways to think about a cohesive Muslim community, yet the ideal always indexes the less than ideal ways in which race, gender, and class complicate a sense of unified sisterhood.

towards the increasing numbers of Latino, white, Native American, and mixed-race Muslims, I put theories of diaspora, feminism, and the sovereign ethical subject in conversation to think through what such collectivities mean both ethically and politically (Daulatzai , Ho and Mullen 2008, Mullen 2004, Prashad 2001, Raphael-Hernandez and Steen 2006, Visweswaran 2010).

Reading Islam and Muslim-ness through a lens of global racial formation (Mullings 2005, Omi and Winant 1994, Winant 2001, Rana 2011) enables one to apply theories of diaspora and power relations that incorporate the work of the imagination, genealogies, travel, intellectual traditions, decolonization struggles, and solidarities as ways of engaging global capitalism, racism, and war. The discursive tradition of Islam as a constitutive and mobilizing force does similar work in creating collectivities—traditionally constituted by racial difference and forced migration—through “a localized process that is thoroughly enmeshed in the global context” (Siu 2001:8). For Brent Hayes Edwards, thinking through diaspora enables

an analysis of the institutional formations of black internationalism that attends to their constitutive differences. Diaspora is a term that marks the ways that internationalism is pursued by translation...a process of linking or connecting across gaps—a practice we might term articulation (Edwards 2003:11).

Diaspora is a metaphoric frame for thinking about difference within a unity: “the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference” (Hall 1994:402).

While grounded in ethnographic research culled from eighteen months in and around Zaytuna College (and a number of preliminary and post-fieldwork trips) in the San Francisco Bay Area, this research is also drawn from a long history of traveling Muslims and Islams and how such histories come to matter to, make sense of, and impact the already here now and the aspired towards future (any)where. Intellectual genealogies

converge and diverge in a complex matrix of the visible and the imagined, the read and the recited, the here's and there's of diasporic and transnational movements, desires, and networks. In his ethnography of the Hadramawt diaspora (*Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility Across the Indian Ocean*. Berkeley: UC Press, 2006), Engseng Ho uses textual genealogies and practices of saint veneration to provide a masterful account of the Tarim, Yemen milieu, while also providing insight into a Muslim way of being that has a very clear impact on the Bay Area and Zaytuna College. While his study examines the experiences of young *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) who return to Yemen from the diaspora with often ambivalent feelings of attachment and belonging, my work takes up an alternative diaspora formed through knowledge-based genealogies and induction into a particular proselytizing movement rather than blood line, a living tradition shaped by twenty-first century globalization. The following chapters refer to this theoretical scaffolding towards a consideration of thinking difference and diaspora differently through forms of Muslim relationality.

THREE GENERATIONS OF SEEKERS

In her discussion of the “invention of world religions” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Tomoko Masuzawa traces how in the effort to hellenize and aryanize Christianity, Islam was semitized:

Thenceforward, to the modern European eye, the religion of Muhammed was to be rigidly stereotyped as the religion of the Arabs, as an intolerant religion determined and constrained by the Arabs' national, ethnic, and racial particularities. This semitization of Islam came about in spite of a fact well known to the Europeans, namely, that the vast majority of the Muslims, then as now, were not Arabs. Notwithstanding the long-established internationality and multiculturalism of this religion, then, Islam came to stand as the epitome of the racially and ethnically determined, nonuniversal religions (Masuzawa 2005: xiii).

Concomitant with this racializing of Islam was the shifting of monotheism as “the basis of universality” to its characterization as a “Semitic tendency” that represented “exclusivity (rejection of multiplicity) rather than universality (orderly embrace of multitudinous totality)” (ibid). Reason—as bequeathed to Europe by the Greeks (albeit by way of the Muslims—was exalted as “the doctrine of one universal god” taking its place as the mantle of European civilization. Only the faculty of reason could be acquired (inherited) and cultivated towards the discernment of “the true unity of myriad phenomena amid the multiplicity and diversity of a marvellously prolific nature” (ibid). Such categorization of particular religions as distinct from and opposed to practices of rationality and later science, and thus modernity, produced the space of the secular, whether in politics, social relations, or intellectual inquiry (Asad 1993, 2003).

For Masuzawa, in the modern era, the discourse of religion has been from the beginning both a “discourse of secularization” and a “discourse of othering” most clearly seen in the fields of anthropology and Orientalism (2005:20). Junaid Rana traces early encounters between Christians and Muslims to the contemporary racialization of Muslims in ways that demonstrate the contingent relationship of race and religion as they were deployed empirically towards the colonized indigenous populations of Africa and the New World (Rana 2011, see also Matar 1999). Situating the Islamic discursive tradition within such histories of statecraft, knowledge production, secularization, and racialization is an important context for understanding how Muslim subjectivities are imagined and worked towards today.

The story of Zaytuna College begins prior to September 11, 2001, which can be seen as a significant “turning point” in a long history for American Muslims (Jamal and Naber 2008). In an expansive history, perhaps it began in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries or the seventh century, or the thirteenth. In more recent times, it began in 1994,

2004, 2010, but it also begins in 1875, the 1920s, the 1930s, the 1970s, or the 1990s. The nodes of my timeline shift depending on who is telling the story and whose story is being told. The early chapters of the dissertation discuss some of these starting and turning points.¹¹

There were three generations of seekers present on that green lawn discussed above, a shared space that accommodates not only Zaytuna College, but a UC Berkeley extension program, and the American Baptist Seminary of the West, which owns the property. Zaid Shakir (b.1956) is a co-founder of Zaytuna College who converted to Islam in 1977 while serving in the United States Air Force. Haroon Sellars and I were both born in the decade of Shakir's conversion, him to a Christian family on the East Coast, me to a Muslim and Buddhist family in San Francisco. Most of the students were born in the 1980s and 1990s, into Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic families of varying levels of religiosity, representing states from across the United States. Zahrah and her classmates commented on their diversity being their strength. This diversity referred to both the American *Umma* (community of believers), as well as the Zaytuna Umma, whose students and teachers reflected part of the racial, ethnic, class-based, ideological, and *madhhab* (school of law) diversity of American Muslim communities.¹² The distinction at Zaytuna, however, was how so many constituencies that normally came together—or stayed apart—based on such distinctions were assembled at Zaytuna College, a singular location for in Zahrah's words, the “outlaws” of American Islam.

¹¹ In 1994, Hamza Yusuf was conducting classes in Santa Clara where he was an imam. In 2004, Zaytuna began its seminary program, and in 2010, the first class of freshmen entered Zaytuna College. The first Muslims most likely arrived in the territorial United States around the sixteenth century in the Atlantic slave trade, and the first Muslims of Arab origin arrived in 1875. The 1920s mark the Ahmadiyya mission to the US, and the 1930s mark the beginnings of the Nation of Islam. In the late 1970s, Warith Deen (born Wallace D.) Muhammad led most Nation of Islam congregations into a more orthodox form of Sunni Islam, while in the 1990s there was another wave of conversions to Islam, dynamic Muslim activism, and the founding of Zaytuna Institute in the San Francisco Bay Area.

¹² See Chapter 1 for a discussion of madhhabs (*madhāhib* in Arabic plural form).

Zaytuna College's founders, the white American convert Mark "Shaykh Hamza Yusuf" Hanson, the African American convert Ricky "Imam Zaid Shakir" Mitchell, and the Palestinian American Hatem Bazian, usually referred to as "Dr. Hatem," established the College in 2009 and welcomed the inaugural class of students in Fall 2010. At the time they were supported by a fluctuating staff of about ten people, who were Americans of mostly Pakistani origin, although there were also Afghans, Latinos, African Americans, (east) Asian Americans, and white Americans (not everyone was Muslim). Faculty members like the African-American Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, the Indian-American Tahir Anwar, and Yusuf Mullick were also instrumental voices in early curricular and institutional development.

Zaytuna's inaugural cohorts consist of recently converted African-American, Asian, and Latino Muslims, second-generation African American Muslims, students from African, Arab, Asian, Caribbean, Latino, and South Asian immigrant families, as well as white American converts. In the opening ethnographic vignette, Zahrah, the Brooklyn-born daughter of Caribbean-American Muslim converts, echoes her close friend and roommate Aminah, the Michigan-born daughter of Syrian-American Muslims in recognizing the "strength" of diversity, whether it be class-based, racial, ethnic, or gendered. Aminah had earlier said the following:

I guess because there are so many Muslims from different backgrounds that are in America, they have that as a strength. Like our diversity is a strength and hopefully working together and being unified like Mary was alluding to. A lot of times, Muslims overseas don't have the opportunity to do things like this because of the oppressive government, or they are stopped or killed or kidnapped or whatever it is, and so they don't have that kind of opportunity.

Aminah echoes and agrees with her classmate Mary, a Latina and white American convert from the Bay Area who arrived at Zaytuna College with a university degree in English. Shakir had asked the students if they thought that they were "limited to the same

parameters that limit and constrain...majoritarian Muslim societies?" Mary responded that despite the issues that exist in the United States, there was an ability to be "Muslims in this country, like to sit here, to sit out here and be able to talk about whatever we want to talk about, you know, like having the liberties that we do, even though there are issues." By learning about the history of Muslim societies, the students are better able to understand the specificity of their American experiences, opportunities, and potentialities.¹³

One of the challenges of writing the first extended academic study of the "Zaytuna School" is that there is a lot of background that I felt compelled to convey, and because the College is so new and emergent,¹⁴ much of what I documented in its first two years quickly became outmoded and historical (the founders recently stated to the incoming 2013 freshman class that Zaytuna College is currently in "2.0", while I was witness to Zaytuna College "1.0").¹⁵ It is an ethnography of an institution in transition. There are less classroom moments here than in a traditional ethnography of a school because during the time I was there, what was happening outside the classroom mattered

¹³ This has become especially relevant as the students witness and struggle to understand current events in Syria and Egypt and throughout the Middle East. While some students have direct ties to these countries through family, others feel linked to particular places and peoples through their learning of Islamic history and their being bound to knowledge-based genealogies through their teachers who studied abroad.

¹⁴ I use "Zaytuna School" 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. These include institutions of primary, secondary, and now tertiary learning, online courses, rihlas, conferences, homeschooling, publishers, as well as da'wa organizations. (Grewal 2013, Haddad, Senzai, and Smith 2009, Kugle 2006)

¹⁵ Zaytuna College's proximity to and the fiscal patronage of Silicon Valley is present in the dot.com vocabulary often uttered at the school. Zaytuna is sometimes called a "start-up," and much of its administrative and managerial leadership has been recruited from the tech industry. Such proximity and influence has had an impact on the way that the College is organized and managed in the background. This intentional form of management and bureaucracy surreptitiously affects the dynamics of the social atmosphere, administrative staff morale, and the frequent turnover of lower-rank administrative employees. While beyond the scope of this research, I often considered what an intentionally Muslim form of administration and operation would look like, what business ethics would be pursued in the treatment of and relationality between staff?

to students as much as what happened inside. There are many accounts that take place outside of the school, whether at related sites or events, or in the past, both recent and centuries old. I contend that an expansive approach matters in understanding the discursive significance and context of the College in a wider Islamic and Bay Area landscape, as well as in demonstrating the other influences in students' becoming. Such an approach shows how despite the best efforts of educators, students do not always immediately respond to what is in front of them, while on the other hand, seeing their teachers both in the classroom and in the streets, mosques, and media shapes their learning and approaches to knowledge in complex ways. While current Zaytuna College students were my most critical interlocutors, they do not dominate the pages in the way I anticipated them to. In many ways, though, they are my ideal audience as they themselves reflect upon the significance of their Zaytuna educations and their roles in establishing its historical legacy.

When they first arrived at Zaytuna, they came hungry for knowledge for what Islam was, and how they could best be Muslim. They looked to the scholars for these answers, and they sat with pens and digital audio-recorders at the ready. The scholars too, built the school in order to institutionalize Islamic knowledge while also producing ideal modern Muslim subjects, versed in multiple epistemologies and knowledge-based traditions. Zaytuna scholars and their students seem to take their "modern-ness" (Deeb 2006) for granted, by virtue of their locatedness in the West and situate "tradition" as simultaneously historical, perennial, and modern. For Shi'i Muslims in Beirut, "modern-ness" involves "both material and spiritual progress" in which spiritual progress provides a "viable alternative to the perceived emptiness of modernity in the West" (5). At Zaytuna an "enchanted modern" also involves a critical engagement with and alternative expression of "Western modernity," where "tradition" is seen as more of a resource and

model than an obstacle to progress. The College will establish itself in the tensions between what is taught as foundational and eternal and what the students and teachers discover and imagine anew. As Sherman Jackson stated at the second convocation, this period is germinal:

Zaytuna as an institution is not only a life-long project, its success is something that can not be achieved in any one lifetime. None of us will likely live long enough to see Zaytuna come to its full and complete success.¹⁶

Immediate assessments and critiques of the College in its contemporary everyday are important and necessary towards assisting the school in its immediate tasks. But in taking the long view, I found it important to think through the foundations of the school and to anticipate its potential transformative futures. To quote Jackson again:

It is we the custodial generation that must determine the use to which the tradition that we have been bequeathed will be put to in this country, in this time, in this place. And that is an enormous challenge for us to stand up to, but it is a challenge that will make the difference between whether Islam in this country will be simply a flash in the pan—something that came and went with very little fanfare—or whether or not we will be the beginning of something that will permanently enable generations, hundreds of years into the future to pursue a life that holds the chance of earning God’s pleasure.¹⁷

This ethnography takes seriously this aspiration towards an unseeable future, and considers how the historical and historic efforts of one Islamic college can inform a wider set of anthropological questions regarding subject-making, difference, community, knowledge/power, visibility, and space.

¹⁶ Sherman Jackson. “Convocation address,” video-recording, August 2011. Dr. Sherman Abdul Hakim Jackson is the King Faisal Chair of Islamic Thought and Culture and Professor of Religion and American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. He is a well-respected Islamic scholar who has written and translated extensively in Islamic Studies and has written and spoken increasingly on issues of race and Islam, especially in regards to the theological possibilities for theorizing race and the role of Black suffering (Jackson 2005, 2009).

¹⁷ *ibid.*

One will find in these chapters, the retelling of Zaytuna's history multiple times, in multiple ways through multiple eyes, in ways that impact the particular forms it takes now and the points of view that people may have both within the school and in the larger Bay Area Muslim communities. I began preliminary fieldwork at Zaytuna College in the summer of 2010 at the Summer Arabic Intensive, where I attended Arabic classes, enrichment lectures and activities, summer faculty meetings, academic affairs meetings, and staff meetings. I conducted initial interviews with faculty and students, and I stayed on for the convocation, orientation, and the first few days of the inaugural semester of Zaytuna College. When the Zaytuna College administration and Board of Trustees approved my research in the months prior, they requested that I postpone my primary fieldwork to the second semester of the first academic year so that I would begin primary fieldwork in the San Francisco Bay Area in January 2011. I returned to the College for the second academic year, attending classes and conducting interviews with both first and second year students, staff, and faculty in the fall, while continuing interviews and conducting additional research in Bay Area Muslim communities that spring. During the summer I have visited some students in their home cities in Michigan, New York, and New Jersey, and I have continued to visit the campus intermittently since leaving the Bay Area in Spring 2012.

RIGHT TO LOOK

Recent work on Islam points to the ways in which knowledge, pieties, and ethics are contingent, shaped by embodied practices (Fadlalla 2007, Hirschkind 2006, Mahmood 2005, Mittermaier 2011), social milieu, politics, and the state (Deeb 2006, Hafez 2011, Rouse 2004, Varzi 2006), and technologies (Abu-Lughod 2005, Hamdy 2012, Hirschkind 2006, Ho 2006, Larkin 2008, Moll 2010). Particular to this project are

the ways in which knowledge practices and mediated forms constitute the “architecture of circulation and representation” that create the “pragmatic contexts for modes of practice and worship” (Hirschkind and Larkin 2008:2). At Zaytuna College, these mediated forms include Internet videos, audio lectures, medieval texts, individual dispositions, and liberal arts classrooms that produce both horizontal and vertical forms of belonging, across political difference and transcending historical time, thinking and practicing “kinship by faith” and authority in new ways.

Despite or because of greater visibility in mainstream media, Islam continues to be conflated with terror, violence, and inequality for women, while Muslims are alternatively considered “conservative,” “radical,” and resistant to modernity, democracy, and equality unless proven otherwise (Al-Azmeh 1996, Mamdani 2004, Razack 2008). Building upon recent scholarship that discusses the legal and cultural processes of the racialization and stigmatization of Islam and its effects on the lives of American Muslims in a post-September 11th America (Aidi 2007, Alsultany 2012, Bayoumi 2006, Grewal 2009, Jamal and Naber 2008, Khan 2004, Maira 2009, Rana 2011, Salaita 2006), I examine the affective and political aftermath of these ongoing processes, as Muslims respond to such dis-identification by mobilizing themselves towards the institutionalization of knowledge practices, which emphasize an Islamic moral imperative to think and practice across racial, ethnic, generational, class, gender, and sectarian difference within Islam.

My work in attempting to represent figures who may “feel like a problem” (Du Bois 1989, Bayoumi 2008) or are portrayed as problems, draws from theories of representation in film and cultural studies and visual anthropology. The history of ethnographic cinema’s contribution—as both science and entertainment—to the discursive production of discrete cultures that mark time and space in a Western

epistemology of progress and modernity is well documented (Griffiths 2002, Grimshaw 2001, Rony 1996, Trinh 1991). How the figure of the Muslim is situated historically as the categorical Other has been discussed in terms of literature, photography, and painting (Alloula 1986, Mitchell 1988, Said 1979, 1997), television and film (Alsultany 2012, 2013, Mamdani 2004, Morey and Yaqin 2011, Rana 2011, Shaheen 2001, Shohat and Stam 1994, Weber 2011) and increasingly as part of an Islamophobia industry that creates lucrative alliances between conservative Christian groups, Zionists, and Tea-Partiers (Lean:11, see also Ali August 2011, Kumar 2012, Sheehi 2011, Shryock 2010).

While a small liberal arts college in Berkeley, California should or could be a discreet phenomenon in this wider geopolitical media landscape, by virtue of its being identified as Islamic, it is often already written within such frames (Deleuze 1989). I suggest that any image, any writing, and utterance of an American Islam is already implicated by this mediated framework and contextual mode. In referring to these mediated discourses, Butler suggests that “such visual and conceptual frames are ways of building and destroying populations as objects of knowledge and targets of war, and that such frames are the means through which social norms are relayed and made effective” (Butler 2010:xix). The particular norms I’m interested in rupturing are those binaries of the “good” or “bad” Muslim that are incited to discourse in terms of their loyalty, citizenship, beliefs, and capacity for peace and tolerance in a multicultural America (Mamdani 2004, Maira 2009).

For example, in the spring of 2011, Zaytuna College students sat in their classroom and watched as the first Congressional hearings on the “Radicalization of American Muslims” led by Representative Peter King of Long Island took place in the nation’s capitol. They watched from their seats in a darkened classroom as their congressmen and women, supposed experts on Islam and Muslims, “patriotic” (read

“good”) Muslims, and Sheriff Lee Baca of Los Angeles spoke to the potentialities of their radicalization as impressionable Muslim youth. Later that year they asked their teachers to explain how Anwar Al-Awlaki and his 16 year-old son, Abdulrahman Al-Awlaki who was only a couple of years younger than most of them, could have been assassinated by the US government by drone strikes in Yemen. Some of the students had grown up listening to lectures of Anwar Al-Awlaki (*The Life of Muhammad*) just as they had grown up listening to lectures of their teachers Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir. The following year the student council invited two of the “Irvine 11” to speak with them regarding the events of their arrest and the suspension of the Muslim Students’ Association at UC Irvine after they protested the lecture of the Israeli ambassador Michael Oren on their campus.¹⁸

On multiple occasions such as these, they witnessed young Americans like themselves being persecuted and at times killed for exercising their freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of movement. The ways that entire communities of Muslims become suspect based on the acts of a few individuals weighs upon their young minds and bears upon their life choices and pursuits. At the same time, the specific contexts of the historical moment shaped classroom discussions and extracurricular events. Just as media shaped discourses about Muslims and Islam, current events likewise shaped discourses amongst Muslims.

As the students studied Economics, their professor Hatem Bazian urged them to analyze such current events like the mortgage crisis, bank bailouts, and the budgetary crises of the University of California system from an Islamic perspective, applying Islamic proscriptions on interest (*riba*), ethics of money-lending, charity, and the

¹⁸ Ten of the Irvine 11 were later found guilty of two misdemeanors in an Orange County court. They are currently appealing the verdicts. See www.Irvine11.com

historical structures of endowments (*awqāf*)¹⁹. The teachers led discussions on the death penalty, race, and Islamic perspectives on capital punishment and criminal justice leading up to the execution of Troy Davis. In English composition, they were visited by a local Muslim community leader who had spent time in prison as they wrote essays on the criminal justice system.

Some students visited the Occupy Oakland encampment with their teacher Zaid Shakir. They prayed and marched, recognizing themselves as the 99%, while talking to different activists about why they were there (there was a small contingent of Muslim girls encamped there, as well as Muslim and non-Muslim students representing Palestinian solidarity groups). In Islamic history class, they discussed history in the making as the events of the Arab Spring unfolded. They asked their teachers to do teach-ins on many of these events. They felt that they needed to be informed about such topics, especially those that related to Muslims directly, and they sought out their teachers' guidance on how to start understanding such issues and think about them from an "Islamic perspective." They were beginning to recognize public expectation and their "public" responsibilities in terms of "speaking for Islam."

Deleuze sees in American cinema a "breakup of the American people, who could no longer believe themselves to be either the melting-pot of peoples past or the seed of a people to come" (Deleuze 1989:216). Multiculturalism attempted to suture a concept of "the American people" back together, but the work of "inventing a people" was left in the hands of those who were still invested in a former and persistent myth, while the minimal representations of people of color by people of color became "utterances which are already collective," despite filmmakers attempts to refuse that responsibility. As Haile

¹⁹ *Awqāf* may also be referred to as *ḥabūs* in other (western) areas of the Arabic speaking world.

Gerima says, “if there is a plurality of black “movements”, each filmmaker is a movement in himself” (220-21). In the irony of American-ness, recent hate crimes targeting Muslims in the US, or people mistaken as Muslims, but inevitably seen as foreign, have been narrated as isolated crimes of “crazed” “lone wolves” rather than symptoms of institutionalized white supremacy and a slow “racial holy war.”²⁰ The individual lone wolf versus the collective “Muslim” demonstrates who “the American people” are and where the “burden of representation” lays (Mercer 1994).

Alsultany critiques the reifying aspects of “simplified complex representations” and “sympathetic portrayals” of Muslims in contemporary media that “form a new kind of racism, one that projects antiracism and multiculturalism on the surface but simultaneously produces the logics and affects necessary to legitimize racist policies and practices” (Alsultany 2013:162). Deleuze asserts that these logics and affects, transmitted through film, television, and media “not only express, but also organize the movement of globalization,” (Keeling 2007:11) presenting the US as “benevolent” and “post-racial” (Alsultany 2013:162).

I use visual and media theory as a theoretical framework in tandem with filmmaking as an ethnographic methodology to draw attention to the temporal, intertextual, ethical, and spatial registers of Islamic epistemologies and self-making. By relating practices of seeing and looking at the College and to the mediated discourses I describe above, I hope to emphasize the ways by which young Muslims are shaped by the “cinematic” effects of media, but also the ways in which these new sensorial capacities and modes, impacted by both “new” and “old” media, are likewise shaped towards “traditional” ways and modes of beings enacted anew (Keeling 2007, McLuhan 1964).

²⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/08/21/us-usa-wisconsin-shooting-army-idUSBRE87K04Y20120821>
<http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/06/us/wisconsin-temple-shooting/index.html>

Through Deleuze's notion of the cinematic by way of Kara Keeling, I relate the perceptual and cognitive dimensions of an Islamic epistemology to visual theories of how our mediated world reifies or disrupts racial logics. The "seekers" who illuminate these pages serve as models for each other across time and space, gender and race. They are seen and sensed, made visible through words and embodied ways of being. At times they also refuse to be seen, represented, and written, commanding privacy, distance, and intimate encounters. These are accounts of the visualizing work of Muslim scholars and their students - the *visualizing* and enabling of heterogeneous collectivities amidst the material realities of the racialized and gendered everyday and the *making visible* and present of particular Muslim figures—both historical and contemporary—towards the localization and historicization of Islam in America.

Through my representational work, I am interested in the possibilities of breaking from a reformist "politics of visibility," towards a breaking "free from the world of the cinematic and the common senses that animate it" (Keeling 2007:10). Experimental technique and abstract form in representational work refuses the "totalizing quest of meaning" (Trinh 1991) that mires the history of anthropology and knowledge production of the Other and instead attempts to stimulate a critical looking and listening towards another kind of knowledge and experience (Mimura 2009, Russell 1999). Visual anthropologists likewise consider how the camera itself and the process of making ethnographic films likewise enables an embodied form of knowing and seeing (Jackson Jr. 2004, MacDougall 2006). As the Portuguese filmmaker Pedro Costa has said, "the primary function of cinema is to make us feel that something isn't right."²¹ I would also add, that cinema suggests what could be.

²¹ Thom Andersen, "Ozu Yasujiro: the master of time," *BFI - British Film Institute*, August 23, 2012, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news/ozu-yasujiro-master-time> (accessed November 10, 2012).

I also identified as a seeker at Zaytuna College, though my intense looking as an ethnographer and filmmaker was often directed towards the seeing subjects rather than the objects being seen or sought. The visualizing and making visible that happens at Zaytuna are also discussed throughout these chapters in terms of the audiovisual, visual representation, the seen and the unseen, and the public and the private. I briefly discuss the production of *IQRA' is READ*, a feature-length documentary that accompanies this written text in Chapters 4 and 6. In order to explore the role of texts and the practices and sensibilities around them, I asked students and scholars to choose a text of significance to them that they would recite/read for the camera. Through their choices and our collaborative filmmaking, we attempt to resituate the frames (of war) through which Muslims are typically represented in order to produce new ethical relations and ways of looking and seeing (Butler 2010).

My “right to look” and “to-be-looked-at-ness” came together in my role as a researcher and filmmaker at Zaytuna College. As a young Asian American Muslim woman, I felt an intensity of appraising gazes while also engaging in my own intensive and invasive practice of observation. There were also experiences of not being seen, or being behind the scenes/seen in my work as a videographer, working with Haroon Sellars the audiovisual technician at Zaytuna. John L. Jackson Jr. suggests that theorizing nativity and visibility together “requires an engagement with the inescapable changes to self and other wrought by film/video as a process that is photochemical/electromagnetic at one end and discursive/performative at the other” (Jackson Jr. 2004:40).

Jackson refers to a “commonsensical acceptance of my nativity” based on his *embodying* a particular racial politic, by way of his blackness in Harlem, New York, that nevertheless is consistently complicated by class difference and his way of “seeing,” an aspired to double consciousness, and a complicating double vision (34,38). In my case

my nativity was more ambiguous and doubtful in that I did not carry the commonly-understood, superficial “racial” markers of Muslimness. While a few Muslims assumed that I was of Central Asian origin (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc.), I am typically interpolated as East Asian. My name is Muslim, though not exclusively so, and I do not usually wear a head covering/*hijab/khimār* - the most visible and debated of Muslim markers (I could have also donned a head covering as a non-Muslim, however). On a number of occasions, I would say something that would “reveal” my identification as a Muslim, and the person who I had been speaking to casually for months (and sometimes even prayed with) would respond in surprise, “I didn’t know you were a Muslim!” (In one case, a female student said, “I did think that you seemed like a Muslim though”). Other times, I was assumed to be a convert because I did not look Middle Eastern, South Asian, Southeast Asian, or African American.²²

The level of my participation and observation shifted during my time at the College. While I initially observed congregational prayers from the back of the room, sometimes filming and other times sitting with other young women who were not praying,²³ I eventually started to join the prayer. Had I not been at Zaytuna as a researcher, I would have been less hesitant about joining prayers. I had qualms about the intentionality of my prayer. Would I be doing it to blend in, be seen, and gain a “native” status? Or did I feel obligated and compelled by my faith? Would praying with my informants bind us in ways that would curtail my “objectivity?” I recalled the experiences of other women ethnographers/writers who recognized the ways that they would be

²² For these same reasons, I am often able to escape the pitfalls of “traveling while Muslim,” whether domestically or internationally. Despite my extensive travels throughout the Middle East firmly stamped into my American passport, I have been able to re-enter the United States with little of the disruptions faced by other American Muslims. My name has sometimes raised flags, however.

²³ Women who are menstruating or are in the state of postnatal bleeding fulfill their obligation to pray by *not* praying during this period by Islamic law.

interpolated and the choices that were open to them as “halfies,” “natives,” “kin,” or “westerners” and “outsiders” amongst Arabs and other groups.²⁴ Was I going to be a female (Shi’i) Muslim student at (Sunni) Zaytuna College or a “secular” anthropologist/filmmaker, a non-gendered being, on par with the scholars of Zaytuna despite our differing educational trajectories?²⁵

Kirin Narayan draws attention to the way that binary positionalities can’t accommodate our “cross-cutting identifications” and the ways they shift according to context and situation (Narayan 1993:676). I navigated a space in between where I had a multiplicity of statuses: student, audiovisual technician, community member, and researcher. My shifting positions did not go unnoticed by staff members or students, because it was very rare that I received the kind of access to the school that I had during the time that I had it.²⁶ With that access comes great responsibility, and of that I am constantly aware. While many “native” and “activist” anthropologists are able to make claims about their political projects being in line with or improving the life chances of the people whom they research, I feel that because Zaytuna College encompasses multiple political and spiritual aspirations, identities, and worldviews within Islam, my alignment and the contours of my research are not always situated comfortably with institutional

²⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod recounts the way her father (and later her husband) accompanied her at the beginning of her fieldwork so that she would be situated within the patriarchal structures of a Bedouin tribe (1986, 1993). She became a “daughter” and later a “wife.” Elizabeth Fernea also recognized that at one point she had to make a decision about whether she would identify as a westerner or a woman in Iraq. As a westerner she could transgress gendered spaces and spend time with the male members of the village with her husband. She would not, however, then have full access to women’s spaces (1989). Karen McCarthy Brown likewise binds herself to Mama Lola in her study of Vodun (1991), while Susan Friend Harding resists belief in her study of born-again Christians (2000).

²⁵ I had more experience teaching at the college level than some of the Zaytuna lecturers, but I importantly lacked “traditional” qualifications and perhaps an “authoritative” disposition.

²⁶ No outsider had been given that kind of access to knowledge, classes, students, scholars, and spaces before for such a long period of time (of course, perhaps no one had asked!). A number of journalists and potential researchers approached and visited the school while I was there, but they were usually limited to a few days and a couple of classes.

goals.²⁷ Despite the open doors, I was and continue to be viewed with a weary acquiescence by those who are always being defined by others. There was a complex consciousness of my conditional positionality amongst students and teachers, as when one student introduced herself strategically and playfully to a friend of mine as one of my “experiments.”

Checking one’s intentions is one of the critical first lessons of seeking sacred knowledge, and I would consistently do such self-checks or be reminded by students, teachers, and staff that it was time for one. Haroon also framed my being there in another way:

Your being named Maryam is not an accident at all, so your involvement in this project is the writing of your personal story and your journey with and to knowing God, and you are in a very unique position that is unprecedented in this organization, and um, it’s like miraculous. You know, I’ve heard one of our other co-workers say the same thing like “Wow, that’s so cool how Maryam got in this position to be doing this. That’s like unheard of, like how easy it was...” like, “Wow, I can’t imagine anyone else, the door being opened like that for them to be so intimately involved, you know, at such delicate stages to be doing something like that. It’s unprecedented,” so it’s like there’s that benefit that you’re bringing, but also that benefit that’s coming to you.

You know, so there’s that scary aspect to it, because also especially being a woman, you become privileged to information that some women have never heard like a fraction of what you’ve been able to hear as a Muslim woman. Like man, there’s people like begging us for information, to give more, and want to hear more, and then let alone the people who we know that exist whose lives could really benefit from being exposed to some of these teachers, so just to be conscious of that sense of accountability, and to take it on in the best way possible to manifest some of those characteristics in your life.

Haroon made clear to me, as did others throughout my time at Zaytuna, that I should not see my work and relationships as “simply research.” I should “seek benefit” and examine my own relationship to God while I was there. This was not a unanimous

²⁷ I really felt like I came head to head with the “Fictions of Feminist Ethnography” (Visweswaran 1994).

position, however. Others at Zaytuna believed that I should maintain a “critical distance” so that I could maintain a type of “objectivity” to what was happening at Zaytuna. At what point would my participation lead me to have “blind spots?” If I became too close to individuals and the lines between “on the record” and “off the record” became blurred, I would become too biased to see clearly, or worse, I would exploit and manipulate such relationships and invade and betray privacies (Stacey 1988, Wolf 1996). There existed real fears about how I would represent students in particular, the most vulnerable to my “observations” and “participations” as many of us had developed intimate relationships, and I was privy to many personal and often “controversial” conversations and events. Such fears were not unwarranted as many individuals had already had experiences with the media misrepresenting them, and they were sensitive to how Muslims were often portrayed. There was also a heightened sense of ethics in terms of what was private, and what wasn’t, and when it came to talking about events at the College, at what point was it unethical to speak about other people who were not present in the room.²⁸

Maintaining a rigorous consciousness of the issues of power differentials, ethics, and visibility enables me to consider “the precarious possibility of unproblematically being native and the political implications of embracing nativity” (Jackson Jr. 2004:35). While through my work with Haroon, many of my images came to have use-value for the College (a number of shots I supplied him with ended up in Zaytuna promotional videos), I was also painfully aware that I was contributing to an “incitement to discourse” (Foucault 1978) about Muslims - the need to know and speak about or speak for Islam, define Islam, defend Islam, condemn Islam, explain Islam, die for Islam, kill for Islam, defame Islam, signify Islam, escape from Islam, apologize for Islam, reform Islam

²⁸ Zaytuna staff, students, and teachers used such ethical frameworks to limit my ethnographic inquiries and challenge the parameters of my research (Kondo 1986, Visweswaran 1994, Wolf 1996).

became and continues to be a thriving industry of punditry, public service announcements, books, anti-Islam think-tanks, and advocacy groups, not to mention comedy troupes, television shows, memoirs, and films. The calls for Muslims to condemn terrorist attacks and violence came quickly in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks and continues to our present day, while the surveillance of Muslims, and Americans in general, is increasingly standard operating procedure and legitimated by ongoing “threats to America.”

Not speaking when one is compelled to “answer for” Islam, not demonstrating that one is not an “oppressed” or “silenced” Muslim woman, these are rights often denied American Muslims. And I was asking them to speak and be seen, surveyed/surveilled even.

OUTLAWS IN MEDINA

I am and always will be a Muslim. My religion is Islam...I do not pretend to be a divine man, but I do believe in divine guidance, divine power, and in the fulfillment of divine prophecy. I am not educated, nor am I an expert in any particular field - but I am sincere and my sincerity is my credential. I'm not out to fight other Negro leaders or organizations. We must find a common approach, a common solution to a common problem...The problem facing our people here in America is bigger than all other personal or organizational differences. (X and Breitman 1990:20-21)

When Malcolm X describes himself as “not educated,” he refers to formal structures of higher learning. He cites his sincerity as his “credential,” and perhaps the means to his knowledge and way of being. In this statement he recognizes the authority that comes with knowledge, and despite his not having a formal education, it is well known that he was well-read, erudite, and came from a politically-conscious family. He speaks of finding commonality and great brotherhood and sisterhood from Mecca to Cairo to Accra to Detroit to Harlem, a kinship that was united in some instances around

the common ethical framework that was Islam (submission to the one God and a recognition that His final prophet is Muhammad) and in other instances a common ethical framework grounded in social justice and dignity for all peoples, in particular African Americans and other people of color around the world, subject to political, cultural, economic, and military imperialism and subjugation.

This is not a text about Malcolm X. But it is a text that invokes his legacy as one of the most prominent American Muslims to have ever lived - whose visage, words, life, and spiritual force continues to impact the everyday lives and struggles of Muslims in America. While the U.S. government claimed him with the issuing of a stamp in 1999, and Manning Marable claimed him for the Black left in 2011 (Marable 2011), and Black nationalists, radicals, and Pan-Africanists claimed him back the next year (Ball and Burroughs 2012); he is likewise claimed every time someone reads his *Autobiography* (1965), sees the Spike Lee joint based on the same text (1992), or reads or hears one of his speeches and sees something of themselves or some truth in his story. He is consistently invoked throughout the Zaytuna milieu, whether in a lecture, “Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Malcolm X” produced at Zaytuna Institute in 2002 featuring Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir, in a program “Malcolm and Martin” produced in downtown Oakland in 2005 featuring Cornel West and Zaid Shakir, at Ta’leef Collective in Hayward in 2013 in a “Living Right” session entitled “The Life of Legacy of Malcolm X” featuring Umar Faruq Abd-Allah and Zaid Shakir, or in the everyday reading practices of students.

Malcolm X’s life has been examined and referenced by countless academic studies.²⁹ He is, as Ossie Davis put it after his death in 1964, “our Black prince.” For

²⁹ The following is a short list of academic works that focus on Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam specifically: Curtis (2002, 2006), Dannin (2002), DeCaro (1996), Dyson (1995), Lincoln (1961), Marable (2011), Turner (2003).

many American Muslims, as well as their global counterparts, he is a *walī*, a Muslim “saint,” a *shahīd*, a martyr, one who has a standing with God based on his significance in the history of American Islam and Black suffering, and his ability both in life and in death to bring others to Islam. I discuss this legacy in Chapter Four - he is one of the breezes that blows; he is one of the African Americans that is still working on behalf of us all, building America.

El Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz (Malcolm X) is one of the original outlaws, one deprived of the benefit and protection of the law, one who thought outside the law and beyond domestic law as he considered approaching the United Nations on behalf of the human rights of African Americans. The outlaws of the seventh century to whom Zahrah refers in the beginning of this introduction left or were cast out from their tribes through which they had certain rights and obligations. They formed their own laws and collectivities until they came to see the truth (through rational inquiry and incipient comparative law) of the *Sharī‘a* (sacred law) of Islam. Sherine Razack writes of contemporary Muslims who are also cast out of Western law and politics (2008), while Zahrah considers her own outlaw status as a perhaps subtler form of ambivalence towards the norms of her society and her tribe, “we’ve been broken apart and split from our...tribal associations.” As children of diasporas in America, most of the students are also apart from their ancestral homelands. While in Berkeley at Zaytuna College, the students leave their “tribal” families and communities, much like their spiritual ancestors who left their families and homes to pursue the truth of Islam, whether they escaped to Abyssinia, Medina, or traveled to centers of learning throughout the Islamic world.

The students participate in a pilgrimage to the San Francisco Bay Area, a *mecca* for Islamic knowledge, a *medina* for a new American Muslim society. I primarily discuss the Islamic landscape in the Bay Area in Chapter Four through the narratives of two

individuals, one who grew up in Berkeley and Oakland, the other in Hayward, California. Yet it is important to introduce the San Francisco Bay Area, and particularly the East and South Bays as significant characters in the story of Zaytuna College.

When one listens to Muslims in the Bay Area, one hears multiple accents and traces in speech. Growing up in San Francisco and spending many years in Berkeley and Oakland, my ears were full of multiple Black vernaculars and Englishes as a second language. There was a Bay Area drawl, an ease that reflected the Southern inflections that came northwest in the Great Migration, and a strange syncopation in words and phrasing that reflected the ways different language systems came to live in English. One can still hear Southern traces in Bay Area mosques, whether in the call to prayer that sounds like the blues, or in the way someone will say “See you at the MASjid” (mosque) stressing the first syllable and giving it a long, flat “A.”³⁰

Following an initial wave in the early twentieth century, the majority of African Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area migrated to the Bay Area during and immediately following World War II, initially following defense jobs and then fleeing agricultural mechanization (Murch 2010). During the war years, the Bay Area was the “largest shipbuilding center in the world” (Broussard 2001:190). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the West Coast branch of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) were highly influential in assisting black migrants in fighting for and winning “access to highly paid wartime employment” that diminished in the years following the war (Murch 2010:17). Robert O. Self (2003) and Donna Murch document how political culture, metropolitan space, and migration were closely interlinked in the East Bay. According to Murch:

³⁰ This is similar to the pronunciation of “PO-lice,” often abbreviated to “the Po-Po” amongst young people in the Bay Area. Murch refers to it as a “flat tongue” (Murch 2010:44).

The influx of southern migrants profoundly altered the social organization of northern California's African American communities, ultimately laying the groundwork for their political mobilization in subsequent decades. Migrants, initially branded as unwelcome "newcomers," quickly subsumed the small prewar population into their quest for political access, a higher living standard, and in the case of the fortunate few, upward mobility (Murch 2010:16).

Some in the prewar population were concerned that newcomers weren't acculturating to California and "that their presence would disrupt the long-established ties with white residents" (28). Such concerns did not mean that racism did not exist prior to the second and third migrations, but that the second wave of migrants in particular came with greater expectations of social mobility and opportunity, as well as higher levels of education and work experience than commonly thought. By 1980 Oakland was 51% African American, with the majority hailing from Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, and to a lesser degree Arkansas and Mississippi.

In May 1961 Malcolm X spoke to a multiracial audience consisting of UC Berkeley students and young people of the surrounding areas. A group of black students from the university had engaged in a fight with the university administration to have him speak on campus, but they were largely unsuccessful. The fruits of such efforts, however, and the profound effect of X's lecture "Elijah Muhammad: Messenger to the American Negro" led to the founding of the Afro-American Association at UC Berkeley. This association, as well as the Nation of Islam, were instrumental precursors to the development of the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in 1966:

The core ideological overlap between the Afro-American Association and the Nation of Islam was the cultivation of an enduring black tradition of self-help, racial pride, and economic enterprise...The Nation of Islam proved useful as a contemporary bridge to broader themes of black culture and consciousness... [though] diverging views of Africa and territorial nationalism set the NOI apart from the increasingly radicalized black students on the Berkeley campus...African liberation movements made the continent not a potential place

of return or colonization, but rather a constant source of inspiration for domestic racial struggles (Murch 2010:82).

These students, who would come to include young people from throughout the Bay Area (students from San Francisco State, Merritt College, Cal State Hayward, and others), became deeply engaged in study groups in which they would read and discuss an assortment of critical texts from cultural anthropology, sociology, and literature, and later religious texts like the Bible and the Qur'an.³¹ The majority of students eventually felt compelled to apply their studies to social action and community engagement; they began “street speaking,” holding events like film screenings, conferences, and engaging in early forms of social media (newspapers, campaigns to engage black celebrities in producing music, and radio and television programming). “All of these innovative methods of outreach focused on a single goal—encouraging local black youth to value education itself, independently from the legalistic framework of racial integration” (93). One early leader of the Afro-American Association

likened their awakening racial consciousness to religious conversion and later referred to this group affectionately as ‘born again’...The ‘born again’ derided drug and alcohol use while stressing racial solidarity over class division, sharing and collectivity over material interest, African pride, and above all else, the *transformative power of education* (91, my italics).

The “transformative power of education” was a significant mobilizing force throughout the Bay Area throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and students organized across campuses to defend free speech, establish women’s studies and ethnic studies, oppose the Vietnam war, apartheid, and US imperialism in Iran and later Central and Latin America. College campuses were critical nodes in social movement building and protest; they were

³¹ These texts are read today as foundations for studies of African American and Diaspora studies including: W.E.B. Dubois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Carter G Woodson’s *The Miseducation of the Negro* (1933), and Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man* (1952), E. David Cronon’s *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey* (1955), Melville J. Herscovits’s *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), and E. Franklin Frazier’s *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957) (Murch 2010: 86).

sites of multiracial interaction and dialogue, and often drew minority elites from both around the country and the emergent post-colonial third world.

At the same time, the Bay Area was also attractive to young white Americans who traveled to Berkeley and San Francisco to participate in the burgeoning counterculture movement with its foundations in the Beat Movement and the region's progressive and union-based politics. While followers of Inayat Khan (d. 1927) may have established a *khanqah* (a gathering place for a Sufi order) in San Rafael in the North Bay as early as the 1920s, the most visible traces of Islam amongst white Americans emerges out of the 1960s and 1970s when according to Gisela Webb,

large numbers of (mostly) young middle class Americans located the cause of racism, the Vietnam War, and the evils of technocracy in a spiritual sickness that establishment religions in America had not only failed to solve but had fostered (Hermansen 2000:159).

At the “wisdom traditions” Shambhala Books on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley or the beatnik City Lights bookstore in North Beach, one could find books on Islam and Sufism. At City Lights, they were downstairs in their small Islam section. If one found his way to Berkeley to where some of the books were published, one would find small collectives of (soon-to-be) white Muslims living together, in some cases very in tune with the psychedelic and Eastern religion-seeking attributes of the time:

We had a light spiritual schedule, getting up in the morning, doing some Yoga and Zen meditation out on the top floor deck in the sunshine, and reading sections from the Nicholson translation of Rumi's *Mathnawi*, which I had just purchased from Shambhala, down on Telegraph Avenue. It was for us a mysterious book full of surreal tales, fabulously imaginative, whose purpose was to know God, but we didn't yet connect it with Islam and living Sufism, which had a very limited presence amid the Hinduism and Buddhism that prevailed then.³²

³² The poet Daniel Abdul Hayy Moore discussing living in Berkeley (a few blocks from the current Zaytuna) in 1969, just before he met Ian Dallas, later known as Shaykh Abdalqadir As-Sufi. Quoted from “In Memorium of Hajj Abdallah Luongo” formerly on “The Muslims of Norwich” website. Accessed on October 10, 2012. <http://www.muslimsofnorwich.org.uk/>

Ties were being made to Muslim communities in England and Morocco through travel, writing, and particular individuals, while a few blocks away Dr. Hamid Algar, who would have a huge impact on the intellectual development of multiple generations of Muslims, began teaching courses on Islam and Middle Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley.

On another plane, in the same time and place, more Muslims from the historical “Muslim world” were arriving, some as students, others looking for work or joining family members. Most of the Arabs who immigrated to the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, arrived in the Bay Area through family and village networks and worked in factories and menial jobs (Naber 2012). Most of the earliest Arab immigrants to the Bay Area, dating from the early 1800s were Christian Arabs from the Levant, while there was also a significant population of Muslim Yemenis who worked as farmworkers in the San Joaquin Valley beginning in the 1950s. Many Arabs who may not have intended to stay in the United States were later unable or less inclined to return to their country either due to war, occupation, or lack of socioeconomic opportunity. Through familial and social networks and investment, both Christian and Muslim Arabs were able to invest in small businesses, and in this period tended to identify with each other through pan-Arab nationalism, rather than along sectarian lines of religion. Similar flows occurred for other Muslim populations from Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, India, China, and other Muslim-populated countries.

While there were initial waves throughout the twentieth century, the largest and most diverse Muslim population surges came in the years following the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that changed immigration quotas and enabled greater immigration from the Global East and South. Other critical factors include the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and later the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989), the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), civil wars in Yemen (1962-1970, 1986,

1994), and the Bosnian war (1992-1995), as well as more recent events like the first Gulf War (1990-1991) and the ongoing (American) wars and unrest in Iraq and Afghanistan (2003-present). Besides the two Nation of Islam temples in Oakland and San Francisco respectively, one of the first mosques in the Bay Area was a small storefront in San Francisco's Mission district that was established in 1959, commonly referred to as the Crescent Street mosque. This mosque was started by working-class Pakistani immigrants and was one of the first places new converts to Islam would go for Islamic knowledge until the 1980s and 1990s when many more mosques became established.

Contrary to contemporary attitudes regarding “immigrant” Muslims and their upper and professional class statuses, the population has been and continues to be quite socioeconomically diverse. In Nadine Naber's ethnography of Arab Americans in the Bay Area, one of her elder interlocutors discusses this 1960s and 70s population wave and its diversity in class, religion, political ideology, and country of origin:

More Arabs from Gulf States came to the Bay Area and more and more from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and we also saw more North Africans and more Muslims. Some were already educated and economically sufficient. They became professionals who came directly into banking, real estate, and engineering. Others were not—they became farmers, taxi drivers, janitors, dish-washers (Naber 2012:41).³³

Students, workers, and refugees from throughout the Middle East and Asia established ethnic enclaves, prayer and community spaces, and businesses that would become an essential part of the cultural fabric of the Bay Area, informing the ways *all* Bay Area residents imagined their situatedness in the world. It is significant that the Muslim population in the Bay Area began to surge in the political and countercultural

³³ My own family and extended community shares this trajectory, coming from Iran throughout the 1960s and 1970s. They initially came as students and workers (primarily in service sectors like restaurants, hotels, and gas stations) and were eventually able to invest in small businesses, like restaurants and gas stations, and real estate, which were very affordable prior to 1973 (See Kashani 2006).

hotbed of the 1960s and 1970s. Numerous political agendas came together in this period as international students became involved in local civil rights struggles and anti-war protests, while also drawing attention to international struggles in their own countries. The 1990s would see a resurgence in solidarity politics as anti-war activism—this time the Gulf War—and numerous local issues and state-based ballot initiatives concerning juvenile justice, immigrant rights, affirmative action, police brutality, and other issues consolidated progressive and radical interests.

Working immigrants throughout both these periods tended to focus more on securing immediate material needs – maintaining employment, housing, and security, or establishing businesses. Small businesses like grocery stores and gas stations were amongst the most common, and many young workers moved from employment to ownership, mimicking patterns of chain migration, but in employment and entrepreneurship.³⁴ Entrepreneurs who invested in real estate or otherwise accumulated or pooled sufficient wealth often moved out of the cities and into the suburbs, thereby further expanding migratory networks and patterns. California has been the top destination for immigrants to the United States since the mid 1970s, and in the year 2000, “California became a ‘majority minority’ state, with people of color constituting more than 50 percent of the population” (Pellow and Park 2002:19). Naber describes the early period of twentieth-century migration as one of ethnic accommodation and cultural authenticity that begins to shift in the 1970s towards diasporic anti-imperialism largely organized around Palestine and US foreign policy. As stated earlier, the 1990s ushered in a period of coalitional politics bringing together immigrant groups, youth groups, labor, leftists, students, prisoners, LGBTQ, anti-racist, feminist, housing, and cultural activists

³⁴ The Arab Grocer’s Foundation was established in the 1970s and was a “mechanism for engaging in the politics of civic participation and advocacy” (Naber 2012:45).

and workers. Muslim activists worked on many of the above issues and were coming together across racial and sectarian lines to not only organize and attend protests, but to pray and study at numerous sites across the Bay Area.

While throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the Transbay corridor between San Francisco and the East Bay's Berkeley and Oakland, marked the primary spaces of a Bay Area Muslim landscape, by the 1990s and into the 2000s much of the most vibrant activity and interaction shifted further south and east. While the East Bay continues to be significant as a source of Islamic knowledge and institutionalization, the South Bay and the farther reaches of the East Bay are now home to the majority of the Bay Area's Muslim populations, schools, and places of worship. This area around the counties of San Jose and Santa Clara, which is also known as Silicon Valley, is one of the wealthiest areas of the nation due to it being the epicenter of the high-tech industry. Yet within the same geographic space in which "enormous wealth, scientific innovation, and prosperity" flow on, there likewise exists "relentless attacks on public and environmental health, the oppression and immiseration of thousands of workers and residents" who undergird and endure long commutes within the shiny façade of dot-com's and high-tech gadgets (3). Muslims make up a good proportion of those who have "made it" in Silicon Valley, and it is the combination of that wealth and monetary and physical efforts by the poor, working, and middle class Muslims who line the East Bay, from Vallejo to Richmond to Berkeley to Oakland to Hayward and Fremont that has enabled the establishment of Zaytuna College in a time of economic depression.³⁵

³⁵ While I emphasize the efforts of Bay Area Muslims here, it is important to understand that Zaytuna College is funded by Muslims from around the world, although the great majority of funders are US-based. Incarcerated Muslims (almost 5% of California's population is incarcerated) donate money to Zaytuna College as well.

Zaytuna College is a critical node in the recentering of the Bay Area Muslim landscape, if not the global Muslim landscape. As a potential point of convergence of the multiple populations briefly described above, the College anticipates the communal needs of maintaining Islam as a worldview and way of being American for generations to come. The traces of the above migrations are quickly becoming illegible as knowledge and modes of Islam give way to the powerful influences of a hegemonic and monolithic American capitalist culture in succeeding generations. In referring to San Francisco specifically, Rebecca Solnit cites affluence in the region as having also drastically transformed the progressive, creative, and working class cultural landscape (Solnit and Schwartzberg 2000). Being “priced out” of San Francisco and increasingly Berkeley and parts of Oakland, many Muslims are moving to the outer reaches of the East Bay. In choosing to locate Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, the school’s founders and students are able to take advantage of not only its academic resources and cache, but a complex cultural landscape in which affluence and poverty, indigeneity and migration commingle in close proximity, imbuing the region with a political urgency and global consciousness.

When the Prophet Muhammad traveled with his community to Medina (Yathrib) to escape persecution in Mecca, he and his Companions and family set about creating the first Muslim society. One could imagine the daunting feeling of possibility in establishing social relations anew. The *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad, the sayings and practices of the Prophet are translated as the “tradition” of the Prophet. Yet “Ḥadīth” is also translated as “modern” and “new,” connoting the transformative impact and newness of the revolutionary changes the Prophet implemented. That the students of Zaytuna can imagine Zaytuna as “their Medina” speaks to the sense of possibility and aspiration they have towards establishing a society based on “truth.” The students can, as Zahrah says

“make something of our own and really establish ourselves and then go back out when we’ve decided who we are. And we can go back out and *inshā’Allah*, spread our message of truth and goodness to all the people.”

After Zahrah finished speaking there was a brief stillness. Zaid Shakir quietly responded, “Absolutely, I’m feeling that, that’s it. *Mashā’Allah*. Wow.” He and the other students reflected on their Medina, feeling the impact of Zahrah’s considered “call to arms,” her call to reimagine what it meant to be Muslims in this time and in this place. They were outlaws, and they had arrived in their Medina.

ETHICAL TRANSMISSIONS

The idea of Medina also refers to the ways in which an individual’s body is also a *medīna*, a place where *dīn* (obedience, submission) happens. Though translated as “a city,” a “*medīna*” is “so called because [it was] had, or held, in possession, or under authority” (Lane and Lane-Poole 1968:943). When one is in control of one’s self, and manages one’s city ethically, one produces the grounds for knowledge acquisition and certainty in Islam within one’s self, and ideally in one’s community (Al-Attas 1985, Al-Ghazali 2010b).

Ethics is the “sticky” (Ahmed 2006b) matter that attaches itself to and follows all aspects of this study.³⁶ Ethics mark all forms of relationality and practice, and the student-teacher-knowledge nexus is thick with ethical possibilities and pitfalls. Recent work on knowledge and ethics challenges notions of human beings as autonomous

³⁶ Sara Ahmed refers to the stickiness of “the object in sexual object choice” and how “the choice of one’s object of desire makes a difference to other things that we do...especially if such orientations do not follow the family or social line.” I find the notion of such stickiness as likewise helpful in thinking about knowledge, especially “sacred knowledge” and nearness to God as the object of desire and the ways that the orientation towards and pursuit of such knowledge shifts all sorts of things in one’s life. As I describe later, knowledge as object for young Muslim women reorders things differently for them than for their male counterparts and this orientation draws many ethical questions in its wake.

subjects and demonstrates how cognitive processes are intrinsically related to the senses and embodied and affective ways of knowing (Asad 1993, Connolly 2002, Hirschkind 2006, MacDougall 2006, Mahmood 2005, Morgan 2012). Muslim scholars and their students are organized around a consistently negotiated and interdependent ethical and moral framework that regards an “individual’s ability to judge what conduct is right and good (for oneself and for others) to be dependent not on an inaccessible conscience but on embodied relationships” with parents, authorities, friends, and also through embodied practices of faith, prayer, fasting, zakat, and hajj (Asad 2003:247-8).

Like an acoustic architecture created through cassette sermons, the orientation around sacred knowledge implies a “distinct moral vision, animating and sustaining the ethical sensibilities that enable ordinary Muslims to live in accord with what they consider to be God’s will” (Hirschkind 2006:8). The ethical substance, mode of subjectivation, ethical work, and telos (to use a Foucauldian framework) are ethical fields of a system informed by Aristotelian moral thinking and embodied practice, while the moral emerges as a particular ethical formation derived from processes of argument, normalization, and performance. Following Hirschkind, I believe in confronting the “inadequacies of such binaries as moral/political,” especially in regards to how in everyday life, Muslims exercise “their agency in contexts of public interaction, shap[ing] the conditions of their collective existence” (ibid.). Knowledge-based institutions become a critical foundational and spatial manifestation towards a collective existence.

The charismatic force of education itself works in tandem with scholars who demonstrate an embodiment of knowledge through socially-recognized forms (such as language, dress, and disposition), both apparent externally and less apparent internally, of ethical cultivation. Such knowledge formations engage in and work against nineteenth century and contemporary critiques of recitation and memorization-based forms of

Islamic education that indoctrinate rather than cultivate critical thinkers. That Zaytuna College is adamant about its liberal arts approach (that is both Western and Islamic) speaks to its situatedness in contemporary debates happening in both the western media and in Islamic-majority countries and how it sees itself as intervening in the ethical and intellectual decline of both educational systems. The substance of this intervention is most acutely apparent in the disconnect between the ethical and intellectual, as well as the critical role of the sensory.

Contemporary debates in higher education revisit the role of ethics and moral education in American colleges and universities (Kiss and Euben 2010). Much of the debate concerns the possibility of agreeing upon what the ethical foundations of our society should be and whether schools are the appropriate places for such inculcation. Stanley Fish, one of the opponents to this “ethical turn” believes that professors can only “aim low” and cultivate intellectual ethics related to the pursuit of knowledge and a particular subject matter itself. He believes that it is only institutions that are related to particular religious denominations, sectarian, ethnically-specific, or very small that can even attempt to produce a unified notion of “good and moral citizens” (Fish 2003). Julie Reuben’s history of the shifting role of morality in higher education documents how early American universities initially connected to particular churches and religious authorities eventually shifted their moral training towards the humanities and religion as a scientific field. Only colleges that continued to maintain a relationship with and “serve a subsection of population, typically identified by religious identity, have kept morality at the center of curricular and community life” (Reuben 2010). These same colleges, however, have

faced the opposite challenge of “establishing their legitimacy as educational institutions” (ibid.).³⁷

Andrew Delbanco conceptualizes college as a “rehearsal space for democracy” in which students learn to listen to and engage in discourse with students of differing perspectives and experiences (2012:xiv). Regardless of whether this ideal is being fulfilled, issues of American citizenship and ethics do play out in and around college classrooms, whether in terms of who has access to those classrooms, debates about what should be taught in them, and how ethics and morals are imagined, inculcated, and practiced. As young Muslims rehearse democracy, they likewise encounter the very real ironies of and challenges for American democracy in their everyday lives. One of their great challenges and why I see ethnic studies as an ideal framework for thinking through Zaytuna’s endeavor in higher education is because though it inaugurates itself as an independent institution, it likewise proposes a non-isolationist agenda based in WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation and interfaith networks (like the Graduate Theological Union). Desiring to be recognized within such frameworks, does not necessarily undermine Zaytuna’s ethical obligations to and orientation around Islam (though some critics have asserted this). What it does within such frameworks—what it reproduces for capital and the state and what it imagines towards communal sustenance and self-definition—will determine to what extent it produces itself and an “American Islam” on its own terms.

³⁷ A similar point was recently made at Zaytuna College’s inaugural academic conference, “Islamic Education in the West,” by David Coolidge, a former Muslim chaplain at an ivy league university. In his talk he presented the example of Earlham College, a Quaker liberal arts college in Indiana that has maintained a connection to the Quaker community and Quaker ethics since its establishment in the mid-nineteenth century. As someone invested in the communal future of Zaytuna College, Coolidge urged the College and its founders to consider its aspirations and goals vis a vis an American mainstream – did the school want to be the “Muslim voice” in an American multicultural mainstream or a critical space for Muslims to develop themselves as a community on their own terms, thereby resigning themselves to the margins of American life. From whom did they seek legitimacy?

Ferguson, following Foucault, urges interdisciplinary scholars to turn their attention,

to that small and insignificant thing called the body...“conducting a critique of relations existing at a minute level would be to render impossible the reproduction of the form of the State apparatus within revolutionary movements.” To undermine the reproduction of hegemony in those little acts of production—reading, writing, teaching, and advising...such are the little things that we can deploy in order to imagine critical forms of community” (2012:232).

I consider the body as a site of ethical cultivation, relationality, and way of knowing that mediates a critical engagement with a larger social body (the nation, the West, modernity) of which Muslims are often viewed as a foreign, dangerous, and radicalizing part. This enables me to draw attention to the significance of how particular Muslim bodies come to occupy space, a visual field, and an ethical community.

CHAPTERS BREAKDOWN

While all the current students and teachers at Zaytuna College are Sunni Muslims, they follow different schools of law (*madhhab* –singular, *madhāhib*-plural). I discuss this distinction in Chapter 1 “Knowledge is a Right” in terms of the way that *fiqh* (understanding, Islamic jurisprudence or law), schools of law, and da‘wa are frameworks for conceptualizing the self and engaging intra-Muslim difference. I juxtapose an analysis of pedagogic and scholarly texts that discuss Islamic ideals about seeking knowledge with some of the ways that “learning forms of thought and behavior,” manifest on the ground at Zaytuna College (Asad 2003:246). Knowledge becomes a cognitive, embodied, and mutual practice that binds “knowing” to one’s rights and ethical responsibilities to God, one’s self, and others.

Chapter 2 “Students and Teacher/Musa and Khidr” continues this discussion of the ethical practice of knowledge in terms of both teaching and learning. Many students’

first encounters with Zaytuna scholars were mediated, whether via digital technologies (CDs, DVDs, Internet videos, websites) or texts. In some cases students attended large conferences or retreats where Hamza Yusuf or Zaid Shakir were headliners. Ideal scholars embody Islamic knowledge, such that they become ethical-spiritual models for students. While mediated productions of scholars allow for greater circulation of Islamic knowledge, they also index the ideal of being in close proximity to the scholar, being face-to-face, heart-to-heart. This digital *da'wa* (calling, summoning, invitation) eventually lead to the establishment of the Zaytuna seminary program that laid the groundwork for the liberal arts college that began in Fall 2010.

Chapter Three “We Pray that the History that We Make will be History that is Remarkable” charts the multiple intellectual genealogies and institutional formations of the Zaytuna School towards a particular telling of its history. I discuss the shift from seminary to college, different teachers’ educations, and how the liberal arts and “great books” traditions are incorporated into the curriculum. This history is also situated within the history of higher education institutions in the United States, specifically the role of moral education and the secularization of science. By discussing the experiences, desires, and sensibilities of students at both institutional formations, this chapter also emphasizes the affective and temporal aspects of “seeking sacred knowledge” and how such embodied relationships are important indices for thinking about the potentialities, limits, and positionalities of critique.

Chapter Four “Muhammadaic Breezes from Tarim to the Bay” charts how particular histories and contemporary realities come together in the Bay Area. Following the discussion of ethical-spiritual models begun in the previous chapter, “Muhammadaic Breezes” continues to illustrate the ways in which particular historical figures are made present as ethical-spiritual, as well as explicitly political, models. The political is

subsumed under the ethical, and narrated through spiritual kinship and genealogies. Such efforts are aimed towards historicizing and localizing Islam in the United States, while they also propose ways of thinking and being across ethnic, racial, and class differences.

Chapter Five “Out of Bounds” continues an exploration of the temporal and spatial dimensions of Muslim ethics by considering issues of (visual) representation with intimacies and distance, embodied knowledges, and forms of refusal and relationality. I re-present an event from the previous chapter in order to consider the ways in which the ethnographic or filmic eye can be out of bounds, and perhaps out-matched by the intensities of a particular moment. The eye continues to do work as it indexes a particular form of embodied knowledge through the shedding of tears and through an intense looking and listening across distance from women’s spaces. The limits and possibilities of representation are further explored through refusals, collaborations, and relations brought about by attempts to record and reproduce knowledge-based practices and events.

Chapter Six “Awe and Certainty” brings together issues of fiqh, embodied knowledge, and the social relationships that constitute knowledge practices with an examination of Islamic astronomy and structures of time. As students study the Islamic sciences of astronomy and time-keeping, they attempt to apply this knowledge towards the determination of prayer times. This chapter explores the complexities of collectivity within Islam - how individual authority, self-governing, and certainty have communal ramifications. Different interpretations of Islamic law and attitudes regarding modern technology and science impact attempts to produce a unified umma, and mark the ways in which the modern state, notions of citizenship, diasporic and local attachments impact the experience of time and the cosmos, authority, and the practice of fiqh.

Chapter Seven “An Image of the Whole World” puts al-Ghazālī’s articulation of the image and the ordering of our image-making capacities in conversation with contemporary theories of sense and visibility. For al-Ghazālī, seeing is a process in which the image is physically sensed, then “seen” in the imagination, and then “seen” finally in the heart. Ultimately, however, the agentive act of seeing is not wholly autonomous and ocular, for it is contingent on God enabling one to see by His grace. Through embodied performances of sacred knowledge, the scholars transmit both information and ways of being to their students, while students also intensely look at one another as ethical-spiritual mirrors and models. By examining a Muslim “to-be-looked-at-ness” in relation to practices of intense looking, this chapter continues a discussion begun in Chapter Five regarding the work that images do, whether embodied, man-made, or divinely designed and how the cultivation of one’s looking and seeing often enables young Muslims to seek out models across gendered and racial differences. New (digital da‘wa) and old (texts and [story]tellers) media technologies work in tandem and in opposition, habituating us towards other ways of seeing and, thus, knowing.

Chapter 1: Knowledge is a Right

Three art pieces sit high above the couch in the lounge at Zaytuna College. Etched in black on a gold background of a black lantern on dark red prints aligned side by side are the following *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad regarding the pursuit of knowledge:

"He who leaves home in search of knowledge walks in the path of God."

"Seek knowledge all the way to China."

"Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave."

All three statements speak to the ethical imperative and virtue of “seeking knowledge.” While the substance and method of such knowledge is not clearly stated, the temporal and spatial aspects of such processes are alluded to in the sense that knowledge is a life-long journey, worthy of being sought from disparate sources and across any distance and period of time. The implication of China as a site of knowledge, prior to the establishment of Islam there, suggests a catholic approach to seeking knowledge from non-Muslims as well (during the Prophet’s time, China was known for its developments in medicine, paper and printing, trade, seafaring...etc). Seeking knowledge is a right of God upon humanity, and knowledge is a right to which all of humanity should have access. Knowledge is also the means by which one enacts one’s rights and comes to know what rights one has and the rights of others with which one must be engaged.

Considering the inherently ethical relationships through which knowledge practices are constituted, this chapter examines how Islamic knowledge practices and traditions are imagined, engaged, and institutionalized towards producing a future for Muslims and Islam in America. I begin with a brief discussion of the constitutive role that knowledge practices have played in the formation and viability of Muslim communities historically in regards to the development of the Islamic sciences and institutions. Throughout this chapter and the next, I analyze and refer to pedagogic and analytical

texts that outline the ideal pursuit and transmission of knowledge within the Islamic discursive tradition. In most cases the texts have been translated and annotated by Zaytuna scholars and are widely read by students at the College. I use the Islamic science and concept of *fiqh* (understanding, jurisprudence) as a framework for thinking about ethical relations in regards to such communities. Thinking through *fiqh* enables a way to understand one's relation to God, to one's self, and to others in terms of conceptions of the self, difference, and one's rights and duties. I discuss *fiqh* and the *da'wa* (invitation, socioreligious activism, and doctrinal renewal) (Mahmood 2005) through which *fiqh* is often expressed in the American context via particular texts and the pre-history of Zaytuna College.

In studies of academic institutions, “formal ideas, which show man at his most dignified” coexist with “the non-volitional behavior of the sort that often shapes institutions” on the ground (Veysey 1965:ix). Following scholars of American higher education, I recognize that “the whole range of the human mind begs recognition—deep-seated impulse as well as polite articulation. Therefore the university must be understood as a magnet for emotions, not alone as a project of conscious definition” (ibid.). An ethnographic analysis begs such an attention to the complex commingling of the aspirational and the everyday, such that this study refers to both the “formal ideas” as exhibited in scholarly treatises of the College founders, the course catalog and promotional materials, video productions, public events, and the website, and to the more complex realities that emerge in the everyday. While I acknowledge these parallel planes, I also problematize the binary of “deep seated impulse” and “polite articulation” that implies different levels of rational input and consideration. Islamic notions of the autonomous self and embodied ways of knowing complicate the Cartesian mapping of

the rational mind and body (Asad 1993, Hirschkind 2006, Mahmood 2005, Mittermaier 2011, see also Connolly 2002).

In *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future* (New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1985), Malaysian philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (b. 1931) lays out his mandate for the Islamization of knowledge and a concomitant program for an Islamic university. His experiences as a student from madrasa to state schools to British military academies, prepared him for his graduate work in Islamic Studies at McGill University and the School of Oriental and African Studies (where he studied with A.J. Arberry and Martin Lings and received his doctorate in 1962). Hamza Yusuf was deeply influenced by the work of Al-Attas, having read all his available published works and having likewise interviewed him in the early 2000s for his Arab satellite television series on MBC, *Rihla* (Journey, Quest) *with Hamza Yusuf*.³⁸

When Yusuf asks Al-Attas to summarize what he thought was the “essential crises taking place right now in the Muslim world,” Al-Attas responds “it is the loss of *adab*.” For Al-Attas, “*adab*” is “acting in conformity with justice [*‘ādil*].”³⁹ In the above mentioned text, he provides a more detailed definition for “*adab*”:

[the] recognition and acknowledgement of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically according to their various grades and degrees of rank, and of one’s proper place in relation to that reality and to one’s physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials (Al-Attas 1985:187).

³⁸ Again there is reference to a journey in seeking something out as if on a quest. In the series, Yusuf would travel to different parts of “the Muslim World,” talking to different scholars and individuals about different issues in Islam. One portion in association with the Egyptian program, *Yalla Shabab* (Let’s go, Young People!) also includes his travels with a couple of Arab young men across the United States, in which they gained a sense of “Muslim American life.” They also visited Yusuf’s high school and met with both his Muslim and non-Muslim family. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUxyEaz7m5M>

³⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F60oME7mM8> The video is also featured on the Seeker’s Guidance website in a series of postings regarding Al-Attas’s work.

For Al-Attas, *adab*, and the process by which *adab* is transmitted as an understanding of reality, inculcated as capacities and potentials, and then executed as *'amal* (good works) is *ta'dīb*, which is for him, the most accurate English translation for “education” as he envisions it in the Islamic context.

Pedagogic texts like *Instruction of the Student: the Method of Learning (Ta'līm al-Muta'allim - Ṭarīq at-Ta'allum)* written by Imam Burhan al-Din al-Zarnūji (d. 620/1223) are directed at students of sacred knowledge.⁴⁰ Such texts elucidate the aspirational ideals of teaching, learning, and application, while the experiences of Zaytuna teachers, former students of the Zaytuna pilot seminary program, and current students at Zaytuna College provide the complex realities of the everyday. These texts contextualize teaching (*ta'līm*) and learning (*ta'allum*) with a consciousness towards *adab* and *ta'dīb*. Al-Attas's profound understanding of the word-concept, “*adab*,” can be likewise understood by considering its more straightforward translations: in verb form (*adaba*) “to invite to a banquet,” “to collect together for an affair,” or “to teach discipline of the mind, and the acquisition of good qualities and attributes of the mind or soul” (Lane and Lane-Poole 1968:34). In modern usage as a noun, it likewise refers to good manners, comportment, belles-lettres, literature, or culture.

In this text I use the noun form of “*adab*” as it was used at Zaytuna, connoting an embodied and cognitive sense of manners and comportment that recognizes and acknowledges forms of authority, hierarchy, and rank, as well as ethical decency, justice, mutual respect, piety, and God-consciousness. Because of the multifaceted nature of the word both in Arabic and in translation, it is in the discursive utterances and iterations of “*adab*” in the everyday around which a type of collective meaning is understood.

⁴⁰ This text is viewed as a rather minor and uninfluential text historically amongst Islamic Studies scholars, although its recent inclusion in a collection of texts on Islamic educational thought (Cook and Malkawi 2011) and its publication in English by Starlatch Press (2003) has increased its study and usage.

THE PATH IS STRAIGHT AND WIDE

In the 2003 revised edition of *Instruction of the Student: the Method of Learning* (Chicago, IL: Starlatch Press) by Imam Burhan al-Din al-Zarnūji, Hamza Yusuf writes in the “Foreword,” “this book should be a starting point for the revival of this Islamic intellectual tradition that has always been the preamble to Islamic Renaissance” (xi).⁴¹ By describing the basic adab of study, the text outlines “what a teacher and a student need to know in order to render fruitful the process of learning and teaching” (viii). Yusuf had first read the text as “a young student of sacred law” in the 1980s in the United Arab Emirates, and he “took it with [him] on [his] journey to the land of Chinqit (Mauritania) and the Maghrib to study with men who embodied its meanings” (ix).

Zaytuna students were formally introduced to the text during the student orientation of Zaytuna’s second year. The inaugural class had recommended to the administration that the orientation should be more extensive so that students could have a better sense of the College’s vision and their own responsibilities as students, classmates, and believers. In many ways, the students were asking for *ta’dīb*, and the Zarnūji text gave them that sense of order and context through which to understand their *ta’allum* (learning) of the substance of the Islamic sciences and general education coursework. Freshmen and sophomores were each given a photocopy of the 2003 edition (currently out of print), and they gathered in the library where Zaid Shakir went over the text with them. Much like their teacher Hamza Yusuf, who “still read[s] it from time to time,” Zaytuna students often keep the text close, referring to its passages often as a reminder for why they are at Zaytuna. As Salman, a student of Afghan origin from the East Coast says,

⁴¹ The original translation by Gustave Edmund Von Grunebaum and Theodora Mead Abel was published in 1947 by King’s Crown Press in New York.

I try to read a small excerpt from [it] every day and...I try to keep that in mind the whole day and it's really motivational...It like, sort of gears me (he points his hand ahead, steering himself forward) in how I should approach my studies and the way I am handling my life in regard to this quest.⁴²

That Salman sees his studies as part of a quest, as if he is on a path or search, is an often used metaphor in Islam. "The straight path" is referred to in "the Opening" (*Al-Fatiha*) of the Qur'an, and seeking knowledge is one of the surest methods for staying on this path. At Zaytuna, the students approach the path from multiple origins and seek to find their own pace. As third-generation Black-American Muslim Ruqayya⁴³ reminds me,

Imam Zaid always says, "the path is straight but wide; it's not the straight and narrow; it's the straight and wide." And I think that's really nice that so many people can find different ways to be on the path, and it's not like all "Everybody get in line and tie your hijab in a certain way," and that kind of thing, just on a superficial level with the hijab.

She laughs, perhaps with a sense of relief and rueful recognition of what "proper" Islam has come to mean in spaces like the mosque, school, and home. Ruqayya and Zaid Shakir refer to both general ways of being and to specific legal rulings regarding congregational prayer in which individuals should be standing in straight lines, shoulder to shoulder, foot to foot, and the requirements of a woman's dress in prayer. Most students come to Zaytuna not knowing that there are often subtle and substantial differences in the ways that different authoritative schools of law interpret the legal rulings regarding such basic things as prayer. Not knowing that such differences existed and were legally "valid" amongst authorities (like the scholars of Al-Azhar in Egypt) often made for discomfiting

⁴² Interview with "Salman" so named for Salman al-Farsi one of the first of the Prophet's Companions who came from Persia. Spring 2011. Audiorecording.

⁴³ Ruqayya prefers to identify as a Black American, rather than an African American, citing her identification with Black history, culture, and politics in the United States, rather than a sense of identity, home, or culture related to the continent of Africa.

situations in mosques, where people could be judged and chastised for not doing things “correctly.”

Sherman Jackson discusses the impact of this lack of knowledge on the interactions between “immigrant Islam” and “indigenous Islam” in which “cultural” knowledge and forms of devotional practice compete in battles for authority and authenticity (Jackson 2005). Jackson emphasizes the historical situatedness of the discursive tradition towards avoiding problematic universals and a type of legal stagnation within the legal tradition in particular:

There is no “real,” “true,” or “authentic” Islam apart from the historical instantiations (read interpretations) of the religion in the world...Muslims, in other words, whenever and wherever they happen to be, are ensconced in historical situatedness, and this endows them with a perspective from which they speak. Where their uncoordinated efforts result in unanimous agreement, this may serve as the functional equivalent of a transcendent view, inasmuch as the agreement itself shows the view to be impervious to the dictates of any particular perspective. But where there is disagreement (assuming due diligence) no particular perspective can be justified in projecting itself onto the world as a universal standard for all.⁴⁴

Al-Attas would likewise refer to this situation as indicative of the loss of adab in the “community,” which leads to a confusion and error in knowledge and the “rise of leaders who are not qualified for valid leadership” of the Umma, “who do not possess the high moral, intellectual and spiritual standards required for Islamic leadership” (Al-Attas 1985:100). Zareena Grewal likewise describes this perceived “crisis of authority” that characterized many Muslim communities in the United States in the last few decades (Grewal 2006, 2013). This sense of not knowing, perhaps an uncertainty, has motivated many young Americans to travel abroad to seek “authentic” Islamic knowledge. While such travel continues, the option of staying in the United States and studying at Zaytuna

⁴⁴ Jackson 2005: 7-15. I further discuss the idea of agreement and disagreement in relation to knowledge in the next chapter.

College is becoming an appealing and at times necessary opportunity for young Muslims.⁴⁵

BEGINNINGS

Zarnūji begins his pedagogic treatise with a sense of what knowledge is, upon whom it is bestowed, and from where it comes:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Mercy-giving. All praise is for God who favored the Children of Adam with knowledge and responsible action [‘amal] above all creation; and may God’s blessings and peace be upon Muhammad, the master of the Arabs and non-Arabs, and upon his family and his Companions from whom knowledge and wisdom spring (Zarnūji, Grunebaum, and Abel 2003:1) .

Knowledge and responsible action are joined together here, binding the intellect to an ethical practice and comportment particular to humanity. The Prophet Muhammad, his Family, and his Companions are all the foundations of human knowledge and wisdom, whether in their acts, speech, or transmissions. That Muhammad is master (*sayyid*) of both Arabs and non-Arabs (*al-‘ajam*) draws attention to the transcendent aspect of knowledge that exceeds and at times contradicts particular tribal customs and traditions, towards a specific unifying Islamic knowledge.⁴⁶ This knowledge and its application is what identifies or inducts one into the *Umma* (the community of believers).

⁴⁵ The current political situation in the Muslim areas of Africa and the Middle East have severely limited American students’ abilities to travel and study in those areas. Hubs like Cairo and Damascus for both formal (university) and informal (study circles and private study) are increasingly inaccessible to students for safety and security reasons, both abroad and when they return home. In Damascus a number of scholars have also had to flee the ongoing civil war. One male student who is part Yemeni was discouraged by Hamza Yusuf to study in Yemen in the summer of 2012, at the same time, however, two sisters who are not Yemeni, did travel to Yemen to study that summer. The differences in ability to travel abroad are not only marked by economic circumstances, but by political, national citizenship, ethnic, and gendered differences as well. The male student would have been marked in both Yemen and the United States upon his return as a potentially “radicalized” American Muslim whose national affiliation with Yemen, no matter how far removed, could have made his political situation more tenuous.

⁴⁶ Al-Zarnuji himself was a non-Arab, born in Zarnuj, east of the Oxus in present-day Turkmenistan. The term “al-‘ajam” also referred specifically to Persians or to those for whom Arabic was not their native language.

Conversion to Islam was a consistent occurrence throughout its early histories, such that developing ways to articulate these new relationships became a necessary part of the *dīn*'s transmission.⁴⁷ This is not to say that such identifying practices were fluid and equally applied. Ethnic, tribal, political, and gendered notions and traditions often endured in practice despite the often revolutionary tenets of the Prophetic Tradition.⁴⁸ Yet it was precisely the possibilities of a new socio-political order, and a belief in Muhammad's message, that attracted people to Islam (Izutsu 2002:58). According to Izutsu:

Muhammad made a daring attempt to abolish the principle of tribal solidarity and to replace it by that of monotheistic faith which would make possible a new organization of society with a wholly ritualized way of life as a manifestation of the eternal order here on earth. It is clear that this revolution—for 'revolution' it certainly was—was prompted at first by a purely religious motive, though as time went on the principle of *kinship by faith* began to assume more and more a rich political coloring (59, my italics).

It was this political coloring that set the stage for a crystallization of knowledge practices historically. The concept of a kinship by faith is important for understanding the revolutionary and ethical nature of Islam both in the eighth century and in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Muslim conversion often disrupted and stressed tribal and familial affiliations and statuses, while gendered forms of relationality were likewise brought into relief as evidenced in the Prophetic Ḥadīth. In our contemporary (race-thinking) imaginary, it is the kinship witnessed by Malcolm X as he experienced

⁴⁷ See Ibn Khaldun regarding his statement about most scholars being Persians.

⁴⁸ Hodgson refers to the translation of Hadith into "tradition" as a misnomer in that the Hadith often marked a practice or judgement quite contrary to established practices or customs of the time. As some point it does become part of the "Islamic tradition" as part of a transmitted corpus and field of knowledge, but initially the Prophet's speech and actions marked a shift from or commentary on established practices (1974a).

multiracial brotherhood in Mecca, and in a more exceptional and sensational mode, the life history of John Walker Lindh, the (white) “American Taliban.”

Kinship by faith is experienced and modulated in the everyday as forms of address as well. At Zaytuna College, as in other Muslim spaces, men and women often address each other or refer to each other as “brothers” and “sisters.” At times it is a general form of address, in other instances it is used as an honorific in lieu of a title like “Imam” or “Imama,” “Shaykh” or “Shaykha,” or “Ustadh” or “Ustadha” (teacher). When a female student speaks about the male students collectively, she refers to them as “the Brothers.” The male students, faculty, and administration, also use such appellations, whether referring to “the Sisters” or to a specific “Sister Maryam.” Such designations suggest intimacy, companionship, and respect (as well as difference vis-à-vis outsiders), while also proscribing appropriate forms of gender relationality. When one is a “sibling” in faith, one is subject to particular expectations of what is good *adab* in terms of relating. The multiple understandings, potential excesses, and (self)policing of such appropriate forms has been one of the most consistent challenges and points of contention for young Muslim men and women.

For example, a prohibition on dating at Zaytuna College attempts to suppress or limit sexuality and delineate “appropriate” forms of gender-mixing on campus and in the dorms. Marriage proposals and “dating” are consistent issues at both the Summer Intensive and the College, such that the faculty and administration now discourage mixed-gender study groups, while simultaneously being intermediaries in marriage proposals and teaching in mixed-gender classrooms. The pastoral and paternalistic approaches to student life at Zaytuna will continue to be challenged by the realities of putting pious and like-minded students in intimate spatial or devotional relation at the school. While most, if not all, the students believe in Islamic proscriptions on physical

intimacy and sex outside of marriage and the need to maintain a level of respectful distance between the sexes, they also wonder if they will ever be able to find spouses as ideal and God-conscious once they leave Zaytuna. Because marriage is “half the dīn,” the students take this life “choice” very seriously, and the “fallout” regarding such issues have had very real and life-altering consequences.

At the same time, Zaytuna is a heteronormative space in which it is expected that students desire and will attempt to follow a prescribed path towards heterosexual reproductive marriage. There is an assumption that those with queer gender or sexual identities would not want to attend Zaytuna, although they are welcome.⁴⁹ Such speculations suppose a particular hierarchy of desires and orientations towards particular objects (Ahmed 2006b). In my introduction, I discuss how one can have an orientation towards sacred knowledge that resituates one’s relations and way of being in the world. One’s same-sex orientations would not necessarily orient one away from God or sacred knowledge, but it would place one in a dissonant relationship with the discursive tradition and the normative community. This dissonance as I discuss later is not exclusive to sexuality, but arises in issues of gender and race as well. These dissonances likewise open up other possibilities and critical positionalities regarding the textual tradition and social norms. The “asexual,” “no dating” space of Zaytuna enjoins students to orient themselves

⁴⁹ In a number of public forums, Hamza Yusuf was asked about homosexuality and whether Zaytuna will accept homosexual students. He states that while they would be accepted, he is not sure why they would want to come to Zaytuna. Hamza Yusuf has been singled out regarding his statements and beliefs on homosexuality and Islam, and I reluctantly participate in such inciting and oftentimes limiting discourses that draw away from his larger concerns and interventions in contemporary Muslim life and education (Korb 2013, Romig 2013). Likewise, Yusuf’s statements on many issues have changed over time as he has developed as a person, and it is important to be cognizant of those processes, as well as the ways in which particular statements draw more attention than others. I am reluctant to participate in such discourses because such concerns about “Zaytuna’s stance on homosexuality” situates particular beliefs as necessary to participate in a liberal polity, while also limiting discussions of gender and sexuality to western liberal formations and rights discourses. It is necessary, however, because many Muslims “identify” as queer or are concerned about what that means in everyday life and the concomitant ethical questions for the individual and the community that such a reality raises.

towards God and their studies, while also performing gender in normative, though heterogenous, ways (particular dresscodes and prayer formations). The tensions and complexities individual Muslims feel within themselves and their communities, their desires for God and their desires for each other, can often drive them *to* sacred knowledge rather than away from it. That Zaytuna may make such pursuits possible, however unknowingly, is an important possibility to consider.

The students' addressing each other as "brothers and sisters" serves as a constant reminder and technology of the self to be conscious of pious gender relations, while they are externally reminded that they should not be thinking about such relations and should be "focusing on their studies." Having grown up with now universal notions of romantic love and marriage, the students often do not take into consideration the economic and social realities and personal challenges of marriage. On the other hand, young people do think about the socio-cultural potentialities of marriage as they challenge the ethnic, racial, and class-based attitudes and assumptions of their parents in regards to choosing a spouse, such that they take the revolutionary demands of "kinship by faith" to heart (Grewal 2009). By choosing potential spouses across racial and ethnic identifications, the students demonstrate antiracist and "Muslim first" approaches to imagining Islamic futures (Naber 2012).

Suad Abdul Khabeer also situates the use of language, specifically the Arabic language, as one of the places where discourses of kinship and difference play out. In an ethnography of African American Muslim women in New York, she demonstrates how socio-cultural contexts shape their language ideologies and usage of the Arabic language in their everyday speech (2009). African American Muslims respond to particular racial dynamics and histories of conversion by incorporating Arabic words and phrases into their speech in strategic and heterogeneous ways. They attempt to demonstrate authority

through a technical competency in the Arabic language, while also maintaining a particular consciousness of and relationship to Black Islam. Such linguistic practices speak to the relationship between Islamic knowledge and discursivity in shaping individual and communal authority within Islam (see also Deeb 2006, De Jorio 2009, Hafez 2011, Mahmood 2005, Rouse 2004, Wadud 1999). The sociocultural contexts of conversion, power and authority, and language, despite the ideal of kinship-by-faith have been fundamental throughout the history of the tradition:

Developing a knowledge and practice-based foundation of Muslim-ness, meant a reversal of the place of Islam in the Arab society in the conquered lands. From being a society of Arabs who happened to be bound together by Islam, it must become a society of Muslims who happened to use the Arabic tongue and respect parts of the Arab heritage (Hodgson 1974a:252-3).

This intra-Arab society would ideally have to apply Arabian tribal and Islamic concepts of personal liberty and dignity to all men and women, such that Muslims from both Arab and non-Arab subject populations could not be discriminated against - “they and their descendants should have the same rights, obligations, and liberties as those descended from the conquering families” (ibid.). While much of this particularly Islamic knowledge was transmitted privately from teacher to student, the consensus about Islamic knowledge, its practical application, and social hierarchies and relations became political matters when measured against the status quo and taken up by governing institutions.⁵⁰

Hodgson refers to the period in which much of Islamic knowledge started to become specialized, refined, and coalesced as a period of “Islamic Opposition” to the Marwani Umayyad caliphate (692-750). The “Piety-minded” included those like Ibn-Ishāq (d. 767) of Medina who composed the *Sīra* (the biography) of the Prophet

⁵⁰ Some of the specific institutional or spatial forms of knowledge transmission are discussed in the next chapter. These include mosques, khans, and libraries, as well as private homes and outdoor spaces. Within the smaller neighborhood mosques and the larger jami’ mosques (for Friday congregational prayer), numerous circles could be found in which one would study specific topics with a specific teacher.

Muhammad during this time and Abū-Ḥanīfah (699-767) of Kūfa who refined the corpus of legal rulings and reasonings that would come to be known as the Hanafī School of *fiqh* (understanding, jurisprudence). During this period, schools of law (*madhāhib*) were organized geographically (ex. Kūfa, Medina, and Syria schools) but would eventually become “personal” schools spread throughout Muslims lands and organized around the discipleship of particular legal scholars. Hundreds of personal schools eventually coalesced as doctrinal schools around the earlier schools of Abu Hanīfa (d. 150/767) and Mālik (d. 179/795) and the slightly later schools of Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) and Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855).⁵¹ These schools would survive into the present day through a synthesis of traditionalist and rationalist impulses in the legal tradition, political support, alliances with particular theological movements, and a distinct juristic identity.⁵² I discuss how these schools of law circulate around Zaytuna later in this chapter.

Qur’an recitation was also becoming a refined intellectual and practical discipline with multiple schools in which variant readings were preserved, leading the way towards further development of the fields of Arabic grammar and rhetoric. Qur’an recitation and memorization, as well as the Arabic language sciences, produced a lingua franca and a common sensibility for global Muslims from its earliest days through to the contemporary era.⁵³ This intellectual work was an essential foundation for the social

⁵¹ Makdisi (1981, 2), Hallaq (2005)

⁵² (Hallaq 2005:170-1) It is likewise important to remember that there were innumerable other schools that did not survive for these same reasons, whether geographic, political, personal, juridical, or otherwise.

⁵³ When Ruqayya traveled to China to study Arabic calligraphy with Haji Noor Al-Deen (a well-known Chinese Muslim calligrapher), she spoke Arabic with him and his wife. Likewise in the late 1800s, Edward Wilmot Blyden wrote of African Muslims of differing tribes and thus language groups commiserating through the language of the Qur’an: “Hausas, Foulahs, Mandingoes, Soosoos, Akus, can all read the same books and mingle in worship together, and there is to all one common authority and one ultimate umpirage. They are united by a common religious sentiment, by a common antagonism to Paganism. Not only the sentiments, but the language, the words of the sacred book are held in the greatest reverence and esteem. And even where the ideas are not fully understood, the words seem to possess for them a nameless beauty and music, a subtle and undefineable charm, incomprehensible to those acquainted only in the European languages” (Blyden 1967).

work of defining what to be a Muslim entailed and likewise defining the status of particular individuals within social hierarchies and relations. For instance, former slaves often achieved freedom through both their conversion and their pursuit of sacred knowledge, and men took lessons from women scholars, as well as the Prophet's wives in the sayings and actions of the Prophet. At the same time, it is important to remember that the Islamic sciences were not part of revelation, nor were they understood as such by the Companions. The Ṣaḥāba did not know the "rules" of Quranic recitation (*tajwīd*) as the formal science it would become. The rules and concomitant sciences were developed as a scaffolding to preserve and protect this "true" original knowledge.

The initial eighth century impulse to preserve and propagate this transformative tradition is echoed throughout Islamic history as Islam circulates and comes into contact with differing populations, world-views, and geographies.⁵⁴ Different figures, like Al-Ghazālī (d.1111), Fakhr al Dīn al-Rāzī (d.1210), and Ibn Ṭaymiyyah (d.1328), are considered renewers (*mujaddidīn*) of the faith through their intellectual work across the centuries. Their textual contributions to the tradition are acknowledged by way of their continued presences in "leather-bound" editions on the shelves of school libraries, private homes, and mosques.⁵⁵ The spread of Islam throughout Asia, Southern Europe, and Africa brought new intellectual developments and material circumstances, resulting in multiple forms of Islamic understanding and practice that are unified as a "discursive tradition" through adherence to basic tenets and devotional practice (Asad 1986). These developments were often impacted by social and political circumstances, geography, and

⁵⁴ For more details (in English) about this early history of Islamic civilization and the role of education within it, one can refer to the three Volumes of *The Venture of Islam* by Marshall Hodgson (1974-1977).

⁵⁵ Many of these books are not really bound in leather, although they are made to appear that way, evoking a sense of historicity and scholarly foundation. Such seemingly sturdy and aesthetic construction simultaneously invites heavy usage and frequent reference, as well as heady intimidation and admiration from afar.

the patronage of particular governing bodies and individuals. New legal and interpretive approaches likewise emerge from the encounter with European colonialism and modern technologies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Agrama 2012, Eickelman 1985, Messick 1993, Mitchell 1988). This modern period marks a significant shift in the forms of Islamic knowledge as European schooling and the nation-state become realities in traditionally Muslim (majority) lands (Starrett 1998). The *maktab* (elementary school), *kuttāb* (Qur'an memorization school), *masjid* (mosque), *madrasa* (school or college), *majlis* (gathering or session), *ḥalaqa* (study circle), *zāwiya* (college for Sufi and legal studies), *jāmi'a* (university), and other settings for knowledge transmission and acquisition and the role of the 'ulamā (scholars) within them undergo varying degrees of transformation in order to ride the waves of history to our contemporary shores.⁵⁶

The Islamic “Revival” that largely began in the 1970s and gained traction with the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran testifies to the continuities of Islam in people's everyday lives throughout the shifts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hourani 1983). While “traditional forms” like those listed above continue to be active, greater literacy, access to texts and other media, and other sociopolitical forces have drawn attention to and created alternative and less formal pathways in knowledge practices.

The “new structures of learning” that emerge in the revival are often organized around “the sensibility of modern socioreligious activism and the spirit of doctrinal innovation” encompassed by the Islamic concept of *da'wa* (Mahmood 2005:56-7). The literal translation of “da'wa” is “call, invitation, appeal, or summons.” As a Quranic

⁵⁶ These translations give a sense of meaning to words that have been used in multiple ways over the last hundreds of years. For example a *majlis* technically means a place of sitting up or sitting up straight, as if coming out of a prostration or reclining position, like out of prayer in order to begin teaching or study. It has come to apply to “all sessions wherein the activity of teaching or other learned discussions took place, and later to a number of activities” (Makdisi 1981:11). See Hefner and Zaman (2007), Takim (2006), Zaman (2002) for the changing role of the 'ulamā.

concept it refers to “God’s call to the prophets and to humanity to believe in the ‘true religion,’ Islam” (ibid.). Da‘wa as interpreted and innovated by Rashid Rida (1865-1930), is composed of two parts: a dependence on moral knowledge and institutional frameworks and “its status as an individual obligation” (62). Study groups and educational institutions, neighborhood mosques, social welfare organizations, publishing houses, media distributors, websites, and cultural forms like audio recordings, DVDs, websites, music, films, children’s books and games, retreats, tours, and conferences all encompass the proselytizing and “enjoining what is good” (*amr bil ma’rūf*) work and should be seen as emerging from “a practical need, one grounded in recent historical and social circumstances” (56-7). Da‘wa, especially in the Egyptian context, cannot be taken as a “normative” aspect of Middle Eastern or global Muslim life, as it is alternatively regulated and enabled by the state, and as Hirschkind (2006), Abu-Lughod (2005), and others have pointed out (Moll 2010), is mediated by a multimillion-dollar industry that produces satellite programming, books, music, recorded sermons, films, children’s games, and clothes.

In the US context, early da‘wa efforts are recorded in *A Muslim in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) , by Dr. Umar F. Abd-Allah. Abd-Allah, himself a convert to Islam who studied with Fazlur Rahman at the University of Chicago and abroad, writes of the life of Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb (1846-1916), one of the earliest converts to Islam and the founder of the first Islamic mission in America. The biography is both an historical account of da‘wa, while it also enacts da‘wa towards both Muslims and non-Muslims. As a historical touchstone for Muslim communities in the United States, Abd-Allah believes it is “a valuable point of reference” because Webb’s “human and very American biography” provides an example of a man of

his time and place whose embrace of Islam was very much “in the spirit of classical American individual initiative in religion” (Abd-Allah 2006:3-5).

The da‘wa that Webb and his fellow converts conducted was typically focused towards the “‘educated and intelligent’ classes of the English speaking world” (7). Webb believed that much of the misperceptions about Islam came from texts written by outsiders who were critical and mistaken about the religion. He was adamant that “everything be printed in English,” and be affordable as well, in an effort not to convert, but “to arouse and encourage among English-speaking Christians a spirit of calm, persistent, and unprejudiced investigation” (169).

Da‘wa was also propagated by the Ahmadiyya movement from India amongst predominantly African American populations in the 1920s and 1930s; in this case it was not only a pedagogic effort to encourage greater piety and correct Islamic conduct (it may have actually focused little on this), but was indeed a proselytizing movement targeted at potential converts to the religion. In contemporary usage, da‘wa takes on both forms in the United States and throughout the Americas. Carolyn Rouse documents instances of both proselytization and “encouragement” amongst her subjects in Los Angeles (2004), while da‘wa, as “modern socioreligious activism,” “doctrinal innovation,” and “individual obligation” is perhaps the driving impulse of Zaytuna College and its affiliate institutions.

Zaytuna Institute initially emerged from an informal set of da‘wa practices and texts: neighborhood classes at private homes, then larger classes at a local mosque. Then another space was rented, and the classes were recorded to produce additional da‘wa in the form of audio recordings and videos, that then resulted in the purchase of a property

to become an educational institute.⁵⁷ In shifting towards becoming a college, Zaytuna fulfills a need that has multiple implications and possibilities that are both encompassed by and exceed contemporary notions of da'wa. As discussed above, when the consensus about Islamic knowledge and practical application moved beyond the private relationship between a teacher and his or her students, it becomes implicated in a web of sociopolitical relations. Zaytuna's move towards becoming a liberal arts college may pave the "road to Americanization" and assimilation, following in the tradition of religious-based institutions that strove to mark their place in an American tapestry of knowledge-production and intellectual discourse, whether Catholic colleges, yeshivas, or seminaries. In this imaginary, America will eventually move towards becoming an Abrahamic country, evolving from a Judeo-Christian one.⁵⁸

Zaytuna College could alternatively follow a more movement-based identity (the above were also types of movements, however) in the tradition of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the Afrocentric and Black Power Freedom Schools of the 1960s and 1970s, the Nation of Islam (University of Islam and Clara Muhammad Schools), the Highlander Center, homeschooling, charter schools, and Ethnic Studies and Third World Colleges, which acknowledged certain ethnic, racial, and class-based realities of the American promise and strove to produce alternative epistemologies and possible futures for distinctly American, though globally-implicated lives. This particular form of schooling would be of the decolonial and "dangerous" variety that is implicated

⁵⁷ I explore this history and Zaytuna's "digital da'wa" in greater detail in the following two chapters.

⁵⁸ Some of Zaytuna's predecessors in the American higher education landscape include schools like St. John's College and Thomas Aquinas College, which are staunchly dedicated to the "Great Books" curriculum, a corpus of works that are thought to constitute a canon of Western Civilization's thought and inquiry. St. John's now also has a graduate institute that incorporates Eastern civilization and thought as well. Zaytuna founders have varying investments in the "Great Books" approach, but many of the ideas about liberal arts education and discourse-based approaches are shared in their respective missions and goals.

in the “traditionalist” form of Islam that the Rand Corporation advises organizing against: a form of Islamic “theorizing” that “may provide the concepts and rationalities through which various forms of opposition to U.S. policies and ambitions in the [Middle East] region can be imagined and expressed” (Mahmood 2006:335).

Zaytuna College incorporates aspects of all these institutional models in an attempt to forge its own becoming in a form that is relevant to a broad swathe of American Muslims and others of faith. In order to thrive, it must be economically and socially sustainable. How the school balances rigorous critical thought, academic freedom, and freedom of speech with an uncompromising position regarding its foundational tenets and values will be one of its most difficult challenges.⁵⁹ By focusing on the ethical, Zaytuna scholars locate Islam in fundamental relationships in terms of one’s relationship to God, one’s relationship to oneself, and one’s relationship to others (Izutsu 2002). These become the pillars of Zaytuna’s mission, and it is through such framing that Zaytuna hopes to imprint itself in the American landscape.

MILESTONES AND FORTRESSES

Fiqh, which comes from the root F-Q-H, means “understanding,” “knowledge,” or “intelligence” (Lane and Lane-Poole 1968:2429), and “originally was intended to mean religious insight and discernment which brings about piety (*taqwā*)” (Al-Attas 1985:196).

⁵⁹ In September 2012, Zaytuna College and the Graduate Theological Union cosponsored an event and panel discussion entitled “Between Militarism and Extremism: the Excluded Middle” featuring the founders of Zaytuna College, James A. Donahue (at the time President of Graduate Theological Union, now President of St. Mary’s College in Oakland, California), and Munir Jiwa (Assistant Professor, Graduate Theological Union). It was moderated by Sandy Tolan (Associate Professor, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at USC). There is an interesting conversation regarding the release of the video “The Innocence of Muslims,” the denigration of Islam, violence, and the ethics of public speech and the Internet, in which the norms and exceptions of free speech are debated, lending a vision to the potentialities and limits of speech at Zaytuna College. *Between Militarism & Extremism: The Excluded Middle with Hatem Bazian, Zaid Shakir and Hamza Yusuf*, 2012.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jo1z_eSHdHE&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) lamented that already in his time, the term was reduced to meaning jurisprudence. While teachers typically mention the foundational meaning of the term as a way to elucidate the significance of fiqh as a form of knowledge, the legal meaning of the term continues to dominate its usage. Zarnūji alludes to the essential connectedness of both meanings, how one facilitates and then comes to stand in for the other, in his *Instruction of the Student* when he quotes the scholar Muhammad ibn al-Hasan Abu Abdullah:

Learn! (*Ta'allim*) For learning is an adornment for one who possesses it, a virtue and a prelude to every praiseworthy action. Profit each day by increasing [your] learning and swimming in the seas of beneficial knowledge. Give yourself up to the study of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), for the knowledge of jurisprudence is the best guide to piety and the fear of God, and it is the straightest path to the ultimate goal. It is the milestone leading to the ways of proper guidance, it is the fortress that saves one from all hardships. Indeed, one godly person versed in jurisprudence is more powerful against Satan than a thousand [ordinary] worshippers (2003:3).

Fiqh is a guide, a path, a milestone, and a fortress. Additionally Abu Hanīfa states that “Fiqh (jurisprudence) is a person’s knowledge of his rights and duties.” *Uṣūl al-fiqh* (Islamic Law/Jurisprudence Studies) is the more theoretically-oriented study of the history, development, and methodologies of Islamic law and jurisprudence, while classes in fiqh focus on the substance of law in regards to established legal tenets and branches/categories. Most Americans are more familiar with the term “sharī‘a” or “sharī‘a law.” *Sharī‘a* is translated as way or path, and when referred to in a legal context it means sacred law. This law is that which is revealed in the Qur’an and the Sunna (the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad). While the Sharī‘a is seen as divine, immutable, and permanent, the means by which it is “discovered” or “understood” is the human work of fiqh.

Talal Asad discusses the historical development of *sharī'a* law in Egypt as a modern classification connoting a kind of religious law, as opposed to secular law, in which particular jurisdictions are carved out for each by the modernizing state, enabling “new institutional and discursive spaces...that make different kinds of knowledge, action, and desire possible” (Asad 2003:217, see also Agrama 2012). This secularization “not only involved the circumscription and reform of the *shari'a* [*sic*],” but also became “deeply entangled with the nineteenth-century reformulation of Islamic tradition generally” (218). *Sharī'a* was “transmuted” and “rendered into a subdivision of legal norms (*fiqh*) that are authorized and maintained by the centralizing state” (227). Asad critically reminds us that “it is often assumed that colonial governments were reluctant to interfere with family law because it was the heart of religious doctrine and practice. I argue, on the contrary, that the *shari'a* [*sic*] thus defined is precisely a secular formula for privatizing ‘religion’ and preparing the ground for the self-governing subject” (227-8).

In many ways, because of their minority status, American Muslims are “freed up” from the concerns of trying to institute “*sharī'a* law” in the United States, despite the concerns of a small group of Islamophobic pundits and legislatures. While the discursive transmutations of the Islamic tradition continue to inform Muslims in North America, in that the majority of discourses are directed at issues of family, personal status, and self-governing, efforts are being made to resurrect the ethical capacities and potentialities of Islamic jurisprudence. Such efforts are especially seen in the realm of Islamic finance and banking (Zaytuna’s economics course taught by Hatem Bazian alludes to such possibilities of the *waqf* [endowment] and ethical thought in the science of economics) and in everyday social interactions.

In their course catalog, Zaytuna College states that “a believer’s piety is reflected in his or her moral character, as well as in a commitment to legal principles that touch on

the central aspects of life,”⁶⁰ such that Muslim students are expected to recognize that the structure and substance of the tradition of Islamic Law (Sharī‘a and fiqh) is fundamentally true (though dynamic), while they also gain a sense of its “flexibility” through a better understanding of its “philosophy, principles, and precepts”.⁶¹ It is likewise important to consider that one’s character and piety are not solely shaped in the abidance of legal principles and precepts in terms of fiqh, such that following rules are not the telos of such actions, but rather a means towards greater God-consciousness. Thoughtful reflection works in tandem with embodied practice towards a particular ethical way of being.

Fiqh outlines the requisite devotional practices or *‘ibādat* (worship) of a Muslim, the five agreed-upon pillars of obligation: *ṣalāt* (prayer), *ṣawm* (fasting), *zakāt* (almsgiving), *hajj* (pilgrimage), and *shahāda* (testimony), while also expanding into a corpus that covers much of the interactions and dealings of everyday life (from *mu‘āmalāt* – rules governing proper behavior between the faithful, and *hudūd* – rules defining limits to the behavior of the faithful through penalties).⁶² It classifies acts according to the following categories: required (*wājib*), recommended (*mustahabb*), indifferent (*mubāḥ*), discouraged (*makrūh*), and forbidden (*ḥarām*).⁶³ In this way fiqh lays out the path (sharī‘a) for Islamic belief and practice, guiding one from milestone to milestone as one builds a fortress of knowledge. This fortress protects and preserves Islam from those both inside and outside the tradition.⁶⁴ Knowing one’s rights are as

⁶⁰ Zaytuna College Course Catalog 2013-2014 p 45.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Asad (2003, 241), see also Hallaq (2005)

⁶³ The school of Hanafi fiqh has a slightly different classification regarding things that are Sunna.

⁶⁴ A good example of how “one godly person versed in jurisprudence is more powerful against Satan than a thousand worshippers” can be seen in the post-September 11th scramble to find those who could speak on behalf of Islam. “Ordinary” Muslims were asked to speak about and justify Islamic laws and practices about which most only had a very basic knowledge. This often yielded more confusion than clarity for both

important as knowing one's duties, such that Islam marked a shift in the rights of individuals, in particular women, orphans, and slaves. It was thus necessary for such individuals to also study Islam and have access to education so that they would have a footing in asserting rights of property, education, marriage, and liberty.⁶⁵

There are certain acts that are obligatory for all individuals, while there are certain acts that are only "obligatory on the collective body of the Muslims," such as astronomy, going to war, or praying over the dead, such that not all Muslims need to know the legal rulings regarding such issues.⁶⁶ The designations of such acts as *fard 'ayn* (individually obligatory) and *fard kifāya* (collectively obligatory), also make the knowledge regarding those acts alternatively individually and collectively obligatory. *Fard 'ayn* knowledge is thus a personal obligation, such that it must form "the basic core of all education," around which all other knowledge is built (Al-Attas 1985:149).

Although most students arrive at Zaytuna with a basic knowledge of fiqh in regards to their *fard 'ayn*,⁶⁷ they spend the first year covering these topics in great detail.

Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims themselves were looking for answers to what Islam is, such that knowledge-based programming and resources gained larger audiences.

⁶⁵ A number of issues are of legal concern to Muslim communities living outside of areas of Muslim majorities. They range from existential questions of whether living in the West constitutes living in *Dār al-Kufr* (House of Unbelievers) to more practical issues of mortgages and eating *ḥalāl/zabiḥa*. Implicit in these concerns is the question of who has the authority to rule on them and what are the things to consider in these rulings. The Fiqh Council of North America formally came into existence in 1988, although it had existed as a committee of the MSA and ISNA prior to this. Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo discusses its history, procedures, and functions, as well as the needs of the community in making it a more effective organization. Its primary function is the provision of formal *fatāwa* and advice based on *sharī'a*, as well as the promotion of fiqh scholarship in areas of contemporary significance. Questions are typically submitted in writing, and a committee of scholars of varied specialties meets to discuss and determine a *fatwā* or answer. The different legal schools of thought are treated equally except in questions regarding worship (*'ibādat*). DeLorenzo stresses the need for the establishment of new institutions of higher learning in order to develop "renewed viability" of fiqh (DeLorenzo 1998).

⁶⁶ Lane and Lane-Poole (1968, 2374). I discuss the collective obligation of the Islamic sciences of astronomy and timekeeping in Chapter 5.

⁶⁷ When speaking English, American Muslims often use the descriptive "*fard 'ayn*" as a noun that refers to the rules and practices regarding the obligatory individual acts of worship as in, "Do you know your *fard 'ayn*?" In such statements there is likewise an implication of individual possession in terms of speaking about "my" or "your" *fard 'ayn*.

The students' fiqh classes were often the most dynamic and participant-driven of their classes because such knowledge was immediately implemented in their daily acts of purification and prayer. Most of them had personal experiences with fasting, and in some cases almsgiving and pilgrimage, on which they could reflect in the light of their newly acquired knowledge. They asked many questions and learned the laws anew regarding basic obligatory acts of worship: in the fall semester they studied purification (*tahāra*), prayer (*ṣalāt*), and fasting (*ṣawm*), and in the spring semester, they studied almsgiving (*zakāt* and *ṣadaqa*), and pilgrimage (*hajj* and *'umra*). These classes were profoundly significant in that the students achieved a greater sense of certainty (*yaqīn*) and empowerment in their devotional practices, as well as an expansive understanding of fiqh as a tradition and means to salvation, both for themselves and for their communities.

MADHHABS

The Heirs of the Prophets (Chicago: Starlatch Press, 2001) Ibn Rajab al-Hanbalī's commentary on the Ḥadīth of Abu Darda regarding scholars is the first text to be translated into English and published by Zaid Shakir. That Shakir chose this text to be his first significant publication for the English-speaking world is significant in representing his beliefs about the importance of knowledge for American Muslims. In his introduction to the text, Shakir discusses how in our contemporary "highly polarized and overly polemical Muslim World, Ibn Rajab would more likely be categorized as a Salafi...despite his manifest Sufi tendencies" (al-Hanbali 2001:xv). Shakir is referring to a contemporary landscape within which Zaytuna discursively and practically maneuvers.

Salafism refers to a movement or methodology within Sunni Islam that refers to the *Salaf* (the predecessors, or the first generations of Muslims) for guidance, rather than a particular madhhab, for instance. There is a great variety in Salafi identity, ideology,

and practice, but when individual Muslims in the United States refer to it, they may speak of it derisively as fundamentalist, literalist, extremist, sexist, or associated with Wahhābism and certain iterations of the Hanbali school from Saudi Arabia. Alternatively, they may speak of it as an authentic methodology that bypasses centuries of human fallibility and colonial influence that does not fall into blind following of a particular school of law or shaykh, dialectical theology, or innovation (which tend to be oblique critiques of other manifestations of Islam like “traditionalism” and “Sufism”). In the United States there are active communities of Salafis (whether they refer to themselves that way or whether they are considered Salafis by others), and they range across different socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Salafism is particularly prevalent in African American Muslim communities, as well as amongst second-generation youth of South Asian and Arab backgrounds and converts.⁶⁸ For Shakir it is important to quell these polarizing and compartmentalizing sectarian discourses and to follow the example of Ibn Rajab and others of his time who exemplified,

that it is possible to combine without conflict the constructs that have come to be known as “Sufi” and “Salafi”; that it is possible to be deeply committed to the Sunna while simultaneously advocating and defending the four juridical schools; and that one can be critical of the formulations of the speculative theologians, while simultaneously respecting the institutional reality built by their followers (xvi).

In addressing the “constructs” of the “Sūfi” and the “Salafī,” by publishing a text by a figure like Ibn Rajab, Shakir participates in and mobilizes the discursive tradition of

⁶⁸ Yasir Qadhi, an American Muslim scholar, trained at both the Islamic University of Madinah and Princeton University, used to identify as Salafi and is currently the Dean of Academic Affairs at Al-Maqasid, a formerly “rival” institution to Zaytuna Institute. He has recently written a description of Salafi Islam, which sheds light on the complexities of its definition, as well as how it informs the Islamic landscape in the United States. <http://muslimmatters.org/2014/04/22/on-salafi-islam-dr-yasir-qadhi/> I say “rival” because in the past students from the two institutes would verbally spar, mostly online, critiquing each other as “Salafis” or “Wahhābis” and “Sufis” or those engaged in *bid’a* (innovation), especially in terms of the practice of *mawlid*s, respectively. Their respective teachers tended to discourage the bad-mouthing of other Muslims and are now much more in dialogue.

Islam by which one uses the ideological differences within Islam to articulate the unity of Islam. Those who identify as “Salafī” (although most Salafīs would refuse such an identity) are amongst the loudest critics of the Zaytuna School, who are often identified as “Sūfis,” which has connotations of being a type of “soft” Islam that is mystical and not adherent to legal Islam or the *Sunna* (practices and teachings, the way) of the Prophet and his Companions.⁶⁹ Such critiques are met with Zaytuna’s approach to the *madhhab* (school of law) system.

The circulation of *madhāhib* (plural of *madhhab*) in the United States is particularly significant in demonstrating the scope of Zaytuna’s influence in American Muslim communities, especially when one examines the prevalence of particular *madhāhib* in the Bay Area. Zaytuna offers courses in three of the four prominent *madhāhib*: the Ḥanafī, Shāfi‘ī, and Mālikī schools, with the potential of offering additional schools in the future (it does not offer the Hanbalī *madhhab*, but the *Heir of the Prophets* translated by Shakir was written by Ibn Rajab, a student of Al-Hanbal). While the Ḥanafī school is the most widely followed *madhhab* in the world, considering its ubiquity in the Indian subcontinent, Eastern Europe, and much of Asia, the Mālikī school is typically located in North and West Africa, while the Shāfi‘ī school is concentrated in the Levant, parts of Egypt, East Africa and parts of Southeast Asia. The Hanbalī School is concentrated in Saudi Arabia and some Gulf States.

⁶⁹ Such characterizations and polarization can be partially traced to the Orientalist construction of such distinctions within Islam. Masuzawa (2005) writes of the way in which European Orientalists further racialized Islam by distinguishing Aryan (Persian or Indian) Sūfi philosophy, practices, and texts from (Semitic/Arab) textual fundamentalism and law. By emphasizing a Greek legacy in Islam’s esoteric aspects, Orientalists could make sense of the philosophical and scientific accomplishments of Muslim scholars. Such ideas about racial specificity within Islam continued into the late twentieth century as Sūfism became associated with “whites” (by both scholars and some Muslims themselves), while Salafī (a modern categorization) or orthodox Islam became associated with everyone else. The Iranian Revolution and movements based in the Indian subcontinent confused such categorization (Persians and Indians are considered Aryan), however, and perhaps lead to the more broad-based racialization of Muslims as a unified entity.

These schools continue to spread their influence through diasporas and the circulations of instructional texts, manuals, teachers, and new media. Amongst converts in the Bay Area who follow a madhhab (there is a difference of opinion about whether following a madhhab is an essential aspect of practice), there are a larger number of Mālikī's than one would expect, largely because of the presence of scholars like Hamza Yusuf, Shaykh Salik bin Siddina, Abdullah bin Hamid Ali (Abdullah Ali), and the communities of Muhammad Sharif (a Sudanese scholar who used to live in the Bay Area, but who is now based in China). Those either self-identified, or more commonly, labeled as Salafī or Wahhābi (two modern designations) are often associated with the Hanbalī school or other communal formations, though they don't necessarily follow a specific madhhab, but instead adhere to the strongest opinions (according to a particular adherence to the Qur'an and Ḥadīth) of each madhhab. Within the Shi'ī tradition there are also a number of schools that are similar to the Sunni schools in matters of practice and intellectual genealogy, although specific theological differences are where there is perhaps the widest difference of opinion and misunderstandings.⁷⁰

The centuries-old madhhab system and its fiqh content serves as a framework for approaching one's Islamic practice, and in many ways the survival of Islam as a distinct discursive tradition. Fiqh facilitates a kind of conception of the self in terms of one's mental capacities and spiritual and physical states, while it also frames one's relationship to the social. While the actual legal rulings form the substance of the tradition, the actual transmission from teacher to student is likewise a fundamental aspect such that the above mentioned treatises emphasize the significance of and proper comportment towards such

⁷⁰ The Amman Message (2004) drew together two hundred scholars from fifty countries and agreed upon the mutual recognition of eight schools of Islamic Law: Ḥanafī (Sunni), Shāfi'ī (Sunni), Mālikī (Sunni) Hanbalī (Sunni), Ja'fari (Shia), Zaidī (Shia), Ibadī (Khawarij), and Zahirī (Sunni).

relationships. I discuss the relationships between teachers and students more in the following chapters, but it is important to keep in mind that it was the students of Malik, Abu Ḥanifa, al-Shāfiʿī, and Ibn Hanbal and the generations that followed who were successful in transmitting the teachings of their teachers, when multitudes of other legal and Ḥadīth scholars' students could not.

Some African Americans in Warith Deen communities consider Warith Deen Muhammad their Imam, such that they adhere to his teachings as one who was engaged in a rigorous study of Islamic scholarship (not necessarily a *mujtahid*—one who practices *ijtihad*, independent reasoning—by the standards of classical Islam, but perhaps according to social conditions). They may also follow one of the four traditional schools or other modern schools as well, depending on the types of Islamic teaching to which they have been exposed. For example, Ruqayya was raised in a Warith Deen community, but chose to attend a Deoband madrasa (from the age of twelve to eighteen years old) where she was educated in the Ḥanafī madhhab. Professor Abdullah Ali who was raised in Chicago and Philadelphia amidst both Warith Deen and predominantly African American Sunni communities was sent to Al-Qarawiyyin University in Morocco as a young man and returned a Mālikī. Warith Deen Muhammad, himself had taught that “Muslims in the United States did not necessarily have to follow the four schools of fiqh or adhere to a particular madhhab on a given legal issue”⁷¹ as a form of minority fiqh, specific to a particular region and its norms.⁷²

⁷¹ Mendes, Muhammad 2011 “The ‘Madhhab’ of Imam Warith Deen Mohammed?-Shaykh Muhammad Mendes” Audio recording. *Lamppost Productions* June 11, 2011Mendes, Muhammad. <http://www.lamppostproductions.com/?p=4356>

⁷² This has become an increasingly dominant opinion amongst scholars in their public statements (not necessarily their personal beliefs), including Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, Hamza Yusuf, Zaid Shakir, Umar Abdullah, marking a shift from the 1990s and early 2000s when some of these scholars were particularly adamant about adherence to the madhab system. They refer to this as *fiqh aquliyya*, minority fiqh. This discursive shift implies both a need to quell divisiveness and a certain confidence in the

Orthodox understandings of these Islamic frameworks can become muddled on the ground, especially in the American landscape where so many “traditions” of Islam share common and conflicting space. For many converts their madhhab is contingent on the first Muslims to which they were exposed or the foreign country in which they spent the most time. For example, Yahya Rhodus, a teacher at Zaytuna converted as a teenager in the Bay Area. As an early student of Hamza Yusuf, he initially came into Islam following the Mālikī madhhab. After studying for a couple of years in Mauritania, he traveled to Yemen where he studied with Ḥabīb ‘Umar bin Hafiz and others who follow and teach the Shāfi‘ī madhhab. When he decided to continue his studies there, he switched to the Shāfi‘ī madhhab, though he maintains intimate relationships with his Mālikī teachers. Zaid Shakir traveled to Syria where he became inducted into the Shāfi‘ī school. Mary who is Latina followed her older brother in converting to Islam in the East Bay amongst a strong Afghan population and became a Ḥanafī.

If converts travelled to Iran to study, practiced with Shi‘i Muslims in the United States, or were sympathetic to Shi‘i doctrine, they often became Shi‘i Muslims. Students at Zaytuna who were unfamiliar with the madhhab system, chose a madhhab based on their ethnic backgrounds, where particular madhāhib were geographically prominent, their preferred teachers’ madhāhib, or on the particular approach of a madhhab. Many students wanted to sit in on other madhāhib courses but were discouraged to do so until they had a solid grounding in one from which they could then later engage comparative fiqh.⁷³

American Umma being now intellectually able to localize practice within the tradition of fiqh but not be beholden to particular schools that were geographically identified and formalized to begin with.

⁷³ Students would playfully comment that the four madhāhib were like the four “houses” of “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry” in the Harry Potter series (1997-2007) by J.K. Rowling. I will leave which madhabs related to which houses to my readers’ imaginations. While the Harry Potter series is a common pop culture reference for Zaytuna students, for Muslims who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s,

While in some Muslim spaces, madhhab differences created tensions, Zaytuna students often chided each other playfully in regards to whose madhhab was better. Ruqayya told me that she would sometimes pray according to another madhhab on purpose. In this way she was able to solidify the rulings of that madhhab in her mind and body through embodied practice, experience, and focus on prayer anew, and feel another way to be Muslim. Since she had not chosen her own madhhab and had been praying since she was a child, praying in a way that was less familiar and known by her body enabled her to experience and imagine prayer as a convert, and to silently show solidarity with practitioners of other schools of law.

Fundamental to the privileging of the madhhab system is that it relies on chains of transmission (*isnād*) leading back to early generations of Muslims. If one is a trained scholar in a particular school, one can trace back a genealogy of knowledge, passed like blood through the generations. This secures a sense of authority and authenticity, so essential in engendering the certainty and intentionality that is foundational for Islamic practice. Scholars had believed that the departure from the madhhab system would lead to a break in the *isnād*, the chain of transmission, thereby losing an authenticated Islam. Hamza Yusuf had been especially vocal about the necessity of the madhhab system when he first started Zaytuna Institute, though he has tempered his public opinions in recent years.⁷⁴

In the Bay Area, madhhabs become a way to talk about and experience the constitutive role of difference within Islam, differences of opinions that buttress a unifying ethical framework and set of common beliefs, most eloquently articulated in the concept of *tawhīd*, oneness, and is practically articulated by the system of cross

the *Star Wars* films were a more apt comparison in which Muslims were related to the spiritual warrior order of the Jedi.

⁷⁴ Mendes (June 11, 2011) and conversations with a number of Yusuf's older students.

referencing and seeking dispensations between legal schools that occurs across centuries in Islamic law and the institutionalizing of these systems in the curriculum of madrasas and Islamic universities.⁷⁵ Baber Johansen emphasizes this often overlooked and undermined aspect of Islamic law, *ikhtilāf* (difference) vs. argument:

The respect for normative pluralism (*ikhtilāf*) is possible only because the fiqh scholars conceive an ontological difference between the knowledge as revealed by God in Koranic texts, the prophet's praxis or the community's consensus on the one hand, and the knowledge which human beings acquire through their own reasoning. The first one contains absolute truth, the second one is fallible human reasoning. The second one has to interpret the first but cannot reach its rank. Therefore Muslim jurists recognize the contingency of all results of scholarly reasoning. The acknowledgement of the contingency of all human action and reasoning is at the basis of fiqh as a discipline.⁷⁶

Naveeda Khan (2012) similarly discusses how a contemporary Pakistani striving within Islam is characterized by disputation in a collective aspiration towards an ideal Islamic state. Such an intrinsic grounding in difference, debate, and disputation enables this living discursive tradition to be both textually constant and practically and imaginatively reshaped across the vicissitudes of time (Fischer and Abedi 1990). The scholars, however, warn that too much focus on difference and disputation can cause harm as well, thus making the adab of knowledge and disagreement particularly significant in maintaining the Umma (Al-Ghazali 2010b:101). Messick recognizes the fragile and "on the ground" aspects of what happens with all these dispersed branches of authority:

⁷⁵ Other attempts to reinvigorate this heterogenous legal framework are the statements of Al-Azhar, which publically acknowledged the validity of the Shia legal traditions, and the Amman Message (2004), which was the result of a meeting of Faqih from different juridical schools, in which they each issued fatawa regarding the co-recognition of four Sunni schools of law and four Shia schools of law (see www.ammanmessage.com).

⁷⁶ Baber Johansen *Contingency in a Sacred Law: Legal and Ethical Norms in the Muslim Fiqh*, Leiden: Brill, 1999 p. 65-66 as quoted in Asad 2003:244.

While it is possible to speak generally of the Islamic “discursive tradition,” looked at in local-level detail even regional versions fragment into multiple histories. While they exhibit important shared structural regularities, the phenomena that compose a tradition also put its cohesiveness in question (Messick 1993:254).

Because fiqh debates are increasingly not limited to the ‘ulamā and legal scholars, but include “lay” Muslims as well, such fragmentation becomes an ever-increasing aspect of contemporary Muslim life.⁷⁷ In the locality of the Bay Area and in a site where there is much migration and immigration, the particular discursive tradition at work in the Bay Area reenacts the historical encounters of Muslims who traveled, whether for knowledge, work, war, family, or trade (Euben 2006, Ho 2006).

Zaytuna inducts its students into the isnāds of fiqh training through their teachers. While the students are not given official *ijazāt* (permissions, licenses, certifications or degrees) in these subjects, they are introduced to them at such a level where they were initially able to hold informal classes for community members—with their teachers as mentors— upon completing their courses (The Zaytuna Teaching Project).⁷⁸ In Ḥanafī fiqh the students trace their lineage through their teacher Tahir Anwar, a London-born, San Jose-raised Indian American whose degree was attained at the Darul Uloom Falah-e-Darain, a historic madrasa in Gujarat, India. In Anwar’s Ḥanafī classes, the students were treated to many stories of real-life situations in which Anwar had to use his knowledge of fiqh in his role as an imam in San Jose. He consistently reiterated to his students the

⁷⁷ See accounts of discursive engagement and interpretation amongst women, in particular, in Mahmood (2005), De Jorio (2009) and Deeb (2006), and the increasing debate that occurs in mediated forms such as satellite television (Eickelman and Anderson 2003, Moll 2010).

⁷⁸ This project took place for about one year. Female students conducted classes in Ḥanafī, Shāfi‘ī, and Mālikī fiqh for women in the Bay Area. Most of the students were community members from the local mosques or students at UC Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union. For the women who took the class, it was a much-valued experience in that they were able to ask specific questions that are not always covered in books about purification/wudu’ and prayer. Judging from conversations I had with women (and practices I’ve observed) at the local mosques, there is a great need for more teaching of the “basics,” the fard ‘ayn for both men and women in local communities.

importance of learning the material because the communities were in great need.⁷⁹ There were a number of instances in which students learned that they had been doing something wrong for years, or they learned that something that they thought was obligatory was only recommended.

In Shāfi'ī fiqh students trace their lines through Yahya (John) Rhodus, a Kansas born - Bay Area raised white convert who studied Shāfi'ī fiqh in Yemen with Ḥabīb 'Umar bin Hafiz and others, Zaid Shakir a Berkeley-born, Connecticut-raised African American convert who sat with a number of scholars in Syria and received a degree from Abu Nour University, and Dr. Rania Awaad an Arab American scholar and psychiatrist who also studied traditional sciences and received ijāzāt in Syria.

The students take Mālikī Fiqh from Abdullah Ali, an African American Muslim raised in Philadelphia and Chicago who received his degree from the College of Sharī'a (Law) at Al-Qarawiyyin University in Morocco. The students receive additional fiqh training indirectly through contact with and observation of their other teachers. I sat in on Abdullah Ali and his student Zeynab's Mālikī courses when she taught it as part of the Zaytuna Teaching Project. While I was exposed to much of the same information twice, it was striking to experience it being taught in very different ways. While Ali taught the course using well-organized Powerpoints and handouts and went over the material in a very matter of fact and straightforward way, his student Zeynab would use the chalkboard and her notebooks, beginning each class with a dua' (supplication) of intention regarding the seeking of sacred knowledge that was written by a Shāfi'ī scholar (The same dua' is at the beginning of this dissertation). Because her class was for women only, she tailored

⁷⁹ During my fieldwork at Zaytuna, I spent the most time in Hanafi fiqh with Tahir Anwar and Maliki fiqh with Abdullah Ali. Because Shafi'i fiqh was at the same time as Maliki fiqh, I chose Maliki because bin Ali had told me that Maliki fiqh was the closest of the Sunni schools to the Shi'i schools.

some of her teaching to address specific issues pertaining to women, like the specifics of doing wuḍū' with long hair or braids and rulings regarding menstruation.

When I first returned to Zaytuna in the Spring of 2011, I asked Jordan, a recent African American convert, about how his classes had gone the previous semester. Jordan, a Mālikī student of Ali's told me about how relieved he was to be learning how to pray the right way, and how he was able to do a particular prayer that made up for the mistakes he had made in past prayers. His relief and excitement was palpable.

HIERARCHIES AND DIFFERENCE

The *Heirs of the Prophets* recounts the ways in which scholars are “elevated” above devout worshippers through their possession of knowledge. In a Ḥadīth the Prophet states, “The superiority of the scholar over the devout worshipper is like the superiority of the full moon over the rest of the heavenly bodies.” At the student orientation, Shakir and the freshmen and sophomores sit together in a circle on the grass in the school's courtyard. As some students sit languidly listening intently, others sit hunched over their laps and notebooks, taking vigorous notes. Shakir continues the above statement, reading from his copy of the text the explanation of Ibn Rajab:

The full moon represents the scholar, owing to the exquisite luminance of its light, while the planets represent devout worshippers. The difference of the full moon and that of the planets represents the difference in virtue between the scholar and the devout worshipper. The underlying reason for this—and Allah knows best—is as follows: a planet's light does not extend beyond itself, whereas the light of the full moon shine's upon the earth's inhabitants; they are illuminated by it and guided in their travels.

Shakir reminds the students to therefore, “seize knowledge” as they embark upon their studies. Ibn Rajab goes on to further explain the difference between the planets and stars in that devout worshippers are like planets because their benefit or light is limited to themselves while stars provide guidance not through providing light by which to see, but

rather light by which to order one's location and movements: "It is He who has set for you the stars that you may be guided by them through the darkness of the land and sea" (Qur'an 6:97). He later narrates an additional Ḥadīth of the Prophet, "The first contingent to enter Paradise will resemble the full moon; those entering after them resemble twinkling stars." Distinguished believers are such twinkling stars, "those whose anecdotes are remembered, hearts are softened when they are mentioned, and their words are sought" (al-Hanbali 2001:32-33).⁸⁰ "Softened hearts" despite its connotation refers not to an appeasing or resignation of the spirit in terms of the acceptance of one's situation, but rather an opening of the heart to truth and to seeing God's signs, a lifting of any veil that shuts the heart from "seeing" reality as it is.

As stated earlier, fiqh is not only the substantive knowledge of what to do, when, and how, it also orders the world and the people within it in particular ways. Egalitarianism and hierarchy coexist, and while there exists a strong discourse of one's rights, the rights that one person may have over another are also important. These human ethical relations mark both the "ethical relationship of Man to God" and the ethical relationship between individuals brought into collectivity through Islam (Izutsu 2002). The students dealt with such issues constantly as they interacted with their teachers and each other, as they navigated ways to be in ethical relations with the Umma and with those beyond. Similar to the mosque movements that Saba Mahmood discusses in Cairo, Egypt, students and teachers at Zaytuna are likewise concerned with "the retraining of ethical sensibilities so as to create a new social and moral order" in the everyday territories between the heavens and earth (2005:193). Despite historical evidence of multiple political failures, there is a hope that ethical living makes the world more just.

⁸⁰ According to these criteria, El Hajj Malik Al Shabazz, as well as a number of Zaytuna scholars and students would be such twinkling stars.

Such ethical living is contingent on knowing one's rights, and such knowledge is discursively brought about at the intersection of fiqh and everyday life.

With different encounters one is forced to ask oneself, is this a good encounter or a bad encounter, why and on whose terms. Is this my *nafs* (soul, self) reacting? Is this *Shayṭān* (Satan)? In the elective *fajr* (dawn) class conducted by Yahya Rhodus drawn from the texts of Imam Al-Ghazālī, a Muslim theologian and philosopher (d.1111) and Imam Al-Haddad, a scholar and sage (d.1720), the students were taught to navigate their feelings and to assess them. This is a process of *ijtihad* (reasoning) applied to the self, measuring laws and events according to a set of standards. For the Zaytuna students, this is an ongoing process, where they must measure their feelings and reactions to the institution and its teachers and staff, determining whether something is part of their moral education or something that they should take issue with. It is a conflicted and conscious place, not aimed at happiness, ease, or accommodation but rather a seeking of truth, struggle, and ideal future selves.

In a recent visit to the school, a gathering of female students told me about a question that was raised in one of their Islamic law classes. An older male student, a husband and father, asked Professor Abdullah Ali whether he should expose his daughters to Islamic law (especially in regards to marriage and inheritance) when so much of it cast them in an inferior light. He was concerned about what effect that would have on them. Ali stated that he was perhaps not as equipped to answer the question as this student's female classmates. Thurayya explained to me how she and the others answered.⁸¹ They were able to distinguish between what was God's revelation, and how

⁸¹ Thurayya was "named" by her fellow student "Zahrah" who I had "named." Thurayya is the Arabic name of the constellation Pleades.

everything else in fiqh was speculative⁸² and contingent, structured and authorized by human fallability and circumstance. In this way they were able to recognize and articulate such dissonances in which they were made to feel inferior, which was in their view, antithetical to the message they received from revelation. I, in turn wondered, what impact do such texts and traditions have on men who are exposed to them. Obviously in this case, a young father did recognize its potential effect on his daughters, but in asking the question he also realized a particular discomfort that he himself had with the tradition. This classroom moment, which the female students felt that they should share with me, articulates a number of things in regards to the coimbrication of the affective and rational modes of appraisal. The question and answer between teacher and student and the later dialogue and working out amongst students themselves are critical moments and groundings for building new frameworks of relationality between individuals and between individuals and the textual tradition. Unhappiness, frustration, discomfort, or doubt work as diagnostics, as in the following examples of students working out the hierarchies of relating to others and their studies.

Mary is a Latina convert originally from the Bay Area peninsula and East Bay. Her older brother had first converted to Islam, and she followed a few years later at the age of fourteen. She began Zaytuna with a Bachelors degree in English and was majoring in the Arabic language. She married Michael right before she started Zaytuna.⁸³ She is

⁸² Such speculation refers to interpretation of legal sources and their evidence or proof (*daleel*) which can be designated *ẓannī* (non-definitive, thereby requiring human consideration) or *qat'ī* (decisive). This is the space of a critical engagement with the discursive tradition regarding an assessment of the historical interpreter's relation to the text and sociocultural context, room for new interpretations, and the measure of harm and benefit regarding the effects of such determinations.

⁸³ Mary took on the name of one of her female elders. Michael is named for Mike "Dream" Francisco (1969-2000), a Bay Area graffiti legend. Mary's husband is also a Filipino raised on hiphop, and he is one of many Filipinos who converted to Islam in the 1990s-2000s. In his life, Mike Dream built bridges, between Filipino and African American communities and between the street and struggles of social justice. DREAM but don't sleep. <http://www.dreamtdk.net/biography.html>

helping to raise his son from a previous marriage, and she recently gave birth to their first child. She plans to continue with her studies. Throughout the last three years, adjusting to both married life and motherhood, as well as a commute, has been difficult for her. Michael and Mary both struggled with how to balance their desires and responsibilities. She laments that she can not devote 100% of herself to her studies like her younger and less-attached counterparts, yet she also accepts this as part of her struggle and experience as a Muslim woman. Her husband would also like to pursue advanced studies (he had been enrolled at the Graduate Theological Union), and has attempted to do so, but ultimately he understands his role as a Muslim husband and father, and instead he continues to work full-time in the tech industry.

When I first started talking to Mary as she began Zaytuna, I recognized her frustration and exhaustion with the balance of school and family life. In addition, she was also commuting to school from Hayward to Berkeley, and would have to move her car every two hours during the school day so that she wouldn't get a parking ticket. While she had tried taking public transportation a number of times, the distance, expense, and indirect route proved difficult. Little things like worrying about parking tickets and sitting in a commute can affect one's presence in the classroom. While Mary continued to excel in her academics, she was frustrated about how much she could participate in extracurricular events and student life. Forging relationships with the other female students was also limited for these reasons.

Mary talked about the balance she was seeking in her home life as she and her new husband negotiated their rights and responsibilities to each other as Muslim husband and wife. While both desired to pursue their studies of sacred knowledge, neither was able to pursue it at the degree he or she hoped. His responsibility to provide for his wife and child prevented him from continuing his graduate studies, while she was figuring out

how to negotiate her own scholarly aspirations with the rights that her husband and child had over her. American society taught her as a young woman of color that she had to assert her rights and “go for hers” or “lean in” because they would not necessarily be bestowed from the outside. At the same time, her teachers taught her that though pursuing knowledge was one of the most important things a Muslim could and should do, one could not do this at the expense of someone else who had a right over her time. This was a topic not covered in Al-Zarnūji’s *Instruction of the Student*, and so she asked Shakir about it after he had finished reading from it at the orientation.

In Zarnūji’s time it was unlikely that a wife and mother of young children would have been able to be a student of knowledge full-time. Yet at Zaytuna, Mary was a full-time student, balancing home life and her schooling, and she asked Shakir how her time should be prioritized. He told her that her husband and step-child had those rights over her, and that her responsibilities as a wife and mother should come before her studies. But what such rights looked like was another terrain of negotiation, and it was only through conscious effort, communication, and knowledge that such exchanges could happen.

Most Muslim men and women know little of the rights that they have over each other both inside and outside the home.⁸⁴ Nowhere in the Qur’an does it say that husbands have the right to a wife who exclusively cooks and cleans the house (not that this was Michael’s expectation of Mary; they were both trying to balance their personal desires and needs with their mutual obligations). There are a number of Ḥadīth that describe how the Prophet Muhammad participated in household duties. Despite such knowledge, there are often cultural expectations of what marital and gender roles should

⁸⁴ Hamza Yusuf, Zaid Shakir, and other scholars actually offer classes on marriage. I attended Shakir’s class at the Lighthouse Mosque and was (pleasantly) surprised to see a Powerpoint full of flowers, hearts, and couples holding hands!

be and what kind of behavior and attitudes should accompany such roles. At the same time, the rights of others are often overlooked in the discourse of contemporary marriages outside of Islam in mainstream discourse. This is why marriage is seen as “half the deen.” It is one of the great tests of service, humility, and living in mutual relation.

Female scholars of Islam, in particular, have engaged with issues of gender, as well as the specificities of marriage and sexuality within the tradition. Amina Wadud’s critical interventions in approaching the Qur’an from a woman’s perspective sheds light on the male-centered contextual nature of its interpretation (Wadud 1999). The accumulative effect of such discourses has resulted in a dissonance between what she and others understand as the egalitarian natures of the Qur’an and the Prophet’s life history and the contemporary realities in Muslim societies (Ahmed 2006a, Kamrava 2006, Safi 2009, 2003). Such literature represents a genealogy of Islamic Studies literature that is not wholly engaged at Zaytuna College as of yet, and at times it seems to exist in a parallel universe. In the landscape of Islamic Studies (in the English-speaking world), Zaytuna is marked as “traditionalist,” while Muslim scholars situated in western universities and colleges are seen as “reformist,” and in some cases self-identify as “progressive.”

While Zaid Shakir did teach Fazlur Rahman’s text *Islam* (1979) in his history class (with some rejoinders), the intellectual inheritors of Rahman’s (reformist) approach are largely displaced by classical texts and by those Muslim scholars and Orientalists with whom Zaytuna College scholars find affinity (like Timothy Winters [Abdul Hakim Murad], Khalid Blankenship, and Sherman Jackson [who are all converts]). I expect that if and when Zaytuna College hires more lecturers with training from religious studies programs, the types of literature taken up at the school may expand. One example of this was when Dr. Mahan Mirza (trained at Princeton in Islamic Studies, in addition to

informal studies and Islamic activism) joined the faculty. When he taught Islamic History, he used Marshall Hodgson's three-part *The Venture of Islam (1974a, b, c)* as the primary textbook.

Preparing students to become conversant in multiple epistemologies (or as it is referred to in the course catalog - "civilizations" and "traditions") is one of Zaytuna's primary goals. How they engage with the multiple traditions of Islamic Studies likewise matters in terms of what ideas, methodologies, and perspectives are brought to the table and the extent to which differing approaches are engaged in an intellectual manner. While there may or may not be agreement with works by scholars like Kecia Ali, Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Leila Ahmed, and a new generation of scholars including Ayesha S. Chaudhry, Laury Silvers, Omid Safi, Khaled Abou El Fadl, and Scott Kugle, such perspectives may inform, broaden, and complicate students' engagement with the tradition and the particular issues of controversy (like gender, sexuality, violence) that occupy them. If anything, the enrichment of the entire discursive landscape is conditioned by the degree to which opposing positions are brought into dialogue.⁸⁵

Despite my stated concerns regarding the scope of Zaytuna's curriculum, it is important to iterate that having a broad set of intellectual resources is not the answer to every issue. An academic text on marriage in Islam may not and perhaps should not provide guidance on contemporary everyday life, though it may shed light on contemporary issues via an historical perspective. The connection between intellectual inquiry, ethical and political quandaries, and everyday life are much contested. While Zaytuna aims to be a transformative force in its students' ethical and moral lives, it

⁸⁵I understand that part of Zaytuna's project is to provide a solid foundation for students so that should they continue their studies and engage such literature in graduate school they will have a stronger foundation in the classical tradition. While I am sympathetic to that perspective, I also feel like students should at least have a sense of what discourses are being engaged beyond Zaytuna's walls. Perhaps this is where their independent senior research projects may be most effective.

should also remain cogniscent of the fact that their student population is self-selected. A student's choice to attend Zaytuna is already an expression of a particular moral and ethical consciousness and striving. Other important factors likewise play a role in their ethical and moral becoming, including their families, friends, home communities, media, books, current events, the environment, and their extracurricular social interactions. To that end I return now to Mary and Michael and their negotiation of rights and responsibilities, informed by a complex assemblage of mitigating life factors of which Islam was a part.

My conversations with Mary evolved over time as she and her husband worked together and learned how to manage their mutual rights and expectations. With each semester she was more at ease as she and her husband each made sacrifices, gained benefits, and negotiated how to be in Islam, marriage, and parenthood together. She stated that it was not only particular aspects of Islamic knowledge that shaped the contours of their relationship, but time and a holistic approach of being in touch with their individual and communal capacities. It was the mutual understanding and (continuing) work that made such ethical relations possible.

Such mutual relations were not exclusive to marital relations. Students also had rights over each other as companions. During the 2012 spring semester, a number of male students, and one in particular came to Matthew, the student life coordinator to discuss his relationships with his classmates.⁸⁶ Over the course of a difficult discussion the student “broke down” and asked “What are we doing? Like, we’re just in our own heads,

⁸⁶“Matthew” is named for Matthew Africa (1972-2012), a deejay and lawyer who grew up and lived in the East Bay. <http://www.djmatthewafrica.com/bio.html> He was a deep listener and collector of rock, punk and new wave, indie and garage rock, funk and soul, and hip hop music and was equally deep and generous in his relationships. I was blessed to know him and be in his company for too short a time. He was a true seeker. In the words of writer Oliver Wang, “he was a mentor, a guide, a gentle hand on the shoulder that helped point you in the direction you wanted to go (even if you didn’t realize it at the time)” <http://soul-sides.com/2012/09/for-matthew-africa/> .

this isn't the tradition. This isn't what Islam is about." While the sisters had a strong sense of camaraderie, a number of the brothers felt isolated. They were always by themselves studying, and there was an increasing sense of competition instead of commiseration.

It was a really tough conversation. We're all here together in this environment, but we don't know each other, and we are not looking out for each other, and everyone's just in their own little world. And those who are serious about the community...serious about Zaytuna and serious about studying, they are the ones that are serious about isolating themselves, too, [because] they read these quotes from scholars like Imam Al-Ghazālī, who...says things like "*Ma halika nas ila nas,*" that "People are only destroyed by people," and say "You have to seclude yourself, and make sure that other people don't distract you from your pursuit of knowledge" and those things.

And then [there is] all the work on the self and developing the self, and doing, pursuing all this knowledge, reading the Qur'an regularly, making *dhikr*,⁸⁷ making remembrance of God. A lot of that isn't really put into context, in terms of "Okay, when scholars wrote that, what kind of environment were they actually living in?" They were living in an environment, in which as far as I can understand, in which the community and the family life is just a given, that's established there. But we've been uprooted from that; we've been torn away from that. And we don't have community; that's not a regular feature of our lives anymore. We're just, our lives are just increasingly more individualized.

This situation had been brewing for months, but in one student's estimation it came to a head in the spring semester because Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir were not present on campus (they were scrambling to raise funds for the purchase of a property that had become available on Holy Hill – where the Graduate Theological Union was located). Much of the energy and guidance that students directed towards and received from their scholars, was absent and the students felt a spiritual vacuum.

⁸⁷ *Dhikr* is the remembrance of God, often done through the repetitive recitation of short phrases or words that glorify God, often with the working of beads on a string called *misbah* or *tasbeeh* (they have many names depending on where someone is coming from). They resemble in both appearance and usage rosary beads used by Catholics and meditation prayer beads used by Buddhists.

Matthew instituted weekly gatherings, *Jumu'a* (Friday) Muffins – where the brothers and sisters would meet separately and discuss non-academic issues and get to know each other better.⁸⁸ While this was not the most organic means of cultivating a sense of community, it went a long way towards helping the brothers, especially, open up a space of dialogue and reflection. When a student brought up that,

Imam Zaid said at the beginning of the semester that we don't need to be so social. Ustadh Yusuf says that our best friend is a good book, and so that's what our teachers are saying, so why do we need to spend this time?

Matthew replied that Imam Zaid had also told one brother that their roommates had a right over them and their time.

You shouldn't do anything on Fridays, except maybe read a bit of Qur'an, but other than that, you shouldn't do anything but spend time with your roommate, spend time with other people, just spend time with people.⁸⁹

Students were learning how to balance the different messages they were getting from texts, scholars, and others. Reading the context of statements and recognizing their own situations were an important part of this process of learning how to interpret and apply Islamic teaching. When Ruqayya asks Yahya Rhodus in the fajr class about going into the kind of retreat or seclusion (*khalwa*) that Al-Ghazālī discusses in regards to a life of study, he tells her that she is already there. By choosing to leave her family and travel across the country to attend Zaytuna College, Ruqayya has dedicated herself to pursuing sacred knowledge, in a kind of seclusion, whether it is in Arabic class, Fiqh, or English

⁸⁸ *Jumu'a*, stands for Friday, and it is the day of the requisite (for men) congregational prayer within the Islamic week, *Salat Al-Jumu'a*. "Jumu'a" comes from the root letter J-M-'A, which mean to gather, to unite, combine, or bring together. *Salat Al-Jumu'a* brings together geographically-local Muslims in prayer, while *Jumu'a Muffins* brings together the Zaytuna students on the day of *Salat Al-Jumu'a*. "Jāmi'a" the Arabic word for "university" also comes from the same root and connotes the bringing together of many subjects in a place of learning, where people gather to transmit knowledge.

⁸⁹ Audiorecording of interview with Matthew 04-04-2012, also confirmed in interviews with students Spring 2012.

composition. The relationships she builds amongst her fellow classmates become critical to her education.⁹⁰ As Matthew explains:

There is a saying, of the Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him, something to the effect that, “The believer is social, and the best people of our community after the Prophet Muhammad...Peace be upon Him, their names are, or as a group they are called, the *Ṣaḥāba* or the *Aṣḥāb*, the Companions, the very definition of who they were, was that they spent time with a certain person, with the Prophet Muhammad, *ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa ‘ālihi wa sallam*.”⁹¹

And we just don’t...it just hit me that this was something that we were really missing. We’re missing community, and if we don’t have community, it doesn’t matter how much knowledge we have. It doesn’t matter how much piety we have. It’s going nowhere, because then we can’t learn from each other. We can’t really understand what we need to work on in ourselves, because we are mirrors for each other...and we can’t really implement the tradition, because so much of the tradition is how we deal with people, how we interact with people, how we learn from people, and teach them. And also in terms of Zaytuna’s whole vision - Zaytuna’s vision is building leaders, and you can’t lead if you don’t want to spend time with other people. *Subḥān Allāh* (Glory be to God or Glorious is God).

It is through such embodied relationships that particularly Muslim ethical subjectivities are being cultivated. Modern secular ethics according to Asad, is contingent on a belief that “conscience is a purely private matter at once enabling and justifying the self-government of human beings” (Asad 2003:247), and it thus follows that this understanding of conscience is used to judge the ability and capacity of Others to self-govern and be fully human. In Sharī‘a, however, there is no completely sovereign moral subject; Muslim jurists “regard the individual’s ability to judge what conduct is right and

⁹⁰ The Internet makes khalwa difficult as well, and students must likewise learn how to maintain an inner sense of seclusion as they surf the web, make Facebook updates, and build social ties in the Bay Area. For students like Mary who are local to the Bay Area and have family responsibilities, khalwa becomes a more inner seclusion at appropriate times, rather than a physical retreat from her responsibilities. Many scholars pursue knowledge in this manner as well, such that it provides its own experiential and beneficial knowledge.

⁹¹ *Ṣaḥāba* – “one who saw Muhammad, and whose companionship with him was long, even if he have not related anything from him; or, as some say, even if his companionship with him was not long.” A *ṣāhib* is a companion, an associate, a comrade, a fellow, or a friend; a fellow traveler (Lane and Lane-Poole 1968:1653). Note again the connotation of traveling on the Straight Path together.

good (for oneself and for others) to be dependent not on an inaccessible conscience but on embodied relationships” with parents, spouses, authorities, friends, and also through embodied practices of faith, prayer, fasting, zakāt, and ḥajj. Islamic ethics thus is not a Western notion of ethics seen through an Islamic moral framework, but rather a different understanding of ethics more akin to an Aristotelian notion of moral thinking and medieval Christianity (Asad 2003:251).

It is because of the emphasis on these embodied relationships as ethical that the tensions regarding one’s rights and being wronged become so impactful and significant. One’s “progress” as a Muslim is in some ways marked by the success of one’s social relationships (whether to one’s teacher, parent, spouse, friend, and child, or a wayfarer, orphan, enemy, and stranger), and these relationships are reflections of one’s relationship with God. When Fazlur Rahman articulates Islam as being a faith predominantly concerned with man’s existence on earth, it is to these relationships that he refers:

The central concern of the Qur’an is the conduct of man. Just as in Kantian terms no ideal knowledge is possible without the regulative ideas of reason (like first cause), so in Qur’anic terms no real morality is possible without the regulative ideas of God and the Last Judgment. Further, their very moral function requires that they exist for religiomoral experience and cannot be mere intellectual postulates to be “believed in.” God is the transcendent anchoring point of attributes such as life, creativity, power, mercy, and justice (including retribution) and of moral values to which a human society must be subject if it to survive and prosper—a ceaseless struggle for the cause of the good. This constant struggle is the keynote of man’s normative existence and constitutes the service (‘ibāda) to God with which the Qur’an squarely and inexorably charges him (Rahman 1982:14).

Rahman asserts that it is “for action in this world” that the Qu’ran and the Prophetic traditions provide “guidance for man concerning his behavior on earth in relation to other men” towards establishing and producing an “ethically based social order” (14-15). What this may mean “politically,” in terms of providing an understanding

and framework for social justice is much debated and of critical importance. Saba Mahmood discusses one interpretation in the effects of the mosque movement of Egypt, saying:

The political efficacy of these movements is, I would suggest, a function of the work they perform in the ethical realm—those strategies of cultivation through which embodied attachments to historically specific forms of truth come to be forged. Their political project, therefore, can only be understood through an exploration of their ethical practices. This requires that we rethink not only our conventional understanding of what constitutes the political, but also what is the substance of ethics (2005:35).

In thinking through the work of education, as opposed to or within a social movement, it is the work of building a ground. Fiqh as understanding, milestones, a path is critical to that ground. The grounding, the location, the place where things can happen, can be encountered. It is built on a possibility, a future, an expectation, as Sara Ahmed says in a very different context, “to recreate a ground is to deviate from a past that has not been given up. When things go astray, other things can happen. We have a future, perhaps” (Ahmed 2010:198). The work of the school, then, is producing multiple kinds of grounds, one - in the manner of site of encounter - the school which enables meetings and forces to move through; second - the grounding of the being, the student who is being cultivated as a corporeal ground prepared for other kinds of encounters and possibilities; and third - the grounding of Islamic tradition, “a past that has not been given up” towards a potential future where it is understood and negotiated anew.

Eickelman describes how in Morocco the competing voices of activists, militants, and men of learning were “unequally weighted” as men of learning

can draw upon the mainstream of existing implicit acceptance of what Karl Mannheim calls “enduring actuality as compared with the progressive desire for change”...Men of learning, by accepting existing social and religious

arrangements, can presume support without fully elaborating the ideological basis of their actions (Eickelman 1985:179).⁹²

While this statement has applicability to the Zaytuna context, there are key differences in terms of how the ‘ulamā and the state are related. The tension of being a minority population in terms of religious identity often subsumes the ethical differences from an American mainstream. The “enduring actuality” of “existing social and religious arrangements” within Islamic formations have been on the defensive in an American media landscape that seeks clear definitions and uniform answers. Zaytuna scholars (the ‘ulamā) assert the rich traditions of Islam and their own experiences within it as a way to propose an authorized and alternative future for American Muslims. Students’ own engagement with and questions about the textual tradition and “existing social and religious arrangements” as described above allude to the possibilities and pitfalls of that future terrain. One major struggle is the level to which one accepts the tradition as is, as well as its messengers (scholars), because according to its terms one is not qualified to participate in it as a *mujtahid* (one who is able to practice *ijtihad* – independent reasoning).

In the video discussed earlier in this chapter, Hamza Yusuf asks Mohammad Naquib Al-Attas about the role of women. Al-Attas considers the inadequacy of simplistic notions of equality, in which a woman can be a general because a man can be a general. “That is not what equality is.” For Al-Attas, the current state of knowledge and the imān (faith) amongst Muslims is inadequate to

force some of these things, you cannot discuss some of these things, therefore, let’s first try to bring that *imān* back, you know *imān* comes and goes, but at least we should prepare the ground.

“How would you suggest preparing the ground?” Yusuf asks. Al-Attas responds,

⁹² Eickelman quotes from Mannheim, Karl. “Conservative Thought.” In *From Karl Mannheim*, edited by Kurt H. Wolff, pp. 132-222. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971. p 172

We talk about the *akhlāq* (virtues), we talk about the ethics, we talk about the thought, we talk about what the Sufis have said, what the [‘alm] *al-kalam* (dialectical theology) people have said. We talk about that because a lot of that is relevant today, but it’s because modern scholars can not relate those ideas with the modern problems.

Yusuf wonders if the future generations will do the “archaeology” in discovering Al-Attas’s work, and commit to “relating” the tradition to “modern problems.” In this video one sees the foundations of Zaytuna College being formed in Yusuf’s thinking as he discusses with Al-Attas the scarcity of Islamic higher education institutions (*kulīyyas* – colleges). As he holds his hands up around his head he emphasizes the need for a “real university that trains an intellect in a full capacity.”

Zaytuna scholars recognize the dynamic potential of the tradition, but are creating a ground to produce the scholars who can engage it. The “unequal weight” is unevenly distributed in our contemporary landscape, where Muslims compete (not necessarily by choice) over who speaks and acts for Islam, and who can represent it on whose terms. Contesting approaches, which have been common to the tradition since the death of the Prophet Muhammad, have been acknowledged and lived with in multiple ways. The contemporary moment, however, presents unique challenges in that there are significant Muslims living as minorities in “the West.” And these nation-states are at war with stateless entities that articulate a movement through concepts figured in an Islamic imagination.

For any world-making project (spiritual or otherwise) to succeed and be effective, it must engage with the all-encompassing institutions and structures of modern governance, whether it aspires to state power or not. This is why many of these scholars do not mince words when it comes to desires for the “‘critical mass’ necessary to reestablish Islam as a dominant sociopolitical reality” (Shakir in al-Hanbali 2001:xvi). This is not an Islamist call to arms; there is no political agenda, per se. Rather it is a

statement about sincerity and belief in the ethical-political system of submission that is referred to as Islam as providing the best possible “ethically-based social order” for sociopolitical life. It is a da‘wa as mobilization that is not organized around imposing “sharī‘a law” for everybody, but an understanding of common ethical values regarding the sustenance of human life. That this ethical system also has clear notions of hierarchy and self-governing are perhaps the sticking points in terms of what secular liberal models of modernity and freedom have come to mean.

Recent publications about Zaytuna imply that the school’s position on homosexuality is the litmus test or limit of its intellectual contribution and full participation in modern American liberal democracy (Korb 2013, Romig 2013). The compulsion to discourse in regards to sexuality elucidated by Foucault, was a means to exert power and regulate populations (Foucault 1978, Foucault et al. 2003, Foucault and Rabinow 1997, Foucault et al. 2007). The compulsion to discourse regarding progressive/moderate/conservative Muslims is a similar attempt to regulate particular types of Muslim participation in the public sphere (Puar 2007); such judgments likewise assume that one’s religious belief or “culture” predisposes one to particular ways of being political (Mamdani 2004). While homophobic and sexist attitudes, distinct from religious proscription, often find shelter in particular interpretations of sacred text, there is more nuance in discourse, everyday practice, and Islamic law regarding the private spheres of desire and homosocial relating, such that the above attempts, amongst others, to regulate and compartmentalize Muslim thought and behavior limit the possibilities of thinking beyond rights-based discourses of the neoliberal state (Babayan et al. 2008, Davies 2010, El-Rouayheb 2005, Massad 2007, Moallem 2005, Najmabadi 2005).

At the same time, Al-Attas’s statement regarding the forcing of things into conversation, and an inability to currently speak about particular issues, especially in

regards to gender, leaves little recourse for dealing with the realities of our contemporary situation (Kugle 2013, Najmabadi 2014, Safi 2003, Sharma et al. 2007). While some scholars have attempted to reinterpret the Qur'an towards altering the normative view on sexuality and gender relations (Chaudhry 2014, Kugle 2010, Safi 2003, Wadud 1999), others push for an ethical approach involving compassion and mercy.

One evening at the Ta'leef Collective in Fremont,⁹³ 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

⁹³ I discuss the Ta'leef Collective and Usama Canon further in the next chapters.

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? The issue of the relationship between the private and the public, which I take up further in a different context in Chapter Five, is also another way, however unsatisfactory, of seeing such concerns outside of a western legal and liberal discourse. As I mention earlier in this chapter, an orientation towards a particular person does not negate nor supercede one's desire to be near God or part of the Muslim Umma.⁹⁴ The embodied nature of Muslim becoming and questions of how to be in ethical relation within the framework of the discursive tradition and towards a particular telos of God-consciousness should remain central to such discussions and ways of being.

Zarnūji quotes Abu Hanifa discussing fiqh, "The purpose of learning is to act by it, while the purpose of action is to abandon the fleeting [things of this life] for what lasts forever" (2003:5). The balance of this life and the next is one of the great challenges of Islamic teachings. At what point is one's action in this life too worldly, too concerned with the sociopolitical realities of everyday life, and at what point is one too removed that one is not working for the revival and survival of Islam, not as an organized religion, but as a way of being. In Yusuf's foreword to the Zarnūji text, he discusses his study "with men who embodied its meanings." That they embodied such meanings differently is a critical point.

⁹⁴ This communal aspiration, through the formation of alternative Muslim communities, is increasingly being activated in online communities, activist groups, and in colleges and universities.

In 1994, just prior to the establishment of Zaytuna Institute (a precursor to Zaytuna College), Haddad and Smith discuss how “Some Muslims in America are raising the question of what a deculturized Islam might actually be, and whether or not it is a goal important enough to warrant the sacrifice of different ethnic and cultural interpretations” (Haddad and Smith 1994:xxv). Such considerations emerged from changing demographics and identities, alienation, and tensions regarding authority and community. Islam’s history in the United States has largely been situated in Black and “immigrant” America, while Morocco, a Muslim-majority country was the first to recognize the United States as a sovereign nation on December 20, 1777. That Muslim recognition of American independence was instrumental to this country’s founding is a significant claim for the commensurability of Islam with American ideals. At the same time, Islam has found its most welcoming home in the hearts and minds of African Americans, and increasingly Latino Americans, and it was the ongoing social subjugation of African Americans that lead the Ahmadiyya Movement of India/Pakistan and the Islamic Mission of America in Brooklyn to proselytize directly to them in the early twentieth century.

The communal conversions of African Americans to both the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam and Sunni, Shia, and Ahmadiyya forms of Islam throughout the twentieth century runs parallel to the establishment of small communities of Arab and Eastern European Muslims who began settling throughout the United States beginning in the late 1800s. A likewise parallel is the conversion of white Americans through countercultural and more mystical paths from the 1960s onward. Mosques and community centers were established in the 1920s and 1930s, a precursor to the waves of new institutions in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of the issues that existed for Muslims twenty years ago, let alone thirteen centuries ago, continue to challenge them today.

As immigrant groups reached a critical mass in the 1980s and 1990s, they were able to establish mosques based on specific ethnic groups that did double duty as community cultural centers, preserving languages, traditions, and social norms of home countries. Mosques would be referred to as Pakistani, Indian, Bosnian, Arab, Yemeni, Bengali, African American, Somali, Afghan, Shia, and/or Iranian mosques. Mosques serving smaller populations were often more multicultural, but the founders, boards, and imams often asserted particular claims to a “proper” often culturally-specific Islam. Similar issues occurred in regional and national organizations that emerged between the 1960s through to the 2000s (the Muslim Student Association was established in 1963).

Originally they were content simply to find other Muslims with whom to share the concerns they had about being Muslim in the American context. Those associations have served to provide a haven against the hostility they often experienced. But they have come to realize that the fact that people have in common an identity as Muslim does not automatically ensure community (Haddad and Smith 1994:xxviii).

Some Muslim spaces were seen as exclusionary, unwelcoming, and racist, particularly towards African American Muslims who were often drawn to Islam because of its antiracist creed and communal possibilities.⁹⁵ Muslims from majority-Muslim countries or American-born students who had traveled abroad to study were seen as importing an “authentic” Islam that commanded shifts in food, dress, gender norms, and language. A “deculturized” Islam would allude to a possibility of a pure, authentic Islam, without any ethnic “baggage,” foreign influence, or class-based distinctions. Efforts to establish a localized or “indigenous” Islam specific to the American context seems to assume, however, that American experiences and everyday life were somehow

⁹⁵ (Curtis 2002, Dannin 2002, Jackson 2005, Karim 2009, Rouse 2004, X and Haley 1965)

homogenous before the “invasion” of too much immigrant culture.⁹⁶ Calls for an “indigenous” Islam, which often came from both white and black converts (and was often supported by second generation “immigrant” Muslims) to Islam often conflate urban working class immigrant cultures with upper or middle class suburban immigrant cultures, experiences, and attitudes. Such claims also denied, marginalized, or qualified the existence of a localized Islam in predominantly African American communities that had already existed for decades. In many ways, the impulse to define what being Muslim entailed in the 1990s and 2000s echoed the sentiments of the eighth and ninth centuries. Is there a specific unifying Islam and Islamic knowledge with concomitant practices and ways of being? And was there a way to find consensus around such knowledges without diminishing the significance of doctrinal difference and diasporic affiliations, desires, and concerns?

The move from Institute to College was informed by this thinking about Zaytuna’s role in Muslim communities. Could there be such a thing as a Zaytuna community? While Zaytuna did not claim to be “in the business of building community,”⁹⁷ many of those who attended its programming regularly or supported it financially felt that it was their community, such that when Zaytuna moved away from public classes towards more exclusive projects like the Seminary and the College, there was a great deal of communal trauma. What need was Zaytuna addressing, whether intentional or unintentional that mobilized people around these classes and the space in

⁹⁶ The use of the term “indigenous” is contested amongst American Muslims who draw attention to the occlusion of Native American indigeneity belied in its usage. It likewise indicates the attitudes of many African American Muslims who see themselves as original inhabitants of the United States in that they emerge as a historical and racial collectivity through experiences of the Middle Passage, slavery, and ensuing racial subjugation, struggle, and survival. This involves a significant claim to Americanness that has been derogated by notions of America as a “Manifest Destiny” country of white settlement and industrious development.

⁹⁷ Haddad and Smith (1994)

Hayward? In some ways it was a safe haven where people could just “be Muslim” - no awkward gazes, questions, or judgments about their difference. It was also a place where being Muslim meant something – where particular practices, dress, and food had centuries-long rationalities and sentiments behind them.

Hamza Yusuf and others gave everyday practices meaning and related these practices and beliefs to everyday life in the United States. He was critical of US foreign and domestic policies and mainstream culture, while paving a theoretical road to America’s redemption through a return to its founding principles and ideals infused with the ethical ideals of Islam.⁹⁸ For immigrants who had disrupted their families, cultural continuities, and senses of belonging and home, finding redemption in the American dream was an important maintenance of hope and faith. For young American converts and second and third-generation American Muslims, Yusuf was a charismatic role model who articulated the dissonance between the American dream and American realities, and offered an alternative, meaningful, distinctive, dignified, and, at times, exotic way to be in the world. While some critiqued the Zaytuna movement as clique-ish and cultish, others found a sense of belonging, purpose, and brotherhood and sisterhood. Muslims were moving to the Bay Area from around the country to be a part of this dynamic epicenter of Islamic knowledge. In their eyes, this was an ideal Umma community that was trying to do and be a part of something significant.

⁹⁸ In the 1990s, Yusuf’s rhetoric about the United States and the West was much more critical and less redemptive. Prior to his experiences teaching at the Islamic Study School and acquiring serious students, he had made plans to make hijra and buy land in Morocco. His training as a nurse would be put to use in North Western Africa. After discovering serious students who sought the knowledge he had to share, he began thinking more about institutionalizing in the US, and the ways that North America, and the Bay Area specifically could be a critical node in the geographies of Islamic knowledge (see Grewal 2013). Yusuf does continue to do critical work on promoting health issues (malaria in particular) in places like Mauritania and throughout the African continent.

In trying to replicate the Prophet's community in Medina, however, one significant factor did not register. In the Bay Area, this was a commuting community. With a few exceptions, nobody lived walking distance from the Hayward locations. One had to drive there, and despite the fact that the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) train practically went through the back yard, there was little public transportation access. Some people came from as far away as Santa Barbara or San Diego on a weekly basis (about a six or eight-hour drive, respectively), while others came from all over the Bay Area. In some ways, many of the material realities of everyday life were shed upon entering the sanctuary of the Zaytuna Institute with its trees, flowers, yurt, and archery targets, assuming you had the means to get there.

The disjuncture between the idealistic Muslim community within Zaytuna's classes and retreats and the material realities outside of its walls, in the suburbs and inner-cities of the San Francisco Bay Area and elsewhere were apparent to both the "Zaytunies" and those looking in. The ripple effect of Zaytuna's classes - the translation to everyday life - wasn't necessarily happening at the level that many people hoped it would. While there was a transformation in the inner life worlds of individual Muslims and many young Muslims benefitted and changed the courses of their lives through their experiences at Zaytuna, there was a tension between what was being expressed in the classroom, and how such knowledge could have greater social impact. People's expectations were lifted, and it is in the unfulfilled expectations that much of the tension lingers.

Many Muslims witnessed great changes in themselves and in the individuals and landscapes around them, but institutional time presented itself in a much slower cycle of change. As stated earlier, much of the work of Zaytuna is preparing a ground. The work in Hayward was a toiling of the soil, the College a planting of seeds - the fruits of

Zaytuna's olive trees, yet to come. As Sherman Jackson stated at Zaytuna's second convocation ceremony in the Fall of 2011, "Zaytuna as an institution is not only a life-long project, its success is something that can not be achieved in any one lifetime. None of us will likely live long enough to see Zaytuna come to its full and complete success."

Quoting the American Christian theologian Reinhold Nieber, Jackson continued:

"Any thing that is worth committing one's life to is not likely to be achieved in a single lifetime, and therefore we must be buoyed by hope, and we cannot allow the enormity of the challenge, to reduce us to hopelessness." Remember that, because there will be dark days. Remember that, because there will be challenges that will seem insurmountable.⁹⁹

Despite such a long view of appraisal, there were indeed significant lifetime-achievable and life-changing projects that early students of the Zaytuna school brought forth.¹⁰⁰ Zaytuna's outreach program and education and support programs for incarcerated Muslims eventually became separate organizations that continue to do critically important work (like the Tayba Foundation and the Ta'leef Collective). Many students of Zaytuna classes eventually began other organizations or continued their educations both in the United States and abroad. The impact of audio cassettes, CDs, and DVDS that circulated amongst Muslims both in the US and abroad is immeasurable. The discourses about Islam were shifting, and the essentialness of seeking out knowledge through "traditional" chains of transmission became a more commonly acceptable and attainable idea. The ethical imperatives of such knowledge acquisition and the distinctions between spiritual and political leadership made such issues more complicated to enact and parse out.

⁹⁹ Jackson, Sherman "Convocation Address" videorecording Zaytuna College 2011

¹⁰⁰ Nadine Naber (2012) articulates some of the critical political work that young Arab Muslims influenced by the Zaytuna school were engaged in throughout the 1990s. They articulated a holistic approach to spiritual and political striving and action that was demonstrated in their anti-imperial and local commitments. Zaytuna College co-founder Hatem Bazian was a significant figure in articulating this positionality and perspective.

Zaytuna and the greater Bay Area were dynamic spaces for exploring the balance between Islam as a way of being directed towards the Afterlife and enacted in the World. For some though, there was an over-reliance on this sanctified space and particular personalities, rather than the extension of this space and teaching into one's home, workplace, school, mosque, or neighborhood. As one former student mentioned, "In Hayward, you could be in a bubble, and I think that was part of the move from Zaytuna Institute to what it's trying to be...not to be in a bubble."¹⁰¹ Another student saw the transition and its contemporary traces more critically:

Community is a group of people who are able to withstand the vicissitudes of time. Like they are going through life together dealing with the problems that they have. From what I've seen is that "our community" is a pretentious kind of paradigm that is supposed to weed out any problems and create the perfect Islam, based in tradition that is intellectually stimulated and spiritually motivated and all these kinds of things.

And I don't believe that that is really...I think that part of it is fantasy, is imagination. It works well within walls; it works well in a speech, but as soon as we hit the streets it doesn't work like that anymore...I also don't think that an institution is a place where community should be born. I think that's false; that's where education should happen, not where community should be born.¹⁰²

Indeed, though profoundly significant, it is unlikely that all the work that Hamza Yusuf and others put into the Institute was about a few hundred people being better Muslims and having a "community." Yusuf had been encouraging a number of Muslim converts he had met through his travels and study to return to the United States or to US cities from the isolated communities they had built in places like New Mexico to be a part of what he was trying to build. Through the circulation of recordings made from the classes at Zaytuna and the movement of people through its spaces and beyond, Zaytuna Institute impacted thousands (perhaps hundreds of thousands) of Muslims.

¹⁰¹ Audiorecording. Interview. Summer 2010

¹⁰² Audiorecording. Interview. Spring 2012

“Community” is an incomplete and perhaps impossible term for what Zaytuna scholars are trying to accomplish. The *Umma* (community of believers) is perhaps a more fluid word-concept that speaks to both the local and global scopes of thinking in terms of collectivities. “Umma ideals” are great mobilizers, though their practical applications are entangled in many other structures of identity and attachment (Karim 2009). As one former Zaytuna staffer put it, “They [Yusuf and Shakir] have the weight of the Umma on their shoulders.” It was the entire community of Muslim believers (through the expanses of time and place), the future of not only Islam in America, but Islam worldwide with which they were spiritually, intellectually, and politically linked.

When Hisham Alaloosi encouraged Yusuf to formalize the classes that he was teaching in the 1990s, Yusuf initially called the institute “Al-Qarawiyyin” after Al-Qarawiyyin University in Morocco, which is considered by many to be the oldest university in the world (It was founded as a mosque with an attached school in 859 AD by Fatima Al-Fihri). When Alaloosi advised that this name would be too difficult for Americans to say, Yusuf came up with “Zaytuna,” after Jami‘at (University) Al-Zaytūna in Tunisia. In the naming of the Institute, it is clear that Yusuf had high aspirations for these weekly classes of fifty people in a Hayward storefront. There has always been a larger vision - a five-year plan, a ten-year plan, a centuries-beyond plan.

Chapter 2: Digital Dispositions

This chapter explores the production and circulation of scholarship, whether through media or embodied performances. I begin with the audiovisual history of Zaytuna, which speaks to the ways in which some scholars became celebrities through the circulation of analog and digital da‘wa media. I then demonstrate how particular dispositions (both living and deceased) circulate towards becoming ethical-spiritual models for students.

AUDIOVISUAL VISIONARIES

Most of the Zaytuna students first encountered their teachers on the Internet or by audiocassette, audio CD, or DVD. They watched their YouTube videos, followed news and publications on the Zaytuna website, listened to recorded lectures, or attended large conferences where Yusuf or Shakir were dramatically lit on a far-off stage. These conferences are now often preceded by dramatic video trailers, sensationally cinematic in their lighting, editing, and sound design.¹⁰³ Roaring soundtracks of thunderous drums or meditative verses praising the Prophet accompany close-ups of scholars calling to the crowd, beseeching, warning, and supplicating cut with dramatic long shots of the scholars on stage and a crowd of hundreds facing them from a convention center floor. Such Muslim scholars are presented as “stars” that can draw and move a crowd. Alternatively, there are videos of smaller gatherings, like the Deen Intensive Rihlas where students and teachers are seated together more intimately in a mosque or prayer space; ethnically diverse students, both male and female – in wide shots and close-ups – are captured in

¹⁰³ This description especially applies to the trailers produced by “Reviving the Islamic Spirit” conference based in Toronto, Canada. The Zaytuna scholars are often featured participants and speakers.

and offer gazes of admiration and contemplation or fervently take notes. Such images are edited together with music, and they often use fancy transitions and dissolves, linking a series of teachers, students, and spaces. These large-scale “expensive” and “block-buster” looking productions are in dialogue with and stand out from more bare-bones videos that are recorded on single, often non-professional cameras, and are uploaded onto the Internet by other Muslim leaders.

Most of Hamza Yusuf’s online and retail videos date from the 1990s and the early 2000s, although there are many recent productions he has done and continues to do. On YouTube, the Yusuf videos are titled according to topic of discussion, and one sees that he wears a variety of dress, ranging from turban and thobe, to a blazer and slacks. While the entire video usually consists of a medium shot of the speaker, these videos usually document a gathering in which an unseen audience is assembled. YouTube videos, Facebook profiles, and the speakers’ own websites, which consist of blogs, audiovisual and text-based archives, stores, and announcements, work in tandem with the touring and speaking schedules of scholars.¹⁰⁴ These online sites and other media in circulation (books, audiotapes, CDs, and DVDs) prepare audiences for their arrival, and then supplement them once they have passed through a particular location.

Many comments sections of blogs and videos are filled with Muslims from around the globe pleading for a local visit from the featured scholar. If an interested Muslim can not move to the Bay Area to study regularly with a particular scholar, he or she can attend one of the larger gatherings described above (if she can afford it or receive

¹⁰⁴ Three of the Zaytuna scholars have their own websites, which are largely collaborative efforts administered by their family members, students, and colleagues. Hamza Yusuf’s is www.sandala.org, Zaid Shakir’s is www.newislamicdirections.com, and Abdullah Ali’s is www.lamppostproductions.com. Each website is unique in its approach and substance. While their audiences overlap, there is a noticeable relevance to African American Muslim experience on lamppostproductions.com, in part because of its foundation in Philadelphia, PA. These and other scholars’ works are also featured on other websites primarily dedicated to sacred learning.

financial aid). At the Rihla and Reviving the Islamic Spirit Knowledge Retreat (which typically precedes the larger event in Toronto), in particular, students are able to engage with the scholars more intimately, as demonstrated by shots of candid conversations between scholars and students in the promotional videos. While scholarships are provided, the Rihla program is not an inexpensive program. While early Rihlas had taken place in the United States at places like Dar Al Islam in Abiquiu, New Mexico, the Zaytuna Institute in Hayward, and in Chicago, Illinois, recent Rihlas have taken place in Konya, Turkey (where Jalal ad-Dīn Muhammad Rumi [d.1273] is buried and spent the latter portion of his life). Other trips like the *Umra* to Mecca and Medina also offer opportunities to engage more intimately with the scholars, while also performing the devotional act of visiting the most sacred sites of Islam.¹⁰⁵

One of the organizers of Hamza Yusuf’s lectures in Hayward had been working in public access television and had access to audiovisual equipment for recording the first classes at the Islamic Study School in Hayward, which were often people’s first introductions to Hamza Yusuf and his teaching.¹⁰⁶ Even students who had attended the classes would get the recordings in order to continue listening to them regularly and to share with family and friends. Miles away in Virginia, Haroon Sellars first saw and heard Hamza Yusuf speak in one of these videos. One evening watching in his living room with his wife, he turned to her and said, “He needs a type of help, and I’m the person for the job.”

¹⁰⁵ Umra is similar to Hajj in that it is a trip to Mecca that involves particular devotional acts. It is not required of Muslims, but it is recommended. Its primary distinction from Hajj is that it is not performed during the requisite period of Hajj. See Karim (2009) and Khan (2009) on Deen Intensive and other programs for more detailed accounts.

¹⁰⁶ This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

An African American convert to Islam, Haroon grew up in a Christian family, the eldest of his brothers and sister. After graduating from college, he worked in audiovisual retail and produced music and poetry. He was an active member of the Virginia community in which he had taken his *shahāda* (testimony of faith by which one consciously becomes Muslim), and he often frequented a local Muslim bookstore where he first encountered the teachings of Hamza Yusuf.

I remember I think I actually saw him, on the little TV that they had in the store. They had a little relay going, of videos, and I think that's how I actually first saw his actual image. And just something kind of stuck out about his delivery and his message, so I started getting tapes of his, and I think that impact actually increased, I think, being that he was also a fellow convert, really [stuck] out for me, and I felt that he was delivering his teachings in a way that was relevant and also sensitive to the context of America, and that really appealed to me a lot. And also that he spoke, specifically, to aspects of the heart. And that really kinda stuck out for me in comparison to some of the other, you know, speakers and scholars that I was listening to. He really emphasized looking in and examining the human heart, and that was very appealing to me.

Haroon first met Yusuf and other scholars in 1998 when he attended the Rihla at the Zaytuna Institute location on Jackson Street in Hayward.

I was involved in audio engineering, audiovisual work, photography and things like that, and the whole digital revolution was just kicking it off... Shaykh Hamza's recording material was VHS and cassette tape, and I was actually editing content, you know, on a computer and outputting it onto CD at that time, and I let it be known, like "Hey...you are recording and delivering such a great message. I think that it should also be recorded in the best way possible and produced in the best way possible...as well."

One day while at work in Virginia, Haroon received an unexpected phone call. "As-Salaamu alaykum, Haroon, how are you doing? What are you doing?" Stunned, Haroon gathered himself, wondering how Yusuf got his work number and also wondering how he should answer a question like "What are you doing?". Coming from Yusuf, Haroon felt the question pierce into his very existence, asking "What are you

doing *with your life*?” Yusuf then, very to the point, related the purpose of his phone call, “You know, you should move out here... You know, the Prophet, *ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, was not a person by himself, he had Companions. People need Helpers, good Helpers at their side.”¹⁰⁷ Haroon remembers these words and remembers thinking first about his wife and two daughters (his wife would give birth to their third daughter in the Bay Area), as well as his best friends, his community, his work, his parents, and his siblings who were all in Virginia.

So to move my family to California—without anything really being mapped out—was a big deal. But I decided after kind of praying on it, thinking about it, and following, just kind of following the whispers in my heart, I was like, “I think that’s a good idea. I think I want to do that. I think that this person is going to make a major contribution to Islam in America and abroad, and I think I can help.

A significant part of this story is that when Yusuf recommended that Haroon move to California, he did not provide any logistical information about where and how he and his family would live. Haroon understood that this decision was on him, and it had to be about his own benefit and the benefit for others that his work would potentially bring. For him, it wasn’t about serving Hamza Yusuf. It was about benefitting a wider public through his work as one who enables the audiovisual transmission of Islamic knowledge. Yusuf made a number of such calls, and he approached individuals and families in person, suggesting to them that they should move to the Bay Area to be “companions” and “helpers,” a reference to and invocation of the original *Ṣaḥāba* (Companions) and the *Anṣār* (Helpers) of the Prophet Muhammad. There were other converts who had studied

¹⁰⁷ By the phrasing in this conversation subject to memory, it would seem that Yusuf is comparing himself to the Prophet Muhammad, calling together his own companions and helpers. I doubt that this was Yusuf’s intention, to put himself on such a footing with the Prophet. Rather, I sense that it was Yusuf’s intention to point out the historical precedent of a community of people who made change happen, that one individual cannot influence such social and political change alone. This is an important recognition in an era when the lone individual is often upheld as the engine of change, overshadowing the background work of hundreds of individuals who made such a person a pivotal figure in the first place (Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela are good examples of this).

overseas and could teach and those who had other skills like craftsmanship, decorative arts, and design.¹⁰⁸ Theoretically these twentieth and twenty-first century Ṣaḥāba and Anṣār were still organizing around the Prophet Muhammad and his efforts to establish a Muslim society, but his physical person and the revelation he received and transmitted was now conveyed by his spiritual descendants, the “heirs of the prophets,” the scholars who were inducted into a knowledge-based genealogy through their studies overseas and through the embodiment of Islamic worldviews and values.

MUSLIM CELEBRITY

By the end of the 1990s, Hamza Yusuf had become a well-known Muslim figure, a charismatic leader whose personal notoriety and sway was being mobilized into an institution and movement. An embodied performance of Islam (in dress, comportment, and language), the expression of Islamic knowledge in the ability to quote traditions and Quranic verses in Arabic, and his ability to explicitly relate such traditions to the contemporary American context elevated Yusuf to “celebrity” status amongst American Muslims. The making of his celebrity was also contingent on the circulation of his courses on audiotape, CDs, and videos, as well as his being a white American convert to Islam. As a convert to Islam, Yusuf had a particular appeal to other converts, whether white, Black, or Latino. Yusuf’s whiteness appealed particularly to South Asian Muslims, as well as other ethnic immigrant Muslims in ways that it did not to African American converts to Islam.

Yusuf’s American whiteness (as distinct from a Bosnian or Middle Eastern “whiteness”) signified a partial redemption for American imperialism, racism, and social hierarchy. As a symbolic figure for a type of American Islam, Yusuf embodied the

¹⁰⁸ Yusuf would encourage others to start different organizations and pursue other types of da‘wa activities as well.

possibilities for other Muslims to assimilate, whether they were from Pakistan, Syria, Indonesia, or Afghanistan. While Mahdi Tourage describes the role of white converts as being fetishistic embodiments of belief for “immigrant Muslims,” I would suggest that they signify aspirations of whiteness and cultural citizenship in an American landscape of racial inequality and subjugation (Tourage 2013).

While ethnic leadership in national Muslim organizations did not explicitly celebrate Yusuf because of his whiteness, it is a significant factor in not only his rise, but the rise of other White American converts to Islam.¹⁰⁹ Looking back upon the history of Zaytuna it is significant to note that one young Afghan Muslim did not listen to Yusuf when he first attended Jumu‘a prayer in Santa Clara in the early 1990s. It was not until he realized later that this prolific Arabic speaker was “a white guy” that he returned and really began to listen to his message.¹¹⁰ That a white man with all the privileges of whiteness would convert to Islam and dedicate himself to its sacred language and sciences stood in stark contrast to the image of American cultural imperialism that was at that time on display in America’s first war with Iraq. In many ways, Yusuf’s critique of US foreign policy from within and his celebration of Islamic traditions and cultures through his “hyper-performativity” of it (ibid.) went a long way in suturing the anxieties and ambivalences of being an immigrant in America. As a white American, he offered a model for being both American and Muslim that made it possible to believe in the promise of America while still being critical of it.

¹⁰⁹ I would include here such scholars like Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah of Chicago, Imam Suhaib Webb (originally from Oklahoma, but currently based in Boston), Dr. Ingrid Mattson (formerly of the Hartford Seminary and now at the University of Waterloo), John “Yahya” Rhodus, Jr. (a Zaytuna scholar currently pursuing a PhD at Cambridge), James Ahmad “Baraka Blue” Whipple (a Bay Area-based spoken word artist and graduate student at the Graduate Theological Union), and Michael Muhammad Knight (a writer, blogger, and graduate student in Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina). There are also many British converts to Islam, including perhaps the most well-known, Yusuf Islam, formerly known as Cat Stevens.

¹¹⁰ I tell this story Chapter Four.

Zareena Grewal acknowledges claims of his critics who argue that his whiteness is “fetishized by some immigrant Muslims, a phenomenon Yusuf himself acknowledges and condemns.” Grewal, however, emphasizes that it is “his demonstrable intellectual skills that have been the primary focus of his Muslim admirers in the US and worldwide...Yusuf’s construction of religious authority replaces immigrants’ experience of diaspora and nostalgia for their homelands with his reference to deep history” in which he recuperates the “glories of Islamic Spain,” the Middle East, and Africa” (Grewal 2013:164-165). His focus on matters of the heart and techniques of the self, also offered another modality for thinking through one’s positionality in American structures of race, class, and gender.

This self-directed modality was not seen as a wholly positive transformation of Muslim subjectivities in the Bay Area in the 1990s. Zaytuna rose out of an already vibrant Islamic landscape in the Bay Area dominated by African American mosques and university-based MSAs. UC Berkeley, Ohlone College, Chabot College, San Francisco State, and other Bay Area colleges had small, but active Muslim populations that interacted with African American and immigrant communities. One could travel throughout California and stay overnight in mosques with no questions asked, and African American masjids were buying properties in their vicinities, running schools, and were politically active and socially visible in Black neighborhoods.

Some Bay Area Muslims lament the growth of the Zaytuna School because they see it as a turning away from the public sphere towards a “white” and “sūfi” inner path. One community member expressed to me a commonly-held perception that historically, white Americans and Europeans were attracted to Islam for its more Sūfistic and mystical aspects, while African Americans were attracted to its racial egalitarianism and social justice aspects. While historically there is institutional and biographical evidence of this,

the landscape was more complex as multiple desires and spiritual impulses found different forms of expression.¹¹¹ Many African Americans are interested in Sūfism, and the disciplining of self was a foundational imperative of the Nation of Islam and Warith Deen communities. White, Asian, and Arab Muslims often articulate their Muslim and ethnic identities through anti-racist and social justice work.

Taṣawwuf (the practice of Sufism, agnosticism, or “purification of the heart”) and social justice work did not and do not need to be mutually exclusive, but in terms of what organized “Islamic movements” grew and which did not, it seems that there was a communal movement away from inner-city, community-based work. However, greater visibility of inequality and social injustices due to increasing economic disparities, recession, policing, aging communities, and changes in state and local policies also may have enhanced the perception that there was less community work being done. The increasing suburbanization of Islam in the Bay Area throughout the 1990s was an important shift in relationships between the different communities. Post-9/11 there was also a fear about seeming too political and critical of the United States. Instead of identifying and cultivating relationships with African American and largely working class Asian and Arab Muslim populations who laid the groundwork of Islam in the Bay Area, many communities focused their resources on building large mosques in the Bay Area suburbs where many upwardly-mobile Muslims were now living. Indeed, a number of the dynamic communities of the 1970s-1990s did falter and now struggle to maintain their properties and congregations for a number of reasons.¹¹²

¹¹¹ See note Chapter 1 note 69 (p76) in regards to the racializing construction of Islam by Orientalists in regards to how Sufism was “Aryan,” while all other Islam’s were Semitic. Such academic assertions have seeped into attitudes and experiences of everyday life.

¹¹² Some reasons include COINTELPRO type infiltration and targeting that fueled distrust and anxiety in local communities, the departure of important figures, the shifting populations of Muslims in the area, the increase of available mosques, and the widening distance between “immigrant” and African American Muslim communities.

While Yusuf's whiteness (and suburban approach) was a critical factor in his rise, the message of this "medium" was likewise significant. Tied into his embodiment of Islam was his knowledge and experiences of it. His language ability and his emphasis on a tradition of Islamic scholarship and *isnād* (chains of transmission) authenticated his credentials as a Muslim, simultaneously modern and relevant though "steeped in tradition." By emphasizing these chains of transmission, he expressed the brokenness of such chains in much of contemporary Islam. In articulating the "crisis of authority" and "the loss" of the tradition and its relevance, Yusuf appealed to an anxiety and doubt that pervaded Muslim populations (Grewal 2013). He located Islamic authority (and an "archive" in Grewal's words) in his teachers, from Mauritania to Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf States, and by narrating his experiences with and access to them, authorized his own teaching. He discussed how individuals not educated within the tradition, though often from Muslim-majority countries, made interpretations based on their own means of subjective reasoning. Such individuals ranged from "Muslim radicals" who "hijacked" the religion to legitimate their forms of jihad to "feminists" who debated the ḥijab, but didn't understand that the *khimār* mentioned in the Qur'an referred to a head covering that Arab women wore at the time of revelation.¹¹³ Yusuf's reverence for and proficiency in the discursive tradition, as well as his concomitant reverence for and literacy in the Western literary canon, appealed to Muslims who aspired to better understand their faith, its meaning, and its significance in their everyday lives. Their Muslim-ness was also an increasingly significant, though at times ambivalent, part of their American and global

¹¹³ Fieldnotes. Yusuf mentioned these issues often in videos throughout the last decade.

identities as Islam and its Muslim-majority countries were increasingly derided in the media.¹¹⁴

Black Muslim scholars and community leaders have articulated critiques of US racism and imperialism throughout the twentieth century, but the type of multiracial mobilization around Yusuf never occurred for any of these leaders. While there have been recent retroactive attempts to resuscitate the contributions of African American Muslim leaders like Warith Deen Muhammad to a multiracial history of American Islam, most histories remain ethnically and racially distinct.

Malcolm X is consistently celebrated as perhaps the most significant American Muslim figure in the multiracial imaginations of American Muslims. His autobiography continues to convert people to Islam and awakens in those born into Muslim families a greater understanding of the possibilities of Islam and the incongruities of American racial histories. If he were alive today, would he be celebrated as a significant leader or marginalized for his “radical” critiques? Marable asks “How would have another three or four decades of life altered how we imagine him and the ways we interpret his legacy?” (Marable 2009:306).

Marable concludes his formidable, and much contested, biography on Malcolm X with an assertion regarding X’s possible opinion on groups like Al Qaeda (Marable 2011). While Marable confidently asserts what would have been X’s definitive disapproval of the events of September 11, 2001, and the “negation of Islam’s core tenets” (487), I wonder if the more proper move would be to imagine how groups like Al-Qaeda would be different had El Ḥajj Malik el-Shabazz lived on? Marable himself believes that El-Shabazz was “potentially a new type of world leader, personally drawn

¹¹⁴ See Grewal (2013) for a discussion of Yusuf as a white Muslim figure and American understandings of Islamic authority and tradition. See also (Kugle 2006).

up from the ‘wretched of the earth’ into a political stratosphere of international power” (Marable 2009:314). Would his singular voice be lost amidst the chorus of voices that infiltrate airwaves, websites, and cable television? Would he be back in prison on political grounds?¹¹⁵ Would he be judged “not Muslim enough,” not knowledgeable enough for lack of overseas or “traditional” training? El-Shabazz was working with Muslims overseas to arrange scholarships for young African American Muslims in his last trips abroad. For him, knowledge was and would still be power. How Islamic knowledge practices emerging from the Americas may impact global Islam remains to be seen. Regardless, these are important histories that impact how politics, social justice, and race are discussed and experienced at Zaytuna and how Zaytuna positions and presents itself to a wider public.

One of the early lectures produced and distributed by the Zaytuna Institute (through Alhambra Productions¹¹⁶) was a class entitled “Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Malcolm X” recorded on February 2, 2002 in Hayward at the Zaytuna Institute. The DVD featured lectures by Yusuf and Shakir in which they discussed Malcolm’s biography, the profound impact of his Ḥajj trip, and the role it played in transforming his thinking and approach to social justice and Islam. The video also conveyed the “taste of tranquility and spirit of brotherhood” that exemplified the multiracial experience of Ḥajj through the presentation of an image of those congregating at Zaytuna Institute in Hayward.¹¹⁷ In addition to medium close-up shots of Shakir and Yusuf, the video shows

¹¹⁵ Consider the cases of Jamil Al-Amin (formerly H Rap Brown), Assata Shakur, and Mumia Abu Jamal, as well as the 2009 death of Imam Luqman Abdullah of Detroit, Michigan. Shakur and Abu Jamal are not to my knowledge Muslims, but their ongoing exiles and imprisonment speak to the current political landscape in regards to a black liberatory politics.

¹¹⁶ More on Alhambra Productions

¹¹⁷ 2003 Alhambra Productions, “Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Malcolm X” from Internet advertisement.

the obviously multiracial audience, in rapt attention and in engaged conversation and camaraderie. The video served both as a medium of Islamic knowledge and as an invitation to join this growing movement, which was now also being led by an African American Muslim.

Prior to his arrival at Zaytuna Institute, Zaid Shakir was well known and respected amongst Black American Muslims, especially along the East Coast. There were and continue to be networks of Black American Islam, formed in relation to organized structures like the Dar Al-Islam movement or Warith Deen Muhammad communities, or more independent communities of Black American Muslims concentrated in cities across the US with significant Black populations (New York, Newark, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, Oakland, Atlanta, etc.). These historically Black communities have increasingly engaged in dialogue with Muslims of other races and ethnicities (Grewal 2009, Jackson 2005, Karim 2009), especially as the demographics of Muslims in America shifted post-1965.

Shakir, often compared to Malcolm X, would become more widely known to non-Black and global communities through his association with Zaytuna Institute.¹¹⁸ I was told a number of times that despite his scholarship and charisma, Shakir would not have been included in “prime time” and “main stage” ISNA programming had it not been for the intervention of Hamza Yusuf, who by that time was one of the main draws to such conferences. The underlying message and belief was that Yusuf leveraged his white privilege and popularity towards the recognition of an African American scholar in a largely South Asian and Arab space. I was told by others, however, that Shakir *was* well-known beyond Black American Muslim populations and at ISNA prior to his

¹¹⁸ Goodstein, Laurie. “U.S. Muslim Clerics Seek a Modern Middle Ground.” *The New York Times*, June 18, 2006, sec. National. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/18/us/18imams.html>.

involvement with Hamza Yusuf and had already been doing much touring in the country for diverse constituencies. If anything, it was his international profile that benefitted from his relationship with Zaytuna and Yusuf. Such contradictory statements regarding Yusuf's leveraging and Shakir's challenges in recognition, speak to the ways that Muslims understand how race may or may not function in the Umma, and in particular how Muslims of different backgrounds perceive Arab and South Asian Muslims' prejudiced views towards African American Muslims and enchantment with white American Muslims as an assimilationist aspiration towards whiteness. While I have heard about and witnessed some of these views, this generalization ahistoricizes and flattens the experiences and attitudes of Arab, South Asian and other immigrant populations and their own experiences of racialization, colonization, and prejudice. Regardless, when Shakir became a resident scholar at Zaytuna Institute, his lectures also began to be recorded, produced, and distributed to an ever-expanding audience.

The dynamic between the two scholars that was later modified by the addition of Hatem Bazian, the third co-founder of the College and other scholars like Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, was a balancing act of differing life and educational experiences, philosophical and practical approaches, and sociopolitical visions that coalesced around the College. Their charismatic leadership was mobilized throughout a diverse American Muslim public that was variously concerned with individual spiritual development and sustainability, cultural citizenship, race and social justice issues, international issues (Israel/Palestine and American presence and war in the Middle East, especially), and community building. These issues were addressed in varying degrees, and it was the scholars respective abilities to make Islam relevant to everyday life and concerns that brought them so much spiritual and practical support. In their God-conscious

cosmologies, this worldly support was ultimately conjured by the enabling grace of God, given and taken.

On worldly terms, the critical manual work of making the College a reality fell on the shoulders of a team of dedicated staff members and faculty that were often behind the scenes and in the shade of celebrity. Men and women staff members were “hidden jewels” at Zaytuna, working long hours and embodying the Muslim ideals of “good character” and “god-consciousness” (taqwā). Yahya Rhodus, one of the lecturers at the Seminary and then the College would remind the students to keep an eye out for such jewels. He told students about Haroon Sellars and their friend Usama Canon (who the students considered one of their informal teachers) who helped Rhodus gain an understanding of the realities of race in America (Usama is mixed race and Yahya is “a white boy from Kansas.” They were high schools friends who converted to Islam within weeks of each other). Just as Rhodus told stories of the great spiritual accomplishments of Imams and Muslim figures of the past, he would also tell stories of people still living, who were working for next-to-nothing “on principle,” to the point of collapsing and fainting from hunger on the grounds of Zaytuna Institute.¹¹⁹

The San Francisco Bay Area, with its rich history of social protest movements, university activism, counter culture, and global consciousness provides a hospitable grounding for an emergent institution of alterity. The landscape is rich in memory and history, lofted and entrenched in its own notoriety and recognition, providing a particularly unique and dynamic environment for Zaytuna College. The co-presence of so many Muslim scholars and the diverse and well-established communities of Muslims who had immigrated to the United States and Muslims who had converted to Islam came

¹¹⁹ Fieldnotes, fajr class Spring 2011, Fall 2011

together in a dynamic landscape which always prided itself in a social vanguardism, whether anomalous or anticipatory.

DIGITAL DA‘WA AND DEVOTIONAL DESIGN

Early on, Haroon Sellars, the audiovisual technician at Zaytuna saw Hamza Yusuf as a visionary who recognized the significance of media, in both its form and content.

He had an appreciation from the beginning for the media arts and its relevancy, its permeation, you know, in contemporary culture, especially Western culture, [a] media-dominated realm. And so he had an appreciation and kind of a perception of that and a value assessment of that early on. And this is very rare, especially for non-profits and startups and things like that. And you are dealing with very tight and fluctuating budgets. Usually the first thing to go is anything artistic...often perceived as unnecessary.

I really appreciate that he had an appreciation for that, and an understanding of the need to engage in that even though he’s a very strong critic of media and its over-saturation and being careful about the types of media you are ingesting, and so forth. But he also realizes the relevancy of it, and that’s been very empowering for me.

In her study of Muslim televangelists, Yasmin Moll (2010) discusses concerns regarding the “secular” origins of the television medium and its use as a medium of da‘wa. For such preachers like Amr Khaled, these modern technologies are:

an integral part of their pious performance aimed at moving their audience to a more virtuous life. It deeply matters that one can see them—educated, young, attractive, obviously well-to-do—working the camera, inhabiting spaces of modern technology, yet still maintaining a high commitment to Islamic practice, as their middle-class audience should too (so the message goes) (9).

Like Yusuf, these televangelists utilize “the association of television with entertainment” by appealing to sensibilities already shaped by such forms, providing, a “viable (entertaining) alternative to secular and potentially immoral media.” While maintaining critiques of media’s negative impact, Yusuf and others both reference and appropriate such forms, recognizing their transformative potential and circulation. In

Moll's words, "Song and sermon don't compete for the sensory attention of believers, but conjoin to amplify it" (9). In the case of many scholars, song and sermon may be entangled in the same message, as Shakir may quote a popular song from his youth in a *khutba* (sermon) or history lesson and Usama Canon quotes rhymes from a hiphop track in his weekly class at Ta'leef Collective (Chicago-based, American Muslim Lupe Fiasco is a favorite).

Harkening back to a time in American culture where poetry was a form of mass entertainment, Yusuf will often recite verses of English poetry in his lectures. Yusuf exposes his audiences to a cultural reservoir with which they previously had little connection or negative connotations. He proposes a Western literary and philosophical genealogy that can coexist with an Islamic discursive tradition towards an emergent form of "American Islam," following what Umar Faruq Abd-Allah refers to as the "cultural imperative" of Islam, in which prior civilizational ideas or cultural practices continue to exist or are modified when a community converts to Islam. In this way, a diversity of Muslim ways of life coexist, united by the legal and ethical frameworks of a universal Islam, while a people's foods, dress, languages, and other forms of social practice and expression are still taken into account (so long as they are not unlawful acts).

Considering such a "cultural imperative," Yusuf and others of the Zaytuna school embrace such media technologies as critical to their da'wa. It is precisely the habituations of our overstimulated sensoriums that make "digital da'wa"¹²⁰ successful as mediums for Islamic knowledge. Mustafa Davis and Usama Canon coined this phrase in regards to the work that Davis does as a digital filmmaker and photographer both independently and for the Ta'leef Collective in Fremont. Usama Canon used the phrase during a "Living Right"

¹²⁰ Fieldnotes from Ta'leef Collective.

class at Ta'leef when he described the work that Davis was producing and uploading to the Internet. By calling it “da‘wa,” they assert the transformative and persuasive work of “enjoining what is good” and “calling” Muslims and non-Muslims to Islam, while likewise inscribing themselves into a genealogy of *da‘īya* (people who do da‘wa), such as their teachers Ḥabīb Umar bin Hafiz, Hamza Yusuf, and Zaid Shakir.

Yusuf, Sellars, Davis, Canon, and others recognize the images that they are competing with, and they utilize such media literacies to engage their potential audiences on such terms. Branding and “beautification” become especially important in such commodified mediascapes. Haroon Sellars articulates this by drawing attention to Yusuf’s “sense” regarding the potential power of media, while also implying a Muslim approach to knowledge and aesthetics:

So I think he also had a sense; I think Shaykh Hamza also had a sense of the historic nature of the work that he was doing, and people like that need help. People like that need help. Unique voices like that, special voices like that, you know, need helpers to kind of rally around them to help, help their gifts spread.

So I think that’s what it was about for me, is that I felt that he was teaching something beneficial, and I wanted that benefit to spread, and spread in a way that was befitting the nature of the message, which I felt was beautiful. So our engagement with that message and how we present that to the public should also be beautiful and noble and honorable and dignified.

Haroon relates form to content here, and likewise asserts the importance of circulating what is beneficial. Like the Maussian gift, beneficial knowledge comes with a spiritual weight and obligations of reciprocity. In this case, however, social bonds are produced through genealogies of knowledge “gifts” transmitted forward through time, rather than in a reciprocal exchange. At Zaytuna the circulation of knowledge must formally reflect the stature of its substance. The “beauty” with which Zaytuna transmits its message has been significant in its influence. Unlike the majority of da‘wa materials

available at the time, the institution's attention to aesthetics in its publications, websites, and spaces was tangible as a kind of "branding." While Haroon handled much of the audiovisual work, there were a number of graphic designers who also assisted with the visual appearance of Zaytuna productions, from fliers to journals to websites. The original Zaytuna logo featuring a two-tone olive branch, minaret, and crescent moon was designed in 1996 by English musician, graphic designer, and calligrapher Ian Abdullateef Whiteman. Having converted to Islam in 1970, Whiteman was a longtime friend of Hamza Yusuf. He continues to design book covers and promotional materials, in addition to typesetting books and catalogs for Zaytuna College and other institutions and publishers with a relationship to Hamza Yusuf and others at the College from his home in Southern Spain.

Peter Gould, a Sidney-based Australian convert to Islam, designs the Zaytuna College website and other related promotional materials, in addition to designing websites and products for other Muslim organizations. Both designers do work for Zaytuna using particular color schemes (olive green, burgundy, and cream) and typefaces (like the five-hundred year old Bembo). This long-distance design works in tandem with local Zaytuna image-facilitators, most prominent of whom is Sister Khadija O'Connell.

O'Connell and her family are close friends of Yusuf and his family, and he had urged them to leave their home in Abiquiu, New Mexico, to be a part of the community he was building in the Bay Area in the mid-1990s. O'Connell and her husband, Yusuf were and continue to be an important part of the space-making and interior design at Zaytuna buildings and events - leading teams of volunteers in floral arrangement, laying out fabrics and furniture, designing table decorations, building a yurt, building furniture, and producing mementos. Khadija also helped to produce an Islamic milieu in the spaces of Zaytuna Institute on Jackson Street and the College, not to mention pursuing her own

businesses and conducting community art classes. Her work contributed greatly to producing the public image of Zaytuna College, and she likewise recognized Yusuf's visionary aspects in his appreciation of beauty and the role it played in opening the space for spiritual discovery and renewal. Like Haroon, she felt empowered to continue her artwork and to care about aesthetics because Yusuf made it an important priority and consideration for the work they were all doing.

Everyone was playing his or her essential part, and despite the changing institutional forms of Zaytuna from Institute to College, the public image/branding has remained consistent aesthetically.¹²¹ While the color palate has shifted slightly from the original design, the logo has remained and the earth tone aesthetic continues to exude a calming and dignified sense. Khadija O'Connell and designer Peter Gould eventually co-founded "Creativity and the Spiritual Path," an event series and "gathering of conversations" for "Muslim-oriented and Islamic arts, design, music, films, and cultural programs."¹²²

This attention to aesthetics is hardly an innovation, as there are a number of traditions that speak to the Prophet Muhammad's love of things beautiful. The beauty of Islamic architecture and calligraphy has been well-documented, such that attention to the work that one's aesthetic environment does is not a new concept in Islam.¹²³ Closely related is a sense of cleanliness and purity, such that an attention to one's body, clothes, and inhabited spaces must be ritually clean to perform acts like prayer. The mosque as

¹²¹ A number of staff members likewise contributed to the aesthetic, carrying it over into Zaytuna booths at conferences and events. A number of female administrators were especially significant in maintaining attention to such details. The students and myself likewise carried on the tradition when we could, recognizing that there was a certain image, mood, and environmental consciousness to maintain at Zaytuna events. Haroon Sellars would likewise carry this over in the realm of scents, often lighting oud (aloeswood), and wafting it into spaces to create a space more conducive to spiritual openings.

¹²² <http://spiritualcreative.com/>

¹²³ See Elias (2012), Gonzalez and Institute of Ismaili Studies. (2001), Marks (2010), Metcalf (1996)

God's space, has particular rights over Muslims, in particular its right to be kept clean and to be treated with respect and dignity (one should not speak idly or conduct unrelated business in the sacred space of the mosque).¹²⁴

Similar to the mosque, the place of Islamic learning likewise has a special status. It should ideally be built with materials that were rightfully acquired and should also be well-maintained and treated with dignity.¹²⁵ The Student Code of Conduct for Zaytuna College likewise mentions the importance of students maintaining a clean and dignified appearance, and Yusuf has on numerous occasions lamented and disdained students' wearing of sweatshirts, jeans, and corporate labels (jeans are no longer allowed). He asks for them to be cut out or zoomed out of video material of Zaytuna student interviews (a Nike sweatshirt, for example), and typically uses such opportunities to share this view with the staff.¹²⁶ Shakir has also given students clothing advice on occasion, recommending that they spend a little more on fewer items of clothing that will last longer than cheaper (and often sweatshop-produced) apparel.¹²⁷

CIRCULATING DISPOSITIONS

Zaid Shakir's attention to the effect of his appearance and disposition was particularly apparent in his visits to the Occupy Oakland encampment in downtown Oakland throughout the Fall of 2012. He would lead his congregations from Friday prayer in his Friday (Jumu'a) best, a long tailored coat, kufi, and cane, striking an

¹²⁴ Notes, Dr. Umar Faruq AbdAllah lecture "Rights of the Masjid" Chicago. April 2013

¹²⁵ Makdisi (1981). There are a number of accounts which describe how particular scholars refused to pray in the Madrasa Nizamiyya because they believed some of the building materials were taken from another waqf property. This particular issue in the American context is complicated by the fact that most Muslim spaces in America were not built as awqaf or as explicitly Muslim spaces with Muslim uses. As mentioned earlier, most of Zaytuna's spaces were previously run by Christians or were non-religious spaces.

¹²⁶ He has not to my knowledge ever explicitly called a student out on their apparel. Rather, he makes general statements in the hopes that they will take this into consideration when they shop for clothes or get dressed in the morning.

¹²⁷ Fieldnotes.

imposing pious and dignified Black figure amongst those perhaps understandably less dapper, holding down the encampment. In such spaces, the well-dressed Muslims recalled the civil rights and Black Power movement's dress codes, whether they were in suits and dresses, or black leather and berets. The power of such an image was well mobilized, and the Zaytuna school of American Islam is well-versed in such effects.¹²⁸ Other teachers like Hatem Bazian, Abdullah Ali, Tahir Anwar, and Yahya Rhodus likewise take consideration in their dress, and their particular dispositions are well-reflected in such decisions. Bazian, with his suits and ties, sweater vests and dress shirts, is ever the professor, and as a Palestinian activist is also conjuring the well-heeled attire of previous social justice movements and Arab intellectual manhood.

In describing Ali, one staff member describes him as “sharp” and “well-dressed,” such that he looks forward to seeing what he will wear on a given day, “*Mashā’Allah.*” While “he’s not into being this dynamic orator and style, he’s a person of knowledge and deen. He’s just African American from around the way.” The British-born and Bay Area-raised Gujarati Anwar, on the other hand, “visually, like he looks like one of those Taliban guys, you know? He has the big beard, and stuff like that. He always usually wears a thobe.” But when one actually interacts with him:

He’s just the nicest person, always got a beautiful smile, wonderful recitation, and he’s sharp. He teaches in a way that is enjoyable, you know, and you can tell that he’s authoritative in what he’s teaching and he’s passionate about it. Gosh, I know there’s some people who see a person that looks the way he looks, and they’re

¹²⁸ Usama Canon, the co-founder of the Ta’leef Collective, and longtime student of the Zaytuna School, carries on the tradition of his well-adorned teachers, from Yusuf to Shakir to Habib ‘Umar bin Hafiz. Canon’s attention to fashion, from his hair to facial hair to clothes, and shoes - is empowered and empowering, effective in multiple ways. He once commented on his first time seeing Habib ‘Umar, and “how fly” he looked in his Yemeni attire. For him, this was an example of Muslim manhood, a significantly different genealogy for what is often considered a “metrosexual” or “dandified” attention to one’s personal appearance. This is in contrast to his more casual co-founder Mustafa Davis, who dons more of a photographer/filmmaker attire of cargo pants, t-shirts, and dress shirts. Their attires reflect their respective roles at Ta’leef as the image and image-maker of the ever-expanding and influential organization.

like, ‘oh!’ but I bet you, once they meet him, like he’s got em, can’t help but like him.¹²⁹

White American Rhodus is described as “chill, tranquil, soft,” “soft-hearted and gentle, and so soft spoken,” in contrast to Shakir’s potent forthrightness, for example. Usually dressed in a long dress coat, dress shirt, slacks, and striped scarf, one occasionally sees traces of the street fashion of his youth in the Bay Area where he experimented with Rastafarianism and excelled in basketball. Echoing Haroon’s early experiences in a visit to the community in the 1990s that I discuss later, these striking differences in the visual, racial, and dispositional appearances of Islamic Studies faculty of Zaytuna (and the current lack of female Islamic scholar-models)¹³⁰ is an important part of learning at Zaytuna, as their contrasting ways of being provide a diversity of political-ethical-spiritual and sartorial models for students.

For the female students there is a recognition that their teachers are mostly male, and as they proceed in their studies, they yearn for more female scholar models.¹³¹ Although Dr. Shirin Maskatia who teaches English Composition is a significant role model and resource, she conveys for students and staff a different kind of scholarly presence. A significant part of the Zaytuna College project is precisely producing female models. They are the models they wish to see. While it would seem that there is a dearth

¹²⁹ Audio recording, Interview with Zaytuna staff member Fall 2012

¹³⁰ There are female teachers in other subjects like English and Ancient Civilizations, as well as male teachers in Arabic language, history, and science, but I’m drawing attention to the teachers who have studied in “traditional” Muslim milieus because they hold a special authority and ideal for students. While they respect and admire their other teachers and the Zaytuna staff, they look to these teachers in particular as spiritual-political-ethical models. A female teacher of fiqh did arrive after my fieldwork period ended, and I hope to discuss her influence and role in the book manuscript as I continue research at the school. In an initial interview, she and I did discuss how she felt that her presence was a significant addition to the campus. There was a “hunger” amongst the female students for a female model such as herself, and she recognizes the particular pressures and scrutiny that the young female graduates of Zaytuna will face as they become public figures, should they choose to do so.

¹³¹ While in their first year, Zaytuna female students did not consider the mostly male faculty as issue (see Aminah’s statement below), as they proceeded into their sophomore and junior years, they felt that there was more of a need.

of female scholars, they do in fact exist, but they mostly teach in private and only to other women. There is a rich tradition of female scholarship and training in Syria (which the current political situation in Syria has endangered). The Dār al-Zahra in Tarim, Yemen, and other schools throughout an expansive notion of the Muslim World (which includes all of Asia, Europe, South and West Africa, and the Americas) have also produced a number of scholars who are teaching in the United States. In one lecture at the College, Yusuf discussed how women were often superior students, and that perhaps it was time for women to take up the helm of Islamic scholarship since men have had their time with it. Young men and women recognize the gender dynamics that pervade their own Muslim communities, such that there is a sense at the school that their egalitarian and co-educational approaches are revolutionary (though not necessarily innovative). There is a constant effort to ground this egalitarian approach in the Prophetic tradition and the Qur'an, such that women are granted equal status in the classroom and student leadership, and are often the mediated faces of the institution (more on this in Chapter Five).

While female students recognize that there is great benefit in preserving the gendered approaches of Islamic learning, they also see how male students could benefit from taking Islamic knowledge from female teachers, just as they have taken knowledge from their male teachers. Having sat in female-only classes with female teachers in less formal settings, I found that these were spaces of arrival and empowerment, and I would not advocate for doing away with such a tradition in a shallow effort towards (Western notions of) gender equality. There was an arrival in the sense of having arrived at a space one was looking for, woman-centered, intellectually and experience driven, and highly generative of alternative forms of intergenerational, multiracial, and authoritative relationality (dare I say, sisterhood?). In such spaces female scholars expressed their

knowledge lineages through both male and female scholars, and they taught specific texts or recitations for which they had *tjizat*. We sat in intimate circles or close enough to see our teachers' faces, ask questions, and receive relevant answers. Locating knowledge and authority in these female embodiments enabled proximity and a form of relationality that was at once hierarchical in terms of knowledge acquired, but also reciprocal and horizontal in terms of shared lived experiences and desires to be better as women.

Feminist forms of pedagogy were engaged in the sense that students had a voice in the classroom and were challenged to think through their logics and life experiences. Preserving such spaces and traditions is an important part of maintaining a women-centered form of Islamic knowledge and practice. These spaces are particularly important for discussing women-specific issues like legal rulings about menstruation or pregnancy.¹³² This form of distinctly gendered egalitarianism requires that men, women, and institutions maintain senses of mutual responsibilities and rights. Individuals and collectivities consistently work discursively towards maintaining the “essentials” of tradition while responding to the vicissitudes of time and circumstance in regards to rights, responsibilities, and space within both public and private spheres.

The founder of the Rahmah Foundation, now a lecturer at the College told me how she was encouraged to start her organization by Hamza Yusuf because there was a need to continue this tradition of female scholarship. These young women, who are trained both abroad and at Zaytuna, teach courses both in person and remotely, doing the critical work of getting women educated on their *dīn*. There is a fear that should these

¹³² Such issues were discussed in coed *fiqh* classes at the College, but depending on the (male) teacher, such issues were covered with more or less detail and more or less awkwardness. The teachers stressed that both male and female students needed to have this knowledge since they would all be expected to answer such questions should they be in leadership positions at mosques and schools. Zaytuna College currently offers a year-long course for female students that covers *fiqh* and social issues pertaining to women. While the female students appreciate the course, they also feel that the male students should be exposed to such issues and be a part of certain dialogues as well.

women begin teaching men, they would take away from the teaching of women and that because of the intimate nature of this form of learning that there would be potential to “sway” their male students in inappropriate ways. There is a general recognition of such issues amongst the scholars, and there are degrees of agreement and disagreement about gender roles. The establishment of and teaching at the College goes a long way towards expressing the positions of the College’s founders. The college/university model enables a way around the tradition of same-sex learning structures towards thinking through other ways of producing female scholars and leaders. While holding such traditions intact, the College also attempts to fill a scholarly and social vacuum of Muslim women’s perspectives and higher learning. How the young Zaytuna women mobilize their educations and think through other possible futures will be one of the most significant parts of the Zaytuna story. That the first class of students was mostly women is intended, whether divinely or humanly. In lieu of female scholars, the young women become models for each other, and seek out models across gender, race, time, and space.

When Ḥabīb ‘Umar bin Hafiz visited Zaytuna College, he was brought into the library where he sat behind a table next to his student and translator Yahya Rhodus. Before him sat the young female students of Zaytuna on his right, and on the left sat the few male students. Behind the students sat teachers, community members, and part of his “entourage” (his students who had traveled to Yemen to study who were now his hosts in the US). Having attended a separate session for just women beforehand, I was struck by the difference in the two events, one for a general population of women, and the other for a co-ed gathering of students. Seeing that the majority of students were women, upon whom he gazed with great care (as opposed to the other event where he was quite stern and removed), he transmitted accounts of the Prophet’s daughter, Fatima. In many of the ways in which the Prophet’s own life was made visible through accounts of Ḥadīth and

the Sīra (see Chapter Five), so did Ḥabīb ‘Umar make Fatima visible and present, specifically as a model for the female students, but also as a model for all Muslims who love the Prophet.

The Zaytuna College teachers bring together a unique assemblage of educational experiences and Muslim dispositions. Professor Abdullah Ali recognizes the challenges of bringing together scholars of differing backgrounds, while he also reminded me that the scholars themselves were formed by a wide array of teachers, role models, and experiences. While he himself is recognized for being the first American to graduate from the Sharī‘a College at Al-Qarawiyyin, a famous and long-established Islamic university in Morocco, he also recognizes the impact of his early American teachers and role models.

The success of Zaytuna is not in one person, it can not be in one person. Nobody is going to take Zaytuna seriously if we are only concerned with the opinions and the voice of one person. Who is going to really take you seriously? And people need to understand that. Even amongst those who are teaching now, we differ on certain things, and the students need to know that. I believe that it’s always best to have a lot of different teachers. Because there’s certain things you benefit from, you take from each one of them. Sometimes students would come from overseas, and they will say “My shaykh... my shaykh...”, and I would say, ‘There’s only one? Only one? Your shaykh, you studied with one person?’ There’s you know...you are very limited when that happens. I was reflecting about this on my way over here. Thinking about my life, and you know my early teachers in high school and middle school and the types of people they were. And just very appreciative for why I benefitted from having been [a student] of so many different people and so many different types of dispositions.

Ali specifically points out the importance of “different types of dispositions” and their influence on his person. Growing up amongst the dynamic Muslim communities of Philadelphia and then traveling to Morocco, his learning experiences were more than simple exchanges of information. They were encounters of dispositions in which a young man was able to observe, reflect, and synthesize multiple models of adulthood and

knowledgeability. These multiple models expressed for him a heterogeneity of subjectivities that contributed significantly to his own becoming as a scholar. While Ali emphasizes an importance of diversity and difference towards a future becoming, others discuss the spiritual force of “great teachers” that impact one immediately. While these two notions often work in tandem, they do account for the different ways that tradition is encountered and synthesized and the ways that these teachers then translate their own experiences as students into their roles as teachers.

At the first end of the year picnic at Zaytuna College, students and community members sat on the grass facing a microphone and speakers. It was a sunny spring day in Berkeley, and teachers were sitting in chairs under the shade of trees. Students and teachers took turns reflecting on the first year of Zaytuna College, discussing the significance of their experiences, remembering a few of the students who had left mid-year, and reminding themselves about why they were all there. Hamza Yusuf reflected on his own experiences as a student and in his characteristic rhetorical style brought forth narrations of the past to think through the present:

We were blessed to have great teachers. I had some teachers that they literally haunt me in my sleep, because they just didn't leave me. I was thinking this morning, I was thinking about Sadiq al Buryani who is a beautiful scholar in Libya and now he is in hiding out of fear from the regime. May Allah protect him and *inshā'Allah* remove all of the evil and hardship that has come upon the Libyans. But he did a *tahqīq* of a beautiful book, by Sidi Ahmad Zarruq, and Sidi Ahmad Zarruq said that there are three type of teachers.

He said there's teachers of *tarqiya* [elevation, furtherance, encouragement], teachers of *tarbiyya* [education, upbringing, raising], and teachers of *ta'lim* [information, instruction, training]. And he said that a teacher of *tarqiya* is somebody who just being in their presence you are elevated, And he said that the Prophet *ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*, the proof of this from the Sunna, is that Anas, *Raḍi Allāhu 'anhu* said that “We hadn't washed our hands, or just removed the dust of our hands from burying the Prophet, except we found a deficiency in our hearts.” And what he, what the commentaries say is just the physical presence

of the Prophet *ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam* elevated them, the fact that he was physically present. And he said there’s a great blessing in having the physical presence.

One of the teachers, Muhammad bin Wasiyya,’ they used to say about him, his students, they said that “Whenever we found, *itha fatarna, thahabana ilayhi linandhur ‘alayhi, fanafa‘na usbu’an*. Like “If we felt lazy or weak, we used to go look at him, and it would sustain us for the week.” To get the *himma* [high-mindedness, high-aiming ambition, intention, resolution] from that person.

Ibn al Munkadher the great teacher of Imam Malik, *Raḍi Allāhu ‘anhu*, one of the great Tabi‘īn, Imam Malik said “We used to go visit him,” and he said, “*Wa kunna nunkeru qulubuna*, after visiting him, we would *nah’takeru anfusuna ayyāma*, that we would hold ourselves in contempt for several days thereafter, just by seeing his state.”

And so, the states of people are really important, and may Allah elevate our states, all of us. Because students inspire teachers often as much as students are inspired by teachers, that when you see people really committed to learning, especially for me, just the fact that you know you came in here for the sake of Allah, I can testify to that, because there wasn’t any other benefit, people wanted to learn for the dīn. And that’s a powerful thing.¹³³

As mentioned earlier, Yusuf had intended to make *hijra* (migration) to northwest Africa, to continue his studies and teaching there while working as a nurse. In some ways, it was finding students eager to learn in the San Francisco Bay Area that shifted his thinking towards establishing a school in the United States. A number of young people in the East Bay were eager to study with him full-time, and other students were driving hours on a weekly basis to attend his classes at the Islamic Study School and then the Zaytuna Institute. As these experiences began to coalesce, he encouraged other converts to Islam to return to the States or to the Bay Area, to be a part of this burgeoning knowledge and devotional-based movement that was initially supported both financially and materially by Arab and Afghan youth and elders. Yusuf is inspired by the students’ commitment to learning, and he relates this commitment to their states, their dispositions.

¹³³ videorecording at end of year picnic Spring 2011.

Chapter 3: We Pray that the History that We Make will be History that is Remarkable

This chapter analyzes the shift from seminary to college and how different teachers' backgrounds, the liberal arts, and the "great books" tradition are incorporated into the curriculum and college structure. The chapter also discusses why particular students decided to go to Zaytuna (largely drawn there by these particular scholars) and the relationships that develop between student and teacher in regards to authority and temporality. This chapter considers Zaytuna College within the history of American institutions of higher learning, and the ways in which secular critique and a "value-free" scientific inquiry came to stand for modern truth. I argue that an attention to the history of "the unity of truth" and the intentions regarding the seeking of knowledge have much to say about all pursuits of knowledge whether at Zaytuna or beyond. In addition, the affective and temporal dimensions of seeking and receiving knowledge from a teacher are important indices for thinking about the potentialities, limits, and positionalities of critique.

THE SEMINARY

The term *seminary* has a Christian valence and is derived from the Latin *seminarium* 'seed plot,' related to *semen* or 'seed.' The choice of referring to Zaytuna's Al-Tabari School of Islamic Studies as a seminary rather than a *madrassa* or *jami'a* speaks to Zaytuna's aspirations as an American institution of advanced (and perhaps pastoral) religious training.¹³⁴ The avoidance of the term "madrassa" may also have to do with the negative connotations the Arabic word for "school" or "place of study" has in the

¹³⁴ Sajida Jalalzai's forthcoming dissertation on Muslim chaplaincy students in Christian seminaries delves further into the relationship between pastoral care and Muslim leadership articulated through Christian frameworks.

American context. Associated with the training of Muslims radicals and jihadis, madrasas are seen as suspicious and backwards, based in rote memorization and indoctrination rather than critical thought and higher learning. Zaytuna's references to its pilot *seminary* program and its eventual transition into a *liberal arts college* speak to its attempts to model itself on US-based institutional forms (though they likewise cite a rich history of Islamic colleges and universities in which the liberal arts were a given) in order to better facilitate relationships across faiths and to better situate it as an established voice and authority for Muslims in America. There are different views within Zaytuna College regarding whether this is an attempt to assimilate or self-determine the future of Islam in America.

The pilot seminary program began at the Hayward Jackson Street location in 2004 and ran until 2008. Originally intended to be a seven-year program that would include Imam training, the seminary graduated three male students and two female students. Two male students attended the program for the full four years, while the other three began from the second year. About three other male students also attended the seminary for about one year each. The program was discontinued when the Zaytuna board decided to work towards becoming an undergraduate college instead of a seminary.¹³⁵ The students typically entered with at least one year's worth of Arabic study (or quickly caught up), and two of the brothers were married with children, while another came directly from high school in New York at seventeen.

Ebad, the son of Bangladeshi immigrants grew up in New York's Lower East Side; he came to the Seminary directly from Stuyvesent High School, where he had been active in the Muslim Student Association there. While in high school, he had also

¹³⁵ This decision was partly influenced by surveys conducted amongst Muslim communities and organizations that pushed for an undergraduate college, as opposed to a Masters level seminary program or madrasa style college.

memorized the Qur'an from a teacher that would come to his home regularly to teach him and his younger siblings. When he arrived in California, he greatly benefitted from time spent with his primary teacher, Zaid Shakir:

We spent most of our time with Imam Zaid. Imam Zaid was like a father, parent figure for me. I came here when I was 17, I didn't know anything about anything. And he took me to Trader Joe's, and [was] like "here get this, this, and that. Salad, and milk, organic milk, make sure you get organic milk," and so he was very much around. I saw him everyday almost. And I was very much in awe of him. In awe of him.

The seminary was an intimate, and at times isolating experience for its students. The male students moved to the Bay Area from Georgia, Michigan, Maryland, and New York, while the female students were based locally, though they had experience studying abroad. Most of them had come from cities and were now in the suburbs. Although the days and nights were full of study and activity, as well as familial responsibilities, there was also a sense of instability, as the end of every year was full of doubts about whether the next year would happen. The program did provide the students with stipends, however, and there was no tuition. Zaytuna and the community which provided funds to support them saw these future scholars as an investment and trust.

The students continued their studies in Arabic and Arabic grammar, and also studied logic, political science, Prophetic Biography, and Ḥadīth Sciences, Qur'anic Sciences, Fiqh, and Jurisprudence/Uṣūl al-Fiqh. The initial plan for the seminary had been to incorporate a social science and humanities curriculum with the Islamic Studies curriculum, but after the first year, they realized that there were limited resources for such a broad curriculum. Imam Zaid was teaching most of the classes on his own the first few years (Hamza Yusuf did not teach in the seminary program). Additional teachers included Shaykh Salik bin Siddina, and Qari Umar Bellaha who initially taught *Tajwīd* (Qur'anic Recitation) and would later teach *Tafsīr* (Qur'anic Interpretation) as well.

Yahya Rhodus would return from Yemen to teach in the second and third years. An Azhari Somali shaykh, Shaykh Abdur Rahman Taahir taught ‘*Aqīda* (Theology) and *Mantiq* (Logic), and Abdullah bin Hamid Ali from Philadelphia would join the faculty for the final year, teaching *Tawhīd* (the philosophical study of the Oneness of God), Uṣūl al-Fiqh, and Ḥadīth Sciences. After the first year, most of the classes were taught in the Arabic language with Arabic texts.

Every morning after the dawn prayer, the students would have what Shakir called their morning “coffee:” recitation of the “Wird al-Latīf” by Imam al-Haddad (d. 1132), the “Wird of Imam Nawawi” (d. 1278), Surah Ya Sin from the Qur’an, as well as *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and *ṣalawāt* (sending salutations) to the Prophet Muhammad, repeating the invocation, *Allahumma ṣallī ‘alā Sayyidinā Muḥammad wa ‘alā ālihi wa sallam* (May Allah send blessings upon our Master Muhammad and his family and grant them peace) two to three hundred times.¹³⁶ As one student remembers, “It was a spiritual practice, like we’d do this devotional practice/act together...it would wake us up. That was the way we woke, that was the way we started [each day].” Shakir would later recommend that the College students likewise implement such practices as a way to “ground” themselves:

Whatever you do, everyone should be constant in reciting the *Awrad* (wird - plural) of the morning and evening, and again these keep us grounded... it not only helps to ground us, and it not only pushes Shayṭān (Satan) away from us...everyone of those compilations, they have things that discourage Shayṭān...things that are mentioned to have protective power, so the person is protected and not overwhelmed by all of the vagaries of the world and the

¹³⁶ The wird is a litany - a collection of Quranic verses, supplications, and Prophetic invocations. The “Wird al-Latīf” is advised as beneficial because it is composed solely from the text of the Qur’an and the Sunna. Surah Ya Sin is a particularly significant chapter of the Qur’an based on the saying of the Prophet Muhammad, “The heart of the Qur’an is Ya Sin. No one recites it, seeking Allah and the next life, except that they are forgiven. Recite it for your dead.” It is also a chapter in which the foundations of the faith are elucidated most emphatically.

vicissitudes of time, but one has an even keel, nice and steady, keep the boat going.¹³⁷

In the first year of the program, this morning exercise would be followed by Imam Zaid reading from *Taj al-‘Arus (The Bride-Groom’s Crown*, also known as the *Hikm*) by Ibn ‘Ata Allah al-Iskandari (d. 1309), the third sheik in the Shadhili Sufi order, a Mālikī jurist, and a scholar at Al-Azhar in Cairo. This was a collection of his aphorisms that were lyrical and memorizable guidelines for Muslims, that along with his text *Miftāḥ al Falāḥ (The Key to Success/Salvation)*, popularized the Shadhili Order throughout North Africa.¹³⁸ One student recalled the enduring lessons from that text,

I always remember and tell people, the first lesson that Imam Zaid mentioned from there, on the first day, was that knowledge arrogates. So we have to humble ourselves, as a reminder before we set off on this journey.

Imam Zaid would repeat the same lesson to the Zaytuna College students years later as he introduced them to the texts of Al-Zarnūji, Ibn Rajab, and Imam Nawawi at their Fall Orientation.

An important part of the experience for the seminary students was the intimacy of their relationship with Zaid Shakir, who carried much of the program on his shoulders. He was a model for the students in not only his scholarship but his everyday way of being:

Besides all the texts and people, it was just seeing someone like Imam Zaid. So Imam Zaid became not like a celebrity figure, but someone here who’s doing all this stuff that he doesn’t need to do. He’d come in the morning, at the old Hayward location, and it disturbed him to see the lights on, when they didn’t need to be on, and he’d go around turning off the lights, like in the bathroom [because] it’d be on during the night, or the outside lights, he’d turn those off, you know. He’d sweep the old grounds and things like that, and then he’d be there reciting

¹³⁷ Audio recording, Student Orientation Fall 2011

¹³⁸ *Taj al-Arus* was recently translated and published by Sherman A. Jackson as *Sufism for Non-Sufis*. Aisha Bewley has also translated sections of both this text and Ibn Ata Allah’s *Miftah Al-Falah (The Key to Salvation)*. Zaid Shakir also put out a series of short lectures on the text that are available on Youtube.

the Qur'an. Just...I think the word for it, I think of it now, like as integrity, having integrity, like being about this.

It's not just lip service, or it's a different thing, I think, for people just to see Imam Zaid at an ISNA stage, and fanfare and what not, to seeing him as a teacher, as a human being, as a man, as someone whose...*(drifts off and remembers the following)*

We went on the first year...we did *'itikaf* [spiritual retreat, staying overnight in the mosque] on the last ten days of Ramadan. The first year in the last ten days of Ramadan, we were in SBIA (South Bay Islamic Association in San Jose, CA), at the masjid there. And we stayed there. Imam Zaid didn't stay there for the whole ten because he had [a speaking engagement], but the three of us were there, and we saw him there. And I remember just, like him...one night I actually lead the night prayers, the *taḥajjud* prayers at 3am. I remember making *du'a*, and I remember Imam Zaid just balling, crying, in tears, having true...having real *(he pauses, breathes deeply, trying to figure out what to say)*...a relationship with God, fear and awe, being a person of God, right? Being a person of *dhikr*, being a person where this is a reality, where this is a...they really believe in this, as an example, as a model, as someone who inspires you, not to mention then the scholarship and thoughts there.¹³⁹

The classroom extends out into the everyday, as Shakir becomes a human model for an embodied practice of Islam.¹⁴⁰ Ebad's difficulty in describing this memory, which I try to preserve in the above account through ellipses, his stops and starts, and his lists of descriptions, speaks to the affective intensity of such moments that are often difficult to translate into words. Coming into contact with what Ebad calls "a real relationship with God, fear and awe" is itself an experience of fear and awe, in which the student "sees," in an embodied way, what it means to remember God, and perhaps how far he has to go. Tears often index and hail such inner realities for Muslims in ways that are outwardly perceptible, while also serving as a pedagogic signifier of what true belief may look like

¹³⁹ Mahdi Tourage (2013) speaks about converts' performances of belief as signifying belief for "born-Muslims." While he focuses on Muslim "revivals" in large auditoriums, my study frames much of this performance in more localized settings as pedagogic and modeling where such dispositions are both sincere and precisely aimed to affect the faith of others. The fetishism Tourage cites is perhaps more specific to race and racial thinking than to performances of belief, although they are often intertwined.

¹⁴⁰ I discuss this embodied modeling as a form of pedagogy further in Chapters Two and Seven.

(Chittick 2005, I discuss tears further in Chapter 5). It is important to recall that this memory follows one in which Ebad identifies Shakir's integrity through his work doing menial tasks like sweeping the grounds and turning lights off, and then reciting the Qur'an. Through such intimate encounters with his teacher, Ebad finds a model for an ethical and moral life. Through his remembering of that period in his life, he relives the intensities of such encounters, though we were sitting in a noisy New York City diner at the time.

Shakir's commitment to both the pilot seminary program and the College are evident in both his students' accounts as well as in my own observations. I still remember his face as he entered the classroom on Orientation Day in the Fall of 2010, as he welcomed the inaugural class of Zaytuna College. There was a lightness in his step, and his face beamed with something of the ecstatic joy that came from seeing this day arrive, a culmination of many years of life experiences, difficult choices, decisions, blessings, prayers, dhikr, and grace.¹⁴¹ Shakir gave the students his "Jackie Robinson talk" in which he expressed to them the historical significance of this endeavor, to bring Muslims and Islam into the American everyday, not through accounts of terrorism and extremism, but through scholarship, integrity, and moral character in the face of attacks and bigotry.

Whether we like it or not we are making history, so we pray that the history that we make will be history that is remarkable. Remarkable in the sense of "wow," but also remarkable in the sense that people will talk about it in good ways in the future. They will remark favorably on this history.

THE COLLEGE

In her historical analysis of the changing relationship between morality and knowledge in American universities, Julie Reuben traces the philosophical and

¹⁴¹ My videorecording of the Orientation confirms/constructs my memory.

institutional shifts regarding intellectual inquiry and truth. Up until the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a common acceptance of “the unity of truth,” in which “religious truth was the most important and valuable form of knowledge because it gave meaning to mundane knowledge.” The spiritual, moral, and cognitive were interlinked and a university education culminated in a senior year course on moral philosophy, which “informed students of their duties to their family, their community, their country, and God,” reconciling “religious doctrines with the findings of secular studies” (Reuben 1996:2-3).

Similar to the ordering of the world and one’s relationships within it that a young Muslim would learn through ta’dīb (the inculcation of adab), moral philosophy and natural theology were seen as compatible and mutually reinforcing. After the Civil War and through to about the 1930s, major curricular and institutional reforms were instituted in the majority of colleges and universities across the United States that relegated moral development to the humanities, arts, and the extracurricular, leaving the sciences for “objective” and “value-free” inquiry and academic freedom that would provide “practical knowledge” for the benefit of society. “Just as religion had been dissociated from ‘cognitive’ truth, morality became divorced from ‘factual’ knowledge and aligned instead with ‘fictive’ and ‘aesthetic’ truth. The good, then, became associated with the beautiful, not the true” (7).

These shifts happened in gradual stages. There were initial attempts to maintain the relationship between morality and knowledge, but Reuben suggests that rather than a gradual secularization of the university, it was university reforms intended to maintain the connection that unintentionally paved the way for the dissolution of the “unity of truth.” Educational reformers, in an effort to modernize religion, promoted the scientific study of religion. Instead of helping to “integrate religion into modern intellectual life,”

such efforts further marginalized the truth of religion and likewise separated theology from the religious everyday (5).¹⁴² Notions about science itself also shifted, contributing to the dominance of logical positivism and emotive ethics as normative frames. This same period of secularization and its concomitant values regarding modernity and religion impacted the development of the modern state and the legal frameworks that “transmuted” shari‘a law in Egypt and elsewhere in the historical Muslim world (Asad 2003). Hussein Agrama describes how in an attempt to maintain the Islamic foundations of Egyptian society, the bifurcation of national law into the secular and the Islamic courts simultaneously produced spaces of the secular and the religious, while likewise blurring the sovereignty of each (2012). In this case attempts to modernize religion severed theology from the everyday in all spheres but family law, demarcating particular domains for the rule of law that would prove unruly.

With the restrictions of theology and “received knowledge” out of the way, “successful inquiry as beginning with open questioning and leading to consensus among researchers” came to dominate the understanding of science and true knowledge. Agreement and freedom worked well in “technical and specialized scholarship,” but “free inquiry, when applied to moral issues produced conflict” such that in an effort to avoid conflict, many scholars and institutions abandoned efforts to maintain the linkages between morality and knowledge (268-9). Morals and ethics became emotional and aesthetic rather than cognitive, and individualized student morale, in regards to behavior rather than belief, came to dominate administrative concerns for educating the “whole” person.

¹⁴² This period coincides interestingly with the emergence of the study of world religions and the social scientific and psychological study of religion (Reuben 1996:102, Masuzawa 2005).

The idea of consensus and agreement as the “proper standard by which to identify ‘truth’” (Reuben 1996:269) has been interrogated by scholars who have presented other ways of knowing and other forms of authorizing discourses. Yet there continues to be a normative way of pursuing truths that privileges consensus as a diagnostic for what is empirically true, such that disagreement seems ambiguous and perhaps “yet to be determined” in a progressive view of knowledge production. In Islamic legal frameworks, consensus is likewise an important designation for essential truths within Islam. Beyond a certain baseline, however, there is a wide range of possibility. As Sherman Jackson told the students at the Zaytuna College Convocation in the Fall of 2011:

We have to again reinvest in one of the most astounding features of our own tradition, and that is that we do not expect every argument, every debate, every controversy to yield a single univocal answer. Not every debate is susceptible to a single univocal answer. There are answers that I favor, but I understand that there are equally plausible alternatives...And this is a part of our tradition that we must, especially as moderns must, reinvest in.¹⁴³

In many ways, the shift of Zaytuna from seminary to college replicates the shift from the classic college to the modern university and liberal arts college that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Can Zaytuna make the reforms to the study of Islam that were attempted in the (failed) development of (Christian) religious sciences? What conceptions of “true knowledge” and “science” will enable “free inquiry” and a critical engagement with and questioning of “received knowledge” and its concomitant authorizing structures? George Makdisi, a Christian scholar of Islam, stated

¹⁴³ Sherman Jackson, “Convocation address” Zaytuna College Convocation videorecording, August 2011. Sherman (Abdul Hakim) Jackson is a “Black American Muslim” and Islamic Studies scholar who is currently the King Faisal Chair in Islamic Thought and Culture and Professor of Religion and American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. His writings, especially *Black American Islam and the Third Resurrection* (2005), have been very influential in American Muslim communities in regards to Islam in America, while his work in Islamic Studies is well regarded by scholars.

that Islamic civilization was the first to reconcile religiosity and intellectual freedom without marginalizing religion.¹⁴⁴ Each generation has to gain access to the tradition and then “renew” it to fit the changing circumstances of everyday reality.

While Muslim civilizations interacted with other civilizational frameworks from their inception, the profound restructurings and remappings of the late nineteenth and twentieth century have shaped the contemporary mindset of Muslims (according to Jackson), reducing such populations

to a mindset, a point of departure, a basic presupposition that looks upon human ingenuity, creative energy, and intellectual exploration with great suspicion and often times with so much suspicion that it becomes difficult for all of these God-given talents to be brought to full fruition.

He challenges the students to have “the intellectual courage”

to go back and to grab onto our tradition and then to stretch that tradition into the modern world and into American life, to stretch it forward, to allow it to spread its wings, to derive inspiration from it, to derive instruction from it, but along the way to reshape it, to modify it, to the point that we render our tradition capable of speaking effectively and prophetically to the realities that define our lives as Muslims, and particularly Muslim Americans.

The students are on the front lines of determining whether the “tradition is going to serve as a means through which we seek to empower our communities, to negotiate a dignified existence as Muslims, in this time, in this age and in the place, or [whether] the preservation of tradition [will be] frozen at some arbitrarily chosen point in the past.”¹⁴⁵

While impulses to “freeze” tradition are evident throughout Islamic history and are not limited to modern history, Jackson importantly articulates some of the important

¹⁴⁴ Jackson recounted this memory from his time as a student of Makdisi’s at the University of Pennsylvania at the convocation. Makdisi (1920-2002) was born in Detroit, Michigan and studied in the US, Lebanon, and France. His work and teaching profoundly impacted Near Eastern and Islamic studies in the United States. My research is likewise indebted to his work, in particular his seminal text on Islamic and western higher education, *The Rise of Colleges* (1981).

¹⁴⁵ Sherman Jackson, “Convocation address” Zaytuna College Convocation videorecording, August 2011

challenges that Zaytuna's faculty, administration, and students face. The Zaytuna "community" recognizes these challenges and have sought advice from scholars educated both "traditionally" and in secular institutions. The curriculum has shifted a great deal in the short time I have been conducting research at the school, and I expect it will continue to undergo many modifications in the coming years. There are a number of reigning principles that govern the academic affairs' approach to curriculum development. Of them are a classical or medieval understanding of the liberal arts (the Trivium - Rhetoric, Logic, Grammar, and the Quadrivium – Mathematics, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music), and the "Great Books" curriculum first introduced at Columbia College in 1920 by John Erskine.¹⁴⁶

Stanford professor W.H. Cowley (1955, 1978) was an early critic of a return to the classical liberal arts and wrote oppositionally to the work of Columbia professor Mark Van Doren (*Liberal Education*, 1959), who has had a big impact on Yusuf's thinking and approach to pedagogy. Cowley disputes the claim that the seven liberal arts are a part of Western civilization's Greek legacy and stipulates that they were not instituted as seven until the fourth or perhaps the sixth century. He states that it wasn't until the Trivium and the Quadrivium were abandoned in the twelfth century that European universities really evolved intellectually and left the Dark Ages:

Universities were first established under the impact of the revival of knowledge from the ancient world and of the new knowledge of mathematics and medicine coming into Europe from Arabian sources. These were the forces which stirred the minds of Europeans to organize the new seats of learning called universities. The seven liberal arts were static studies of a world fast becoming outmoded (1978:98).

¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, after September 11th, 2001 Columbia University included the works of Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, and other Islamic scholars into their "core curriculum" undergraduate training.

Mottahadeh (1985) speaks positively of the classical liberal arts tradition as it existed in Islamic knowledge practices until the beginning of the twentieth century, where young Muslims took courses in logic and engaged in active discourses and dialogic learning, in addition to and within their studies in the Islamic Sciences. It is interesting to consider whether forms of rhetoric, logic, and grammar, as well as music, geometry, astronomy, and mathematics, would perform a different accompaniment and framework for Islamic studies versus studies in Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic. As Zaytuna College adds further courses in such subjects it will be interesting to see how such coursework is imagined and what effect they have on the ways students encounter material and engage with each other intellectually.

In some ways, it is also ironic that Zaytuna would choose to use the “Great Books” as a model, as such developments within the humanities were often imagined as a secular substitute for religion in terms of developing students’ character and imparting moral lessons. As social sciences and natural sciences became increasingly “value-free,” utilitarian, and specialized, it was the humanities and arts-based curriculums that were supposed to reunify morality and knowledge through the “emotional appeal of beauty rather than with the cognitive authority of knowledge” (Reuben 1996:229), as well as a sense of ethical citizenship. It is perhaps because of this great moral weight and responsibility that the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s took place. How would students get “universal” morality from “multicultural” coursework?

The initial intent of the “Great Books” curriculum was to develop intellect, not character. During World War II, one of its initiators Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago moved towards the position that students would “gain a ‘rational’ and ‘true’ conception of human nature and the good society” through their reading of the great books (Reuben 2010:41). To accommodate the concerns of mainstream academics, “who

viewed it as dogmatic and antimodern,” the great books curriculum was historicized as “great expressions of ideas which emanated from certain historical backgrounds,” windows into the historical development of “Western culture” (42). One of the critical issues at stake in such curriculum development was the pedagogic approach to such texts. Was the instructor interested in facilitating critical thinking through the material presented in the great books, or was the instructor “transferring information” to ensure the continuity of intellectual traditions (Markell 2010:191)?

Such debates matter for Zaytuna College in multiple ways. To the extent that they cite perennial faculty, such as Imam Abu Dawud (d. 275AH, Basra), Imam Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali (d. 795AH, Damascus), Rabi’ah al-‘Adawiyyah (d. 185AH, Jerusalem), and Qadi Ibn Khaldun (d. 808 AH, Cairo) amongst many others, on their website and teach their texts in the classroom signifies that they are not only historical figures, but classical and critical interlocutors. While not presenting such figures as keys to the understanding of “Islamic Civilization,” they clearly articulate an intellectual genealogy and inheritance:

A people disconnected from their past will never move confidently into the future. At Zaytuna College, we believe we must acknowledge and remain connected to the giants who have laid the intellectual and spiritual foundation upon which we aspire to build (from “Our Perennial Faculty” Zaytuna College website).

Because the texts of the perennial faculty are integrated into the curriculum across subjects, students gain a sense of their foundational significance, but not always their historical context. Depending on the course, such texts will alternatively be engaged towards developing a critical engagement with ideas, histories, and methodologies (as in jurisprudence and Islamic history classes), or as more, though not necessarily absolutely, authoritative and perennial (as in theology or Hadith Sciences). Students especially enjoyed tackling such texts in Arabic classes, where an attention to language and grammar lends itself to a different kind of intimacy with their perennial teachers.

Through courses like “The Rise and Fall of Civilizations” and “World Religions,” students have contact with other epistemological traditions, while in “The History of Science,” they gain insight into the historical relationship between science and religion. The college harkens back to a period in American higher education when “truth” was intimately tied into an alternatively Protestant or Catholic worldview, articulated through a particular canon that situated the West from the rest. While Zaytuna scholars are critical of the many occlusions and contradictions of this idealization, they also attempt to “integrate the study of Arabic and Islam into the Western canon.” While the binary of “two major world civilizations” being integrated makes the curricular story of Zaytuna more legible, it also undermines the complexity of what is happening at Zaytuna on the ground. In the time I was at Zaytuna (and this may no longer be the case), there was a third critical epistemological influence at the College that found its way into classrooms and extracurricular life. This was the influence of the social and educational debates of the 1960s and 70s.

Reuben cites the students themselves as the impetus behind these critical debates in higher education:

Inspired by the sit-in movement led by students at black colleges in the South and disturbed by the general apathy that reigned on their campuses, these students analyzed the insularity of student life and blamed the colleges and universities they attended for the complacency of their fellow students. They argued that the nature of university education—its abstract curriculum that ignored contemporary social issues; its devotion to the ideal of objectivity and distrust of commitment and engagement; its authoritarian style of instruction that encouraged passivity rather than participation on the part of students; and campus rules that unnecessarily restricted students’ freedom—produced uninvolved, self-centered students and graduates (2010:43).

I quote this text at length because it speaks to some of the critiques and some of the laments of Zaytuna scholars regarding higher education. While apathy, insularity,

complacency, and self-centeredness are shared critiques, Zaytuna scholars bemoan the “postmodern turn” that did away with objective truth and would likewise debate what students’ freedom actually looks like. Professors also weighed into these 1960s debates stating that the “values and structures of the university distorted the production of knowledge” and that,

the university espoused the values of objective and neutral scholarship— values that were both wrong and false. These ideals were wrong because, to the extent they were achieved, they produced meaningless knowledge; they were false because the knowledge produced by the university was not objective and neutral but in fact served the interests of the elite (44).

Despite the changes that this era of protest brought about, including the establishment of the interdisciplinaries and greater diversity (on the surface) in higher education, many of the above critiques could be applied to our contemporary universities, especially in regards to science and technology and professional schools. While students were able to do away with moral strictures and curricular requirements, they largely left the apparatus of the university intact, and as I further discuss in the conclusion, the university, as well as the state and capital, quickly adapted to the changing sociocultural and demographic landscape.

Zaytuna College responds to some of these incomplete claims for “reorienting the social function of the university from power to justice and therefore reviving its moral mission” (44). All three founders are inheritors of this protest tradition. Hamza Yusuf’s mother was an “activist in the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and the nascent environmentalist movement;” her worldview, as well as his humanities professor father, had a profound effect on his worldview and his appreciation for knowledge as an ethical practice (Grewal 2013:160).¹⁴⁷ Zaid Shakir was likewise raised by a politically-

¹⁴⁷ Yusuf speaks fondly of his mother’s influence and character in numerous videos and lectures, including *Rihla with Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Ep 25*. 2011.

inclined mother whose writings he would later publish (Mitchell 2007), and both he and Hatem Bazian are well-versed in the histories of social justice activism, in which they were both participants, both domestically and abroad. Hatem Bazian was a student activist at both San Francisco State and at UC Berkeley, primarily regarding Palestine, the U.S. War on Terror, and increasingly on behalf of the civil rights of Muslims, and he is a lecturer in Asian American Studies at UC Berkeley. Zaytuna College's presence in Berkeley, California, also situates it within a particular legacy, which leaves traces that resonate not only in its walls, but in its personages.

“*Al-Bidayat Majala Al-Nihayat*. The Beginnings are the Manifestations of the Endings.” John Yahya Rhodus states this phrase at the introduction of Shāfi‘ī fiqh class in the Fall of 2011. This is the first class of the second year of Zaytuna College. The incoming freshmen are assembled in the classroom together although they will be parsed out to their different fiqh courses the following week. Rhodus gives them an introductory lecture that applies to not only their study of fiqh, but to the totality of their studies at Zaytuna and beyond. He tells the students the story of Imam Mālik’s (the namesake of the Mālikī school of fiqh) passing, and how upon his being carried by her home, a female scholar and descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, Sayyida Nafīsa states, “He perfected his wuḍū’” (the rites of purification). This is said to mean that Imam Mālik had perfected the beginning of his worship, thus setting the stage for all that was to follow. Rhodus uses this example to demonstrate to the freshmen students the need to consider and make intentions at the beginning of their studies at Zaytuna and to begin well.

The day before, Zaid Shakir had likewise emphasized the importance of *al-niyya* (the intention) that one articulates, whether to one’s self or out loud, at the beginning of an action or endeavor:

Everyone should be here for the sake of knowledge and for the sake of serving with that knowledge...I'm doing this for the sake of Allah *subhānahu wa ta'āla*, and for the service of the people of Allah, which is a function of the intention of doing it for Allah, to serve the people.

Knowing what knowledge is enables one to make one's intentions towards its acquisition. As Zarnūji states:

It is necessary for the student in his quest for knowledge to strive for the pleasure of God, the abode of the Hereafter, the removal of ignorance from himself and from the rest of the ignorant, the revival of religion, and the survival of Islam. For the survival of Islam depends on knowledge. And the disciplined life and piety are not complete when there is ignorance (6).¹⁴⁸

Once again, a connection is made between knowledge and action. Namely, that one can not truly exist without the other, in that knowledge in and of itself is a means, not an end. It is part of a larger process in which, "Deeds [are measured] by their intentions." This Prophetic Ḥadīth, often the first in a number of Ḥadīth collections, indicates that one's intention for a particular action determines its worth ethically. The requisite works like prayer, purification, ḥajj, zakāt, and fasting require the act of intention as an opening to divine reckoning. Whether said on the tongue or "in the heart" making intention is a fundamental part of devotional practice. Intention likewise deems licit acts that are neither meritorious nor disliked as meritorious. If one eats a meal or gets dressed with the intention of having energy to better worship or to express modesty, respectively, these acts become good deeds. Similarly, intention in itself is a meritorious act as seen in the Ḥadīth related by Ibn 'Abbas that relates the words of the Prophet regarding intention:

God has written good and evil deeds, then rendered them clear; anyone who intends a good deed but does not perform it, God records it as one good deed,

¹⁴⁸ Diouf (1998) too refers to the importance of knowledge in Islam and its key to its survival. Islam amongst West African slaves in the Americas was rarely passed on, neither vertically nor horizontally, because of the difficulty in passing on knowledge under such conditions. Because Islam has no iconography, it could not be passed on through objects and images and was largely orally-based (although there are records of prayer beads being made and passed on, as well as transcriptions of sections of the Qur'an). By the early 1900s, knowledgeable Muslims born in West Africa had passed on.

whereas should he intend and then perform it, God records it as ten good deeds, up to seven hundred fold, and to yet more multiplications. If he intends an evil deed and does not do it, God records it as one full good deed; if he intends and then does it, God records it as one evil deed.

Such Ḥadīth incorporate much of human action into the ethical framework of Islam. There is no private sacred space where Islam is practiced, rather it permeates every public and private action through a consciousness of intention.

Zaytuna students are encouraged to consider their intentions as they set out on the path of learning. Short treatises like those of Al-Zarnūji, Ibn Rajab, Imam Al-Haddad, and “Dear Beloved Son” by Al-Ghazālī all succinctly state the importance of thinking through one’s reasons for pursuing sacred knowledge. Salman, an Afghan American student chose to read from “Dear Son” in his self-portrait.¹⁴⁹ Having been given the text by a friend, he felt that it succinctly articulated what being a student of sacred knowledge meant. His copy was well-worn and fit comfortably in his hands. He stood in the middle of the Berkeley mosque reading out loud:

Oh Son! How many nights have you spent drilling yourself in knowledge and poring over books and denying yourself sleep? I do not know what is the motivation. If it is to gain worldly goods, to attract worldly ephemera, to acquire worldly appointments and compete with your peers and colleagues, then woe on you, and your judgment [in the hereafter]; woe on you! But if your aim in this is to reinvigorate the Prophet’s law (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him!), to rectify your moral principles, and to break the domination of your soul, then blessings upon you, and [in the hereafter]: blessings upon you! (Al-Ghazali 2010a:94)

When Hamza Yusuf told his Mauritanian teacher Murabit Al Ḥajj about the plans to start a college, Murabit Al Ḥajj said something along the lines of, “Whatever you do, don’t give degrees, *‘li madha ḥusul ala shahāda, muṭarida shahāda ifsadu niyya.*’ Chasing a diploma will corrupt your intention.”¹⁵⁰ Yusuf similarly relates that “One of the signs of the end of time, the Prophet said, is *‘Yaṭalibu ‘ilmi gheer liwajḥ Allah,*’

¹⁴⁹ I discuss the self-portraits in chapter 5 and 7.

¹⁵⁰ Zaid Shakir, Orientation 2011, see also Yusuf recordings.

people will seek knowledge for other than the sake of Allah, that's a sign of the latter people."¹⁵¹ Distributing diplomas and seeking accreditation were two issues of debate for the Zaytuna scholars, who ultimately recognized that social and economic conditions for students and their families would impede them from attending a four-year program that was not recognized by some governing body. There were issues of social mobility that a college education could provide, as well as access to financial aid, student visas, and channels for higher learning that were only accessible with accreditation and a college degree.¹⁵² While such issues like accreditation and degree-granting continue to be debated issues at the College, it was known that the initial classes of students were not guaranteed accredited college degrees. They were largely attending Zaytuna out of a sincere desire to study the Islamic sciences. While some students had clear ideas about how they would honor and mobilize that knowledge in future endeavors, others just knew that seeking Islamic knowledge for its own sake was the best way they could spend this time in their lives, whether they had previously postponed it or were waiting for the opportunity.

Why am I coming to Zaytuna? There's a bunch of reasons, and I think I'll have more reasons as the time passes. But one is, it's mainly spiritual and personal in the sense that I felt like I needed to develop myself, and [I] still feel like I need to develop myself spiritually. And you know, I feel like it's our responsibility, it's my responsibility to gain Islamic knowledge because it's the most important knowledge that you can have, and also I felt like I was opening this door for me...I remember my sister said, "It's poor adab to not walk through a door when God has opened it for you, especially if it's something that will only bring you benefit." And so, that's one reason why I wanted to come. You know, I felt like if I didn't come, then it was possibly a poor reflection on my character, as in why

¹⁵¹ videorecording , picnic may 2011

¹⁵² Currently enrolled students, however, will graduate from Zaytuna before it is accredited. Although a few schools have agreed to accept an undergraduate degree from Zaytuna College, the students largely enrolled at Zaytuna with few assurances of an accredited degree. (Actually as of May 2013 Zaytuna currently has a state of California accreditation to be degree granting, but they are still pursuing the more academically rigorous WASC accreditation).

would I choose not to come here, and you know postpone my Islamic knowledge or potentially not do it at all.

And another reason, I always...My dad, he converted to Islam when he was nineteen...and I always felt like that was such a huge accomplishment and turning point in his life, and to do it when you are still a teenager, it makes it even more kind of powerful, and so I kind of always felt like, "Well what am I going to do...that is as comparable to what he did?" And so I thought this was kind of like the best way to carry on that transition in his life, you know, because becoming Muslim is the biggest blessing that Allah can give to your family, and so I felt like this was like a continuation of that for me and for my family.

Zahrah is not alone in relating her desire to study Islam as being related to her father's conversion. Both male and female students who were children of converts expressed the desire to understand what made their parents convert to Islam, as well as a responsibility to carry on this identity and way of life. For Abdul Malik, a second-generation African American Muslim, his time at Zaytuna was an unexpected opening at a time when he was thinking critically about Islam's potential impact in his hometown of Detroit and within his own family.

When I left Detroit, other than the crime and the bad economic situation, the leadership there, we have a very strong leadership there, but it was...they are all old, and the youth, so to speak, they are not really geared toward Islam at all. They are doing their own thing, and it's needed there. I've been to a lot of places in America, especially the East Coast, and people...Detroit is so different, it's so bad. We need, what I realized [is that] we need something to spark, you know? Jobs and everything are important, but people don't have the desire to live according to what's important in life as far as morality is concerned, not even touching on religion. They are not going to have any success, or any type of, you know, no type of relative path, even given the resources. They don't have the ingredients to even nurture any opportunity if they were granted such.

So when they asked me to write what I would do with my opportunity, once I graduated *inshā'Allah*, I said, I said I would give back. I don't have a profession in mind, I don't have even an aspect of what type of financial opportunities would be given. I just want to help people, you know as far as influence anybody, even if they don't want to go out and take on a field that deals directly with Islam, those...Islam is a way of life, it's not just reading Qur'an and doing dhikr, we need doctors, we need teachers, we need...any aspect is just as great, you can

incorporate Islam just as much in those types of fields, and I just want to be able to inspire people to go about their objectives, and whatever aspect that is in life, with the fundamentals, the guidance that Islam brings to make sure that their decision making, their influence, is done to the fullest potential. So, I just want to help people.

And what I realized prior to coming here is I knew more about Christianity, than I knew about Islam. And that really shocked me, like wow, I'm supposed to be a Muslim all my life, and [I] don't know my own faith, but yet still [I'm] defending Islam when I'm not even educated about it. I'm focusing more on the latter, rather than taking care of home.

While members of his family were no longer practicing, Abdul Malik felt responsible in his role as a son who would carry on his father's adopted Muslim name. His decision to come to Zaytuna hinged upon both his communal concerns and his concern for his parents' particular "goals and objectives, or wishes and desires. I feel that in order to keep Islam alive not only in my community but in my household, I would have to really get myself straightened out. I have to help myself before I could help other people...this is all I have, doing the best I can." Like Abdul Malik, Latifah, also a second-generation African American Muslim, is also committed to community work,

My goal after Zaytuna is really to give back to the community. When I say community, I mean the African American community, because I see that as being something neglected I think by Muslims at large...like it's not held to be very important...the Islamic well-being of Blacks in America, I mean you have some doing a lot of really good work, but I would just really like to be a part of that, to give back.

At the same time, Latifah also sees the need to develop herself and her own sense of spirituality as a part of her goals to serve.

That's one of the main reasons I'm here, is to get that Islamic spirituality, because even though I've been Muslim all my life, I don't feel that I know more, to be honest, I don't feel that I know more than just the basic beliefs of Islam. And its just kind of me, I'm looking for more, I want a better understanding, just so I can grow myself, so that I can get closer to Allah, it's something that I feel that I'm lacking.

Many of the students felt that they weren't living to their full potential, that there was more to Islam than the daily prayers and dietary restrictions, and they were seeking out a community of like-minded seekers. As Ahmad, the eldest son of Pakistani immigrants said, "I chose Zaytuna because I love this deen, I want to better my faith, and I want to be closer to God...I don't want to be satisfied. Making it a lifelong effort will make me the best I can be." While he doesn't know what he will do after he graduates, he knows that this study will make him a "better" person, and that the study of his deen and sitting with the scholars is time well spent.

Some students come to Zaytuna with prior undergraduate and graduate degrees. For them attending Zaytuna means finally being able to devote time to the study of Islam that they have been yearning for. For Thurayya, who is African American and second generation Muslim and who already has a Masters degree in creative writing, going through another undergraduate education initially seemed nonsensical and indulgent. Yet, she recognized that this yearning would not leave her, and that this would not be a repetitive experience,

I feel like this is a different kind of education than my initial education... "we are going to think critically about things, and we are going to be examining..." A lot of universities say that, but to a certain extent, it's like "ok, we are going to give you this information, and you are going to take a test, and you are gonna..." but I feel like this is about my faith, and this is about Muslims living in this country, and me living in this country and how I can participate and work towards various goals...so I feel like this is the place I need to be right now.

Whether students have a sense of their potential communal contributions or not, they all focus on the personal development they likewise seek. Zaytuna for them is a place where they can "be free" as Muslims, to think through together what it means to be Muslim in 21st century America. In addition to the above reasons for attending the College, the students consistently raised the presence of scholars like Hamza Yusuf and

Zaid Shakir. While some of the students didn't expect that they would actually be teaching at Zaytuna, others anticipated that spending time with such scholars would assist in their growth. This anticipation was facilitated by their familiarity with them as scholars through the circulation of their CDs, DVDs, writings, as well as YouTube videos and speaking engagements. Zahrah reflects on this transition from a distant mediated experience of her teachers to being in their physical presence in regular classes.

Imam Zaid and Shaykh Hamza, I have been following them since, for years now, mostly on YouTube, and then also going to the conferences that they speak at. And so, they are just like beacons of light for me, and they really, they really have inspired me to want to know my religion and, you know, they've made it seem accessible, and I just want to follow their example really. Because they are like the biggest, among the greatest scholars of the religion alive today, and they are American. And so that says a lot about how Islam has traveled throughout the years, and it says a lot about our potential as American Muslims. And so yeah, they have been the biggest role models, you know, aside from my dad and my mom, just to sit in their class and just to hear them speak, you know, four or five days a week, it's going to be one of the biggest blessings.

NEW FOUNDATION, OLD STONES

So, as long as knowledge remains, people will be guided. But sacred knowledge will remain as long as the scholars remain. When the scholars dwindle in number, people will fall into error. The Prophet relates this meaning in a sound Ḥadīth:

“Allah does not withdraw knowledge by extracting it from the hearts of men, rather He takes away the religious scholars. When no religious scholar remains, people take the ignorant as their leaders; these ignorant ones are questioned and give religious verdicts without knowledge. They are astray and lead others astray.”¹⁵³

It was a sunny day, almost too hot to stand in the sun for extended periods of time, except for those moments of a refreshing breeze or persistent wind. We were standing outside of a café on Shattuck Avenue on the northside of the UC Berkeley campus, the problematically named “Gourmet Ghetto.” As Masoud, the Midwestern son

¹⁵³ Bukhārī, Hadith no. 100, 7307 as quoted in al-Hanbali (2001).

of Egyptian immigrants and I waited for the others to get their coffees, he stood removed, hugging the wall, quietly looking down at his hands.¹⁵⁴ I asked him if he was alright and how things were going, and he expressed to me in a jumble of emotion how he was having doubts.

He doubted his teachers because they had entrusted young students like him with the heavy weight of being amongst the first students of Zaytuna College. This whole project depended on their success, and how could the scholars, funders, and all think that he and his classmates would be strong enough, wise enough to make the whole endeavor successful. He spoke of his youth, that reckless, frivolous, and foolish youth that was not strong enough to make the right choices, discipline one's self, and stay focused in studies.

I was surprised and concerned about where this was coming from and why now at the end of his first year? A few weeks prior, we had spoken in an interview one-on-one about how well things were going, and how he was excited about the future and being at Zaytuna, and now in the middle of a busy sidewalk, he was expressing doubt about the entire institutional project of Zaytuna College because he felt like he was failing it somehow. I knew that he was dealing with something personal and that he was also being counseled by his teachers. I attempted some consolation, ultimately feeling inadequate, but hoping I'd channeled some positive energy, and faith, his way. In an attempt to use a wiser person's words in place of my own (a much appreciated tradition at the school), I expressed to him something of Antonio Gramsci's "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will," although I think I substituted "will" with "heart." As my memory serves, I

¹⁵⁴ Masoud is named for my paternal uncle Masoud Kashani (1951-1975) who passed away on Thanksgiving night in 1975 in San Francisco. He is the first member of my family to be buried on American soil and his passing one month after my parents' marriage solidified something of their experience of loss in diaspora. My father told me about trying to find a knowledgeable (Iranian/Shia) Muslim who could administer the rites of *janaza* (funereal absolutions and prayers). In a small section of Muslims buried in a cemetery in Colma, California, he lays next to a young Palestinian man who had passed away the year before.

also mentioned Musa and Khidr to him, knowing that he would understand my meaning.¹⁵⁵

Masoud ultimately worked through the doubts of that particular day, and the next time we spoke he was feeling better about his place at Zaytuna. While that initial encounter had really concerned me because I was not used to such emotional outpourings from this usually quite reserved and moderate being, I was also not that surprised and ultimately thought that this experience with doubt, though not disbelief, was a good thing. In many ways this experience was part of the knowledge and wisdom he sought at Zaytuna. Struggles both within the classroom and outside of it forced the students to rethink their understandings of Islam and their teachers, creating a tension between what they had believed and the criticality that was being imparted by facing history, human fallability (their own, their elders, and their spiritual ancestors), and the realities of everyday life.

MUSA AND KHDR

Aspirations, feelings, embodiments, and cognitive processes form a complex assemblage of sensibilities around knowledge practices. There is palpable fragility, as well as alternations of doubt and certainty, admiration and scorn, hope and disappointment, achievement and failure, confusion and discoveries. These processes are to be expected, but when one is in the midst of darkness, learning to wait for and see the “light” can be profoundly difficult. Zaytuna students and scholars have to likewise adjust their relationships from the pastoral to the intellectual, from celebrity scholar to professor, from “kin” within Islam to institutional constituencies. As students begin studying Islam “scientifically” as an object of empirical analysis, one of the educational

¹⁵⁵ see below for explanation of Musa and Khidr.

processes they encounter, though it is not always recognized, is how to distinguish between Islam as a totality of truth, Islam as a discursive tradition produced after revelation, and Islam as it enacted by Muslims. Getting a handle on this abstract understanding of “what Islam is” and “what knowledge is” for that matter is not easily acquired. The Musa and Khidr story that concludes this chapter enables a conversation about these issues. In this Quranic account, Musa is seeking wisdom and knowledge, but consistently expresses doubt and impatience with his guide Khidr. The parable expresses the temporal nature of knowledge and experience, as well as the multifaceted ways in which knowledge is apprehended and produced. Much of education is the developing of faculties and capacities through processes of learning, rather than the actual information being transmitted; sometimes a boat needs to be scuttled in order for the boat to be saved.¹⁵⁶

In Islamic history and theology courses, the teachers make a point of complicating the historical narratives about the Shi’i and Sunni split. For many students it is the first time that they have heard about, or discussed from multiple perspectives, the incidents of Karbala, in which members of the Prophet Muhammad’s family are killed. They are often saddened and distressed to learn of the darker moments in the foundations of Islamic history. Zaid Shakir encourages the students to take their *imān* (faith) vitamins during these readings and class discussions. Learning about these events is an essential part of a Muslim liberal arts education, where historical facts are critically engaged as an important part of understanding both the historical and contemporary struggles between Muslims themselves. The students learn how to understand Islam historically, while also gaining a deeper understanding about “what Muslims believe” in terms of creed. In their

¹⁵⁶ To scuttle – to deliberately sink a boat by holing it.

theology classes they would read works by the New Atheists as well, in order to understand their arguments, and to formulate their own responses to such arguments.

While for some students, such readings were invigorating (learning how to battle the arguments of atheists), for others it gave them chills and made them uncomfortable. These moments may have been some students' first encounters with doubt or substantive arguments against Islam and God. These may have been their first encounters with the "ugly" parts of Islamic history, and the first time they heard about differences in what they understood as a monolithic agreed upon Islam. Some students were so uncomfortable about a conversation they had about a text by Sam Harris that they later asked their teacher to ask Haroon and I to erase any recordings that we had done that day.

Much of this demystifying (and in some ways de-sacralizing) of Islamic history and theology goes hand in hand with the disenchantment and critical engagement that occurs with one's teacher and/or spiritual guide. For many young American Muslims their disenchantment with "Islam" occurs early in their youth, whether through forced Islamic learning, bad teaching, moral strictness, punishment, or negative impressions of Islam via their parents, friends, media, or their experiences with Muslims themselves. For some it comes with secular education and American society, and while they may still believe in God, they may see less of a role for Islam in the governing of their daily lives. For many it is the evil that people or states do in the name of religions, Islam or otherwise, that leaves them doubtful, atheist, agnostic, and/or suspicious of institutionalized religion. It is likely that the majority of "Muslims" in the United States are neither mosque-going, nor "practicing" in a significant way. Yet this does not mean that Islamic values and beliefs do not continue to impact their worldviews and ways of being.

The faiths of students who come to Zaytuna have either been spared negative or ambivalent exposure or have survived it. Because of the range of ages and educational experiences in the student body, such experiential histories coexist and inform each other. The Zaytuna milieu is typically consistent with the teachings students received previously, or it is a departure from their upbringings for which they have been hungry. For the converts to Islam, the foundation is still being built, so the structure of faith is harder to topple over. They come to the deen with their questions and, to an extent, the most significant of them have already been asked and answered. That they have a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood at the school assists in thwarting feelings of loneliness that often arise after the initial excitement of conversion and welcoming into a given community.

While most students survive their encounter with Islamic history and atheism, over time they must also learn how to navigate how to distinguish their own relationship to God and being Muslim from their relationships with other Muslims themselves, in particular those whom they admire and rely upon. As demonstrated in these pages, scholars like Yusuf and Shakir are held in a special reverence by their students and by community members. On numerous occasions during my research, I talked to both current and former students and staff members, as well as other American Muslims, who expressed a manifold of feelings regarding these “leaders” that diminished initial feelings of certainty and awe. These individuals saw the scholars act in ways or say things that “were beneath them” or that seemed contradictory to their overall message.¹⁵⁷ This often

¹⁵⁷ These were often in regards to political issues whether of the nation state, international and domestic politics, the workplace, or in gender or racial dynamics. Distinct from such critiques, I had also heard “rumors” of these scholars as potential informants and infiltrators of the state because of their seemingly quietest (to some) stances (the opposite of COINTELPRO type infiltrators who would promote more radical forms of activity). After meeting with President George W. Bush in the initial aftermath of September 11, 2001, Hamza Yusuf was often referred to as a “pet Muslim” by other Muslims. Such rumours speak to the still present feelings and traces regarding COINTELPRO, surveillance, and

felt like a personal betrayal, where an individual would feel abandoned, wronged, or disappointed. But it also could manifest as a sense of communal betrayal, when an issue remained unaddressed or access to someone became more difficult.

The scholars were not the only ones subject to such expectations. Muslims also often felt betrayed by their fellow Muslims and community members when they acted in ways that were—in their eyes—ethically insufficient according to Muslim values and tenets. Yet, it was the scholars' fallibility that could shake a person's faith in the traditions of Islam. Over time some individuals would come to see the necessity and wisdom of this "disenchantment," while for others such feelings continue to remain exposed and raw.

You know, sometimes when you see the humanity of your teachers it can jade you a little bit, you know what I mean, it can kind of jade you a little bit. And I think that that jading process that happened helped me to become more sincere in the end. Because if it's about personalities, then I've seen them.

Like I've seen the best from them, I've seen sometimes some of the more unpleasant aspects. I've seen both, you know. And no one in particular, I just mean from that crowd of people, you see both, you know. And...then you see the way people deal with you, in ways you think that it's below, it's beneath them to do so, or kind of feeling dejected or realizing you really want this person to recognize and validate your efforts. And they are not doing it. And realizing that it's about God's validation and not people.

Sometimes, when you are as stubborn as someone like myself, I think sometimes you have to get slapped a little bit, just to kind of like, "Ok, wait, wait a minute. Okay, I get it. I get it. This is about God. It was never about me. It was never about Zaytuna. It was never about classes. It was never about learning. It was never about any of that stuff. It's always been, you know, it's always been about God.

infiltration, and their effects on political communities in the Bay Area. Zareena Grewal discusses the feelings of disenchantment, including her own, at the political silences and changes that some scholars went through both after the September 11th attacks and during the "Arab Spring." She includes in that critique a discussion of Hamza Yusuf's public persona over time (2013).

What's interesting, though, like at this point in my life, is that it is full circle, because that's what it was about when I became a Muslim. (*Laughs*) Like I didn't really care about, I didn't care about Islam, per se. It's like whatever, you know Islam whatever, it's a religion, I mean I understand that. But there's something in it that I believe can take me to God. So, I became Muslim for that reason. Not to get a new name or wear new clothes or eat different cuisine, or something like that, you know.

It was for a very specific reason, and I think somehow this trip through the Zaytuna scenario and all that has brought me back to that original kind of light, which is, like there's something really significant about God's presence. And if you want it, you might have to like kind of go through the mud a little bit, it's like the diamond in the rough. You might have to do that...your intentions have to be checked. Sometimes it's through your own actions or sometimes its through the actions of other people, you know what I mean? So I guess at the end of the day, I set out to be educated, but I didn't realize what that meant. And it's still happening, it's a never-ending process.

Muhammad converted to Islam in Atlanta, Georgia, and moved his family to the Bay Area a few years later. He had been one of the original students of the pilot seminary program at the Zaytuna property in Hayward, affectionately referred to as Jackson Street. Not long after his graduation from Zaytuna, Zaid Shakir appointed Muhammad to be the Imam of the Lighthouse Mosque in North Oakland. Shakir had begun Lighthouse a few years earlier in a space formerly occupied by the Masjid (Mosque) Al-Taqwā, which moved to a larger space a few blocks away. Lighthouse serves a multiracial congregation of individuals in the area, ranging from African Americans from the neighborhood in North Oakland to current and former students from UC Berkeley who represented a microcosm of global Islam.¹⁵⁸ After almost four years in that position, he recently resigned, and he is currently in graduate school.

¹⁵⁸ A large number of African American congregants had been a part of the community at Masjid Al-Islam in East Oakland discussed in the following chapter. After a number of incidents that led to a partial dissolution to the cohesiveness of that community, a number of its congregants dispersed throughout the East Bay. Many joined Imam Zaid Shakir and later Imam "Muhammad" at Lighthouse. Some recent conflicts around masjids in the area are regarding the roles of "masjids" in the community. Are they community centers, cultural centers, and spaces of community organizing or exclusively places of prayer and worship?

A conversation with Muhammad a year earlier had been difficult for us both. He had not yet been accepted into a graduate program, and he expressed frustration and bitterness about a lack of support upon his graduation from the seminary from both his teachers and the wider communities of Muslims that supported Zaytuna scholars. He had expected that “America would support us, and that we would be supported and then welcomed and taken care of in our environment...All we needed was their stamp of approval, and then we would be able to take on the torch.” The bitterness, perhaps at one time directed at specific individuals, he later realized was actually a frustration regarding his own naivete. He was an idealist, and the idealism of the classroom and of the hopeful and motivating classes at Zaytuna needed to be applied in the trenches of everyday life, where things weren’t so easy. Muhammad in one *khutba* at Lighthouse, talked about how we had to be grateful for those trying times, that they were a sign of God’s love. As he later explained,

But if He loves you, right, what’s He going to do? If He loves you, then He’s going to put you in a situation where He’s going to take everything else away from you, so where you can see nothing but Him, that’s what’s going to happen to you. You know what I mean?

He had come to understand the difficulties of his experiences as both a student and an Imam through the story of Musa and Khidr, a set of Qur’anic verses that narrates the meaning of knowledge, patience, and paradox.¹⁵⁹ In the story Musa (Moses) and his attendant are seeking out “the junction of the two seas,” which is the place where they will meet the figure traditionally known as Khidr, “one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed mercy from Ourselves and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own

¹⁵⁹ ‘Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an, 10th edition. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2002.

presence.” They have brought along a salted fish, which is to disappear at the junction of the two seas. When the fish is enlivened and takes “its course through the sea in a marvellous way,” the attendant fails to tell Musa, and they must then return back the way they have come, reaching the junction again, where Khidr then appears. Musa says to Khidr, “May I follow thee, on the footing that thou teach me something of the (Higher) Truth which thou hast been taught?” Khidr replies, “Verily thou wilt not be able to have patience with me! And how canst thou have patience about things about which thy understanding is not complete?” Musa replies that he will be found patient and will not disobey Khidr. Khidr then says, “If then thou wouldst follow me, ask me no questions about anything until I myself speak to thee concerning it.”

The verses proceed to narrate how when Musa and Khidr come across a boat, Khidr puts holes into it. Musa finds this strange and questions Khidr, “Hast thou scuttled it in order to drown those in it? Truly a strange thing Hast thou done!” Khidr slightly rebukes him, “Did I not tell thee that thou canst have no patience with me?” They then continue and meet a young man who Khidr then kills. Musa again questions him, “Hast thou slain an innocent person who had slain none? Truly a foul (unheard-of) thing Hast thou done!” Again Khidr answers, “Did I not tell thee that thou canst have no patience with me?” Musa then tells him that should he question him again, he can “keep me not in thy company.”

Khidr and Musa reach a town where they ask the people for food. They are refused hospitality. They come upon a wall that is about to fall and Khidr sets it right. Musa then asks him why he does not seek compensation from the stingy townspeople for it. Khidr replies, “This is the parting between me and thee: now will I tell thee the interpretation of (those things) over which thou wast unable to hold patience.” Khidr then describes the meanings of his actions to Musa, how he had put (repairable) holes in the

boat of two poor men to prevent it from being seized by a greedy king. He kills the man because his parents were people of faith, and “we feared that he would grieve them by obstinate rebellion and ingratitude (to Allah and man). So we desired that their Lord would give them in exchange (a son) better in purity (of conduct) and closer in affection.” The wall that he set right belonged to two orphans in the town. Beneath the wall their father had buried treasure for them to have when they grew older. Khidr fixed the wall so that their wealth would not be found by the townspeople. Khidr acts not of his own accord in these last two cases, acting on higher authority. In any case, he then departs from the wise though impatient Musa (Qur’an 18:60-82).

In our conversation, Muhammad references this story from the Qur’an to convey how time, patience, and experience are parts of the path towards knowledge. Much like a parent tells a child, “You will thank me when you are older” or “You will understand when you have kids,” in the relationship between teacher and student, there are moments when things don’t make sense or don’t seem fair or just. This situation requires a great deal of trust in one’s teacher, and a humbleness that one may not understand everything. It can also be a test for one’s faith in particular people, one’s self, and one’s God.

During a student-faculty town hall meeting, the students raise the issue of Arabic language instruction at the College. The students discuss how dissatisfied they are with their Arabic courses. Ruqayya is brought to tears because she is seeking an intimacy with the Arabic language that she has not yet gained. The students are frustrated with the “secular” Arabic textbooks that are being used at Zaytuna and believe that there should be more “sacred” material included. Salman also tries to express how the students feel, and how the curriculum doesn’t match their expectations for the role that Arabic should be playing in their everyday lives. Their teacher Yusuf is not at the meeting, but their issue is not with him as he had not chosen this curriculum, although he does believe in its

potential. Instead the students take the issue up with the founders, who themselves are in some ambivalence about the Arabic curriculum, although they do not express this at the meeting.¹⁶⁰

During the meeting the director of academic affairs, Hatem Bazian continues to assert his faith in the Arabic textbooks, but says that they will continue to consider the issue. A number of the teachers also express that the students need to trust their teachers who have their best interests and education in mind. After the meeting Salman, one of the male students who spoke passionately at the meeting tears up and is visibly upset and wonders if he was too forward and insolent with his teachers. Should he not trust their structuring of the College and its curriculum? Was he wrong to speak up and express his concerns and disagreement? The other students share his concerns to an extent, but also console him, assuring him that he spoke eloquently and with respect. In this moment the students encouraged and supported each others' speech, but were mortified by their own utterances. Because Salman and Ruqayya had expressed their opinions in an open forum and spoke with respect for their teachers and out of a sincerity regarding the issues at hand, the other students supported and encouraged them. But there were also times when students disagreed on what was good adab in terms of how far to express one's dissatisfaction or disagreement with a teacher and the potential intentions behind it. While their teachers "reminded" them about trust and patience this evening, they had also on earlier occasions (like the convocation and orientation) urged the students to be critical and engaged in the process by expressing their opinions, critiques, and

¹⁶⁰ The students on numerous occasions had heard from different teachers that they were unsatisfied by the *Al-Kitaab* curriculum (used in most American universities) for the Zaytuna setting. Such mixed messages, as well as particular narrative storylines within the curriculum, instilled in the students a distrust of the curriculum, which is designed for American students who want to be able to communicate in both written and spoken Arabic, which is quite distinct from classical and Qur'anic Arabic that the students encounter in their other classes and in their everyday devotional activities.

suggestions to the administration. It was finding the balance and appropriate avenues for such discourse that troubled everyone involved.

In talking about that meeting with the students later, they are visibly traumatized by it. It was “terrible,” and “embarrassing.” While the students taking ownership of their learning experiences resulted in real changes taking place on the administrative level, some of them were embarrassed and ashamed at their inability to express themselves and their opposing and questioning their teachers. In the end, the Arabic curriculum did undergo an upheaval. An Islam-oriented Arabic textbook series was put into use, and additional texts were brought into the classroom.

It is in such encounters that the complexity of the Musa and Khidr exemplum come into play. While the students are encouraged to be critical of American mainstream discourses, media, and state power, their critiques of what the Zaytuna teachers and staff teach, believe, and do is encouraged, though at times, limited. It is limited by the atmosphere of *hayba* (awe, fear, respect)¹⁶¹ that surrounds the scholars and blankets the College, and it is in tension with notions of submission, selflessness, and trust that are expressed as ideal Islamic ways of being. When something an authority figure does or does not do resonates within you as wrong, how does one navigate whether this is a Musa/Khidr moment or whether this is human fallibility? How does one know whether this is a moment in which one’s rights have been withheld or disregarded, and then whether one should assert one’s right or “humbly” submit to the circumstances?

The veneration of early texts and figures, the sanctity of early histories and traditions, and the recognition of contemporary global authorities, normative systems, and cultural ways are a vindication, which asserts the possibility of a pure Islamic

¹⁶¹ See chapter 6 for a further discussion of *hayba*.

authority and authenticity and the richness of a tradition. Yet this need for vindication in spaces where Islam is always under attack also undermines the potentialities of critical discourse within Islam. While the scholars are aware of this and want to produce a space of “academic freedom,” both they and the students are in the thick of ways to make space and challenge their own thinking and modes of expression.

Secular modes of critique have since the early twentieth century been considered the primary space where learning and “pure knowledge” can truly happen, foregoing Islamic way towards truth. As Asad notes in a reply to Judith Butler in their collection *Is Critique Secular?:*

It is not the secular claim to truth that worries me, but what critique may do to relationships with friends and fellow citizens with whom one deeply disagrees. Critique is no less violent than the law—and no more free. In short, I am puzzled as to why one should want to isolate and privilege ‘critique’ as a way of apprehending truth. What does this do to the way one is asked to—and actually—live? (Asad 2009:140).

Asad gets here to the tensions between modes of critique and submission and what we are to do with difference, whether embodied or intellectual. It is perhaps for this reason that one of the first lessons that Shakir expresses to his students is the lesson conveyed by Ibn Rajab:

Jubayr ibn Nufayr said:

“I met ‘Ubada ibn al-Samit and said to him, ‘Will you not listen to what Abu Darda’ is saying?’ I then informed him of what he said concerning the loss of knowledge. He said, ‘Abu Darda’ has spoken truthfully. If you wish I will inform you of the first knowledge to be removed from people. It is humility [khushu‘]. You will enter the central masjid and hardly find a single humble person!” (al-Hanbali 2001:10)

Zaid Shakir repeatedly reminds students that “knowledge arrogates.” Knowledge makes one make claims, yielding an arrogance of knowing something about something such that cultivating humility becomes an important aspect of Islamic scholarship. This

humility does not prevent or limit critique, but instead enables one to reflect on one's practice of critique, or intellectual inquiry towards, perhaps, finding one's way towards a new "unity of truth."

Chapter 4: Muhammadaic Breezes From Tarim to the Bay¹⁶²

SCENE 1

(FADE IN) EXTERIOR - FERNCLIFF CEMETERY, WESTCHESTER, NEW YORK, SPRING 2011 - DAY

We walk through a cemetery on a gloomy day of light rain. Green grass pokes up around flat tombstones, THE ḤABĪB walks swathed by a crowd of men who struggle to maintain a place in the shuffling orbit that encircles him. They hold umbrellas over him, while likewise enabling his way across the wet grass. A microphone and camera phones try to keep pace with his assertive gait. We are in Hartsdale, Westchester, New York at the burial place of EL ḤAJJ MALIK AL-SHABAZZ popularly known as MALCOLM X, formerly known as Malcolm Little. Standing at his grave, this assembly makes supplications with a genealogical roll call and greetings of peace to THE ANCESTORS

¹⁶² I use the word “Muhammadaic” in the way that Zaid Shakir uses it in his writings (2006, 2009) to describe “breezes,” “souls,” and “truths” that emerge from the example and force of the Prophet Muhammad. The title comes from his 2006 article quoted later in this chapter. While the Orientalist term “Muhammadan,” which situated Islam and the Prophet Muhammad in relation to Christianity and Jesus Christ, referred to those who follow Muhammad, Muslims and contemporary scholars reject the term, largely because it suggests the worship of Muhammad rather than the one God, Allah. Shakir does not suggest the worship of the Prophet Muhammad, but rather his significance as messenger and human exemplar:

“It is time for the souls who have imbibed the fragrance of the *Muhammadaic* truth, whose life-giving aroma is currently effusing the world, to rise. Their uprising will not be one of angry mobs demanding justice at any cost even that purchased with the currency of vengeance so bitter that it disguises the hubris of its advocates. If that is the state of the mob, perhaps Nemesis will be confused and descend upon that mob even though it is nominally advocating justice.

The uprising of the *Muhammadaic* souls will not be that of frenzied mobs descending into the streets. It will be the rising up of committed believers from the sweetness of sleep in the privacy of their homes to stand before their Lord in deep devotion. That uprising will not begin during the day, nor will it be played out before flashing lights and cameras. It will begin during the night before the watchful gaze of God” (Shakir 2010, my italics).

(*May God's Mercy Be Upon Them*) and *THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (Peace Be Upon Him)*.¹⁶³

Ḥabīb ‘Umar bin Muhammad bin Salim bin Hafiz leads this delegation of young mostly American-born Muslims. The Ḥabīb is the director of Dār Al-Mustafa Seminary in Tarim, Yemen, and is an eminent figure of the Hadramawt Ba’Alawi (Ṭarīqa Alawiyya).¹⁶⁴ A *sayyid* (descendent of the Prophet Muhammad) Ḥabīb ‘Umar, fled Tarim as a young man. It has been said that his father was disappeared and killed in a political purge wielded by the Socialist regime in the early 1970s.¹⁶⁵ Ḥabīb ‘Umar completed his education in Saudi Arabia and returned to Hadramawt once Yemen was unified in 1990. He opened Dār al-Mustafa seminary in 1996 and Dār al-Zahraa seminary for women a year later.¹⁶⁶ Students travel from all over the world to study with the Ḥabīb and his advanced students. Once students reach a certain level in their studies, they are “dispatched to disseminate ‘correct’ Islam,” whether in the surrounding areas or abroad (Knysh 2001). Students from the United States and Europe are increasingly attending his seminaries, either for short stays in the intensive summer program or for many years.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ In these opening vignettes, I use the format of a screenplay to introduce ethnographic “scenes.” Within them are audiovisual cues—landscapes, words, gestures, and characters—that inform the substance of this ethnography. They are brought together in montage to express the multiple ways that Islam is constituted in the everyday practices of Muslims in America. By marking certain deceased figures as characters in the scene through their names being in caps, I indicate the ways in which their presences are articulated and narrated, as well as the *active* roles they play as forces in both the cosmological and historical understandings of Islam in America.

¹⁶⁴ “Habib” can be translated as “the beloved (of God)” or dear one. He is one of many “Habibs,” or “Haba’ib,” the Arabic plural of “Habib.” Throughout this chapter I refer to Habib ‘Umar as either Habib ‘Umar or the Habib.

¹⁶⁵ Knysh (2001). Habib ‘Umar descends from the family of Shaykh Abu Bakr b. Salim from the city of ‘Inat, Yemen. For more information see Engseng Ho’s ethnography of the Hadramout diaspora (2006).

¹⁶⁶ Habib ‘Umar was recently ranked 33rd in a list of the “500 Most Influential Muslims” in the world based on his scholarly influence and lineage (Esposito and Kalin 2009). He is ranked 36th in the 2012 report to Hamza Yusuf’s ranking as 42nd (Schleifer 2011).

¹⁶⁷ A number of Zaytuna College students have attended Dār al-Mustafa or Dār Al-Zahraa during their summer breaks.

This international flow of students is largely enabled by the presence and translation of long-term students who have both popularized the teachings and personalities of the Ḥabā'ib through their travels and through their returning to their countries of origin and rising in the ranks of local scholars themselves. These traveling teachers and students produce alternative diasporas constituted by and affectively experienced through knowledge-based genealogies and participation in a particular mode of *da'wa* (socioreligious activism). Such traveling affiliations and attachments echo and sustain a tradition of journeying Muslims throughout history, but the specific landscapes, technologies, and connections being made now are definitively twenty-first century.¹⁶⁸

Aminah, a Syrian American Zaytuna student from Michigan, explained how she was motivated to devote her life to Islam through witnessing the students of Ḥabīb 'Umar from her home town:

Although I went to an Islamic school, I didn't necessarily feel like I loved what I was doing or what I was learning. I mean, some of it was exciting. We had some pretty good teachers and pretty good speakers, but it wasn't something that I necessarily wanted to devote my life to. I didn't feel that like, you know, that I want to be a part of this. It's kind of like I was born into this, you know what I mean? And then here comes the 'angel of mercy' named Tarek, and he's just like beautiful in every way, inside and out.¹⁶⁹ His character is amazing, you know. And I was just like, "Oh this guy is something else," and I had seen the positive effect he had on my brother, and all this kind of stuff. And so I just was like, "Whatever he is doing, I gotta be a part of that right now!" And so that's how it started for me. It's an immense blessing. And I feel like this is the reason that I am here that I am with such amazing scholars, and that's how it started. [It] was, really, good character. And I feel like that's the entire point, you know, of this religion is good character. Good character with your Lord, good character with people, you know?"

¹⁶⁸ See Cooke and Lawrence (2005), Eickelman and Piscatori (1990), Euben (2006).

¹⁶⁹ I've changed the names of community members with no official affiliation with Zaytuna College. This "Tarek" is named for Tarek "DJ Dusk" Habib Captan (1974-2006) of Los Angeles (and Lebanon), a friend and "angel of mercy."

Aminah's devotion to Islam is shaped by her witnessing of particular individuals whose good characters act as an embodied and enacted sign of Islam and its potential meaning in her life. It is likewise shaped by her experiences as an Arab American girl growing up in a small city in Michigan. Because Tarek also grew up in the United States as a child of North African parents, Aminah is particularly struck by what "good character" in an American context, and more particularly for an American man, can look like. That she is able to imagine and aspires to this ethical future for herself, demonstrates the particular ways in which "good character" can be recognized across gender, although the traits of "good character" are often marked as feminine and masculine.¹⁷⁰ Aminah's aspiration across gender marks the way in which many young Muslim men and women are forming their identities through the emulation of particular types of (gentle)men. This type of recognition relies on particular ethical dispositions "to see" one another.¹⁷¹ Aminah's recognition of Tarek's "amazing character" is dependent on her recognizing his traits as those that she desires and seeks to emulate. His way of being invites her to seek out a tradition to which she was already born, but not actively and purposefully engaged.

While Aminah can see Tarek's "good character," she also recognizes the more veiled or private forms of good character that circulate in less public ways. In her friendships with both male and female classmates, she is attuned to aspects of good character, whether present in their particular dispositions, acts, or intentions. She seeks these people out, needing to see them regularly and commune. On numerous occasions

¹⁷⁰ The ninety-nine names of Allah are attributes that are synonymous with God's existence. In Islamic teachings they are often distinguished as either *Jalal*, having to do with a commanding *Godness*, and *Jamal*, having to do with a nurturing *Lordship*. These are often taken to be masculine and feminine, respectively, though not necessarily. The students invited a young African American scholar, Muhammad Adeyinka Mendes from Atlanta, Georgia, to speak to how the "99 Names" should not be taken as prescriptions for gender norms, although they are often proscribed that way in practice (Wadud 2010).

¹⁷¹ I discuss the work of ethical dispositions and "seeing" in more detail in the following two chapters.

she would announce the need “to visit” or “to see” a particular staff member who energized and motivated her spiritually. Visiting him, taking bits of knowledge from him, and being in his company was like taking a spiritual vitamin. These heart-to-heart interactions traverse gendered distance with her male companions, while producing and maintaining gendered intimacy with her female companions and friends. With her hearty laugh and her earnest seeking, she strives to better her character through the learning that happens between people.¹⁷²

In addition to “the 99 Names of God,” the textual traditions of *Ḥadīth* (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad) and the *Sīra* (biographies of the Prophet) are full of descriptions of his character, whether explicitly through adjectives or implicitly through his words and actions. How he was patient with those who offended him or his property, his behavior in the home, the battlefield, or the place of prayer, and his behavior with his wives, children, elders, companions, opponents, and strangers - all these relational situations are ethical parables and guides for Muslims. Just as the Prophet Muhammad affected the people around him in the seventh century, the force of these ethical dispositions continue to affect the world, effect change in individual lives, as well as in larger social contexts.

The dispositions of the Prophet Muhammad, his Family, and his Companions continue to impact Muslims today, mediated through the stories that are told again and again in the tradition, as well as through the “living proofs of Islam,” an honorific

¹⁷² On the other hand, there is the learning that happens in the diligent approach to one’s studies, sometimes at the expense of one’s personal relationships. Midway through their second semester members of the class of 2015 had a minor crisis. While they were applying themselves diligently towards their studies, also in pursuit of good character, they were at times neglecting each other and their social needs. Finding the balance became an important part of student life at Zaytuna as students strive towards their learned teachers and role models, while also negotiating their individual approaches to learning and relating to others. This incident is discussed in Chapter One.

appellation given to those whose actions or scholarly prowess are viewed to be compelling examples of the possibilities of Islam and its ongoing traditions (Imam Al-Ghazālī is one of the most prominent “proofs of Islam”). This chapter discusses this affective circulation of dispositions (both living and not) and how within the framework of *da‘wa*, such dispositions inculcate adab, the “acting in conformity with justice” (Al-Attas 2012). By considering the ta’dīb (teaching adab) dimensions of *da‘wa*, it becomes not only an explicit socio-religious activism that is directed inward toward ethical self-making (Mahmood 2005, Hirschkind 2006) and outward in Islamic-based social reform (Deeb 2006, Hafez 2011, Rouse 2004), but also a mobilizing force for recognizing histories, solidarities, and difference in the diverse populations of American Islam.¹⁷³ Through such *da‘wa*, histories and accountabilities across ethnicity, race, gender, and class are produced as discursive locations in which one must “command good” and “forbid wrong doing.” By demonstrating the flexibility and applicability of *da‘wa* as produced by American Muslims and their teachers, this chapter demonstrates how Islam is interpreted and applied locally with global ramifications and within global knowledge-based genealogies.

¹⁷³ See Chapter One for discussion of *da‘wa*. In the *ad-Dawah At-Tammah wa-Tadzkirah* [sic] *Al-Amamah* (The Perfect Summons and a General Admonition) by Imam Habib Abdullah Al-Haddad, *da‘wa* is encompassed by practices such as “seeking and spreading knowledge [‘ilm], giving sermons, admonitions urging people to strive in the path of Allah and commanding good and forbidding wrong doing.” It is also constituted by non-verbal practices such as ‘body language’ for “it has been said that ‘one’s conduct speaks volumes” (Al-Haddad 2011:17-18).



Image 2: Ḥabīb ‘Umar and his students at the grave of El Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz, Spring 2011.

WELCOME TO AMERICA

In the spring of 2011, the “Tranquility Amidst Turbulence” tour traveled to urban centers across Canada and the United States, and Ḥabīb ‘Umar’s lectures, workshops, and congregational prayer events were streamed live and posted online for his international audience. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the tour settled for its final week in America. Ḥabīb ‘Umar visited the cities that produced many of his American students who had traveled to Dār Al-Mustafa in pursuit of Islamic knowledge. They were now his translators and hosts in Atlanta, Georgia; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; Washington D.C.; New York, New York; and San Diego, Los Angeles, and San

Francisco, California.¹⁷⁴ In the San Francisco Bay Area, the tour presented events at places like the Ta’leef Collective in Fremont (a non-profit organization for Islamic learning and outreach started by students of both the former Zaytuna Institute and Ḥabīb ‘Umar), Zaytuna College in Berkeley, Fiji Jam’atul Islam of America (a small mosque established by Fijians 30 years ago) in South San Francisco, the Muslim Community Center (a large suburban mosque) in Pleasanton, San Jose State University, University of San Francisco (a private Jesuit university), the Graduate Theological Seminary in Berkeley, and Castlemont High School (a public high school) in East Oakland.

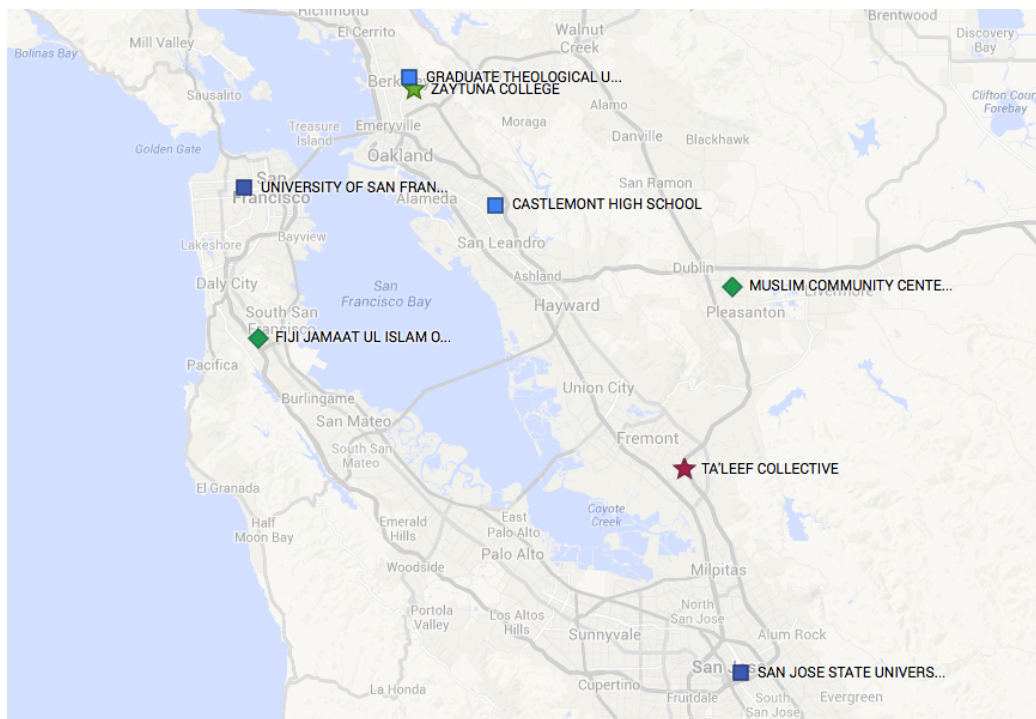


Image 3: “Tranquility Amidst Turbulence” Tour Bay Area locations.

Ḥabīb ‘Umar’s physical tour was preceded by a mediated buildup that included pictures on the walls of a student’s room, videos posted online and shared on Facebook, stories exchanged, and his spiritual essence in the faces, beings, and teachings of his

¹⁷⁴ He also stopped in a number of Canadian locations, mostly around Toronto.

students who are spread throughout the country and are concentrated in the San Francisco Bay Area. In her room at Zaytuna, Aminah had framed pictures of Ḥabīb ‘Umar, pictures she had downloaded from the Internet and one small picture that her brother had purchased and brought back for her from Tarim. The picture above is a still from a video taken with a mobile phone that was later posted on Facebook. One of Aminah’s male Facebook “friends” had posted it, and she showed it to her roommates and I in her apartment as we prepared for the Ḥabīb’s visit.¹⁷⁵ Aminah had just met the brother a few days earlier at the Michigan stop of Ḥabīb’s tour. She had flown home to attend the Tour’s events, and because her brother had been a student of the Ḥabīb’s, she was able to attend many more private events.

In describing her adventures to us, she laughed as she explained how awkward it sometimes was because she and her African American friend Yuri¹⁷⁶ were often the only women in particular spaces. They thought that they probably weren’t supposed to be there, but they continued to occupy discrete spaces along the walls in these gatherings. They were excited, nonetheless, and their following the tour to its innermost spaces transgressed norms of conduct in Tarim that were being replicated in Michigan, but these Michigan sisters pushed through the “Awkward!” feelings, eager to participate in and witness this historic event. Their sincere desires to be close to this teacher, this descendent of their beloved Prophet, and their anticipating and expecting that these men of “good character” would recognize their intentions, desires, and “rights,” outweighed

¹⁷⁵ I later communicated with the owner of the video. He sent me the same link for the video to use for my research.

¹⁷⁶ This pseudonym is named for Yuri Kochiyama (b.1921), the Japanese American activist who was a member of Malcolm X’s Organization of Afro-American Unity. Her life is a testament to multiracial solidarity and social justice work. Her internment as a young woman during World War II and her work for reparations for Japanese Americans, also speak to the ways in which American citizenship and civil liberties become conditional and tenuous in war times.

their concerns of what was “proper” adab in those moments.¹⁷⁷ Aminah, Yuri, and the men present pushed against the normalizing effect of adab in terms of “one’s proper place,” towards the potential of adab in terms of seeking knowledge, transformative encounters, and ethical relations. Aminah and Yuri acknowledge their “breach of propriety” by situating themselves in door frames and discrete spaces, yet they maintain and perhaps reinvigorate the male students’ attention on their common “object of love.”¹⁷⁸

Crowding around a computer screen, the Sisters and I prepared for the Ḥabīb’s arrival in the Bay Area by tracing his travels through North America, watching him arrive in airports from Toronto to Los Angeles, his students rushing to kiss his hand in greeting and performing *nashīd* accompanied by a daff player.¹⁷⁹ We watched videos posted to Facebook in which the Ḥabīb places his hands on children’s heads, sits in the passenger seat of a rented SUV, sits with his former students both young and old, and makes a pilgrimage to the resting place of Malcolm X, El Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz. As the sisters pointed out people they knew in the videos, they pondered how they would greet the Ḥabīb:

Zahrah: You know, we should develop some kind of greeting custom for women, with *shuyūkh* (Arabic plural of shaykh), you know, something that’s similar, but obviously not kissing his hand.

¹⁷⁷ In this case, adab can be translated as etiquette, culture, manners, decency, morality, ethics, and literature. It continues to relate to the definition of Al-Attas (1985), in that it is a “recognition and acknowledgement of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically according to their various grades and degrees of rank, and of one’s proper place in relation to that reality and to one’s physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials.”

¹⁷⁸ I thank Sara Ludin and Farah Al-Sharif for helping me think through this episode.

¹⁷⁹ A *nashīd* is a devotional song, hymn or anthem usually written in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. It is similar to a *qaṣīda*, which is a lyrical poem or ode. The *Qaṣīda Al-Burda (The Prophet’s Mantle)* composed by Imam Sharafuddin Muhammad Al-Busiri (d. 1296) is amongst the most well known, and it has been translated by a number of scholars including Hamza Yusuf. It can have different melodies and rhythms depending on who is performing it. A daff is a flat handheld drum.

Zeinab: Yeah, we should have something, you know?

Ruqayya: Like touching his shawl?

Zahrah: Kissing his shawl! Maybe?

In this brief interchange and in Aminah's Michigan adventures above, the Zaytuna female students acknowledge the gender distinction that limits their physical contact and proximity to the Ḥabā'ib. While male acolytes rush to kneel before the Ḥabīb and kiss his hand, there did not seem to be a related greeting for women. Women were on the peripheries of these welcome scenes, if they were there at all. As the video proceeded, one of the girls pointed out a sister in a black *niqāb* (face veil) and *'abāya* (a flowing garment that envelops the woman from head to toe or neck to toe) standing off to the side. Zeinab points at the screen, "Oh, there's like one woman." Aminah replies soberly, "Yeah." Zeinab laughs.



Image 4: Watching Ḥabīb 'Umar arrive at the airport in Southern California.

The tour organizers acknowledged the remove in which women experienced the majority of the Ḥabīb's events by scheduling events specifically for women. While this

was appreciated by the women (the event I attended in Pleasanton was attended by hundreds of women), there was also a desire to be a part of the larger events that were not so “women’s issues”-focused.

At the women’s event at a mosque in Pleasanton, I was sitting in the front row. I too felt compelled to cover my face out of respect for the traditions of Tarim, especially after the riveting introduction of one of his female students, a well-known (in particular circles) women’s teacher based in California. But when filming the Ḥabīb in closer quarters when he visited Zaytuna College, he would look directly at me and my camera as I filmed. Was my camera a veil/shield? In the space of a school, the relationship between the Ḥabīb and his female audience seemed to shift. In the Pleasanton mosque, the women were asked to scoot further back to leave more space between them and the Ḥabīb and his translators. In the Zaytuna library, the female students were seated in chairs quite close to the Ḥabīb. In this co-ed audience, Ḥabīb ‘Umar seemed to direct his lecture to them with stories of the example of Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter. His stories were spoken with such intimacy that the ahl Al-Bayt (the People of the House, the Prophet’s Family) drew close and immediate. Both male and female students of Islam are brought into this genealogy descended from Fatima, her husband Ali, and her father the Prophet Muhammad. Ḥabīb ‘Umar brought meaning into this relationship as a foundational tenet of what being Muslim was all about, regardless of one’s ancestry.

It is important to recognize that the female students respect the elevated social status of Ḥabīb ‘Umar and their own teachers as people of knowledge and in the Ḥabīb’s case, as a knowledgeable descendent of the Prophet Muhammad. In looking to find a way to greet him or engage with him as students, they do not want to disrupt particular understandings of knowledge hierarchies or Islamic gender relations, per se, but they also

recognize how there are different ways to enact and interpret prescriptions for gender difference and separation.

This distinction is particularly significant in a place like Zaytuna College, which is attempting to create a space where women have the same access to and benefits of their teachers and their teaching. While the classroom does impart a space of egalitarian opportunity and thriving, it is in the extracurricular spaces of Zaytuna and the wider American Muslim landscape, that egalitarian ideals are set against the complexities of everyday practice. As Zaytuna College attempts to produce male and female leaders and global citizens, defining and nurturing that leadership will involve counteracting many of the institutionalized forms of sexism and patriarchy that shape not only multiple Muslim landscapes, but an American one as well.

Throughout my research I came across ways that this particular assemblage of Muslims is articulating multiple ways, sometimes contradictory, to be ethically minded individuals and communities. This ethical positioning involves calling to account the ways in which different Muslims experience everyday life. This difference, rather than being suppressed under a veil of equality and similitude through a common Muslim-ness, is instead brought out to draw attention to the different ways Muslims are impacted by systems of power and oppression, whether it be race, gender, class, or sexuality-based. How these systems intersect with access to forms of Islamic knowledge and its social capital and meaning for American Muslims is a foundational theme in this text. As in the example of the Zaytuna sisters above, this chapter draws on the airing of these themes of difference, the ways that individuals experience and mobilize the tour to think about and make present particular issues, historical figures, and experiences.

WITNESSING

He is reported to have said, 'I am the most tranquil of all people.' Whether he was facing betrayal, treachery, or a formidable enemy, the Blessed Messenger was never perturbed because his heart was always in praise of his Lord.¹⁸⁰

Kings wear their crowns on top of their heads. Malcolm's crown was on the inside. Malcolm X showed me the difference between a crown and a halo.¹⁸¹

Imam Zaid Shakir, co-founder of Zaytuna College and board member at Ta'leef Collective introduced Ḥabīb 'Umar at multiple events, dubbing his stop in Oakland, California, "Ḥabīb in the Hood."¹⁸² Ḥabīb 'Umar being in the hood, the American inner-city, collapses a number of boundaries while producing critical spaces of intervention, connection, and meaning. Engseng Ho discusses the "the cumulative results of...actions and movements" across the Indian Ocean of the Alawi diaspora that "reshaped this space, the relative position of places within it, and the distribution of diasporas around it" (2006, 122). This chapter discusses a similar set of actions and movements tracing alternative genealogies that span the Oceans Atlantic and Pacific and the coasts East and West. The axis of place is crossed by the axis of time as Imam Zaid Shakir and Ḥabīb 'Umar make present and relevant particular figures of historical time in the rhythms of devotional time.

In Tarim, tombstones of the Sufi saints "stand erect as witnesses" marking the arrival of Islam and Prophetic descent in Hadramawt. The historical development and devotional practices of Islam are narrated through particular figures and texts. The living and the dead come together in person, as relics, and as ancestral traces in a noble

¹⁸⁰ "Tranquility Amidst Turbulence Tour" website.

¹⁸¹ Dick Gregory (1976).

¹⁸² I refer to Zaid Shakir as Imam Zaid Shakir in this section to distinguish between his positionality in devotional spaces versus his work as Professor Zaid Shakir at Zaytuna College, even though he is addressed and spoken about as "Imam Zaid" across these locations. While I believe that his pedagogic work in both locations has a certain unity and common telos, there are important differences in his authorial position and rhetorical and discursive modes at each location. Making sense of and marking such distinctions is an essential part of Zaytuna's transition to a liberal arts college.

presencing (*ḥaḍra*).¹⁸³ In the words of Eng seng Ho, “what is available is a cure for this world and the next, salve and salvation. One takes in the history with the cure” (204-5).

If we are to take in “the history with the cure” at the graves of saints in Tarim, what do we take at the grave of El Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz, 18 miles north of Harlem? The active practice of visiting saints’ tombs localizes and historicizes the genealogies of key figures in the Hadrami line leading back to the Prophet Muhammad. The visitation of El Ḥajj’s grave by both Ḥabīb ‘Umar and his student Ḥabīb Ali al-Jifri and American Imam Zaid Shakir a few years earlier localizes and historicizes Islam in America. El Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz becomes a “saint,” both a historical and spiritual figure for American Islam and an important node in the Prophetic line, tied not by genealogy of blood, but by a tradition of faith and da‘wa.¹⁸⁴ The remembrance of Malcolm X, whether through grave visitation or rhetorical reference, facilitates a historical grounding and legacy of Islam in America, while also proposing a way of being an American Muslim.

The tour traverses innercity and suburban spaces that are largely populated by Arab and South Asian immigrant families. The da‘wa of the tour, Ḥabīb ‘Umar’s summoning of diverse populations through the work of his students, reveals an important disjuncture largely experienced through race and class in the American Umma. If Afghan, Yemeni, African, and Iraqi war refugees, Arab and South Asian tech entrepreneurs, engineers, doctors, gas station and liquor store owners, janitors, and taxi-

¹⁸³ Most theories of the etymology of Hadramawt, take the “ḥaḍra” to reference “ḥaḍara” to come, as in “death has come,” although “presencing death” or “death is present” also seem poetically apt. Death, rather than people who are dead, could also refer to having a consciousness of death in terms of the Afterlife, therefore living with the Day of Judgment in mind.

¹⁸⁴ The term “saint,” typically associated with Catholicism, is not a direct translation of “walī” or “shahīd” (martyr) or other related terms in Arabic, which also have disputed and multiple meanings. It does convey in English, however, a sense of the spiritual standing that Al Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz should, within Islamic creedal beliefs, have with God in terms of his martyrdom status and the effect that his life-story has had in “renewing” Islam in his century. The term also connotes something of his spiritual force, not as an intercessor with God, but as a model in terms of one who “embodied the meanings” of Prophetic guidance.

drivers, their American-born children, white and Latino converts, as well as African American Muslims of diverse experiences come to see Malcolm X as their saint and black liberation and global solidarity as their legacy, what does this do to their (generally speaking) model minority narratives of assimilation? Their narratives of being “good” Muslims in an “exceptional” United States?

In his oft-quoted eulogy, Ossie Davis articulates the “meaning” of Malcolm X for not only his generation, but for “a generation who is not yet spoiled, not yet deguttled, not yet de-bold, not yet emasculated.” He speaks to the destructive work of America, that marginalizes and makes men less and the responsibility of future generations to realize “the light of this truth [and] rise up and redeem him and us and all of the rest of the world.” That his meaning is not limited to African American men, and that other men and women can find his truth and redeem such histories of occlusion, suffering, and fortitude is the work of not only this particular tour, but the work of a wide array of American Muslims. To reclaim the *spiritual* Malcolm, the God-fearing El Ḥajj Malik al-Shabazz, is to situate his meaning and life’s work within a genealogy that leads back to the prophets of Islam. He is given a “standing with Allah,” and by calling upon his memory and his spiritual force, everyday Muslims draw lines of attachment and signification, shaping the contours of American Muslim identities. By recognizing El Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz as a global Muslim figure, this visitation likewise proposes an alternative directionality for and understanding of Islamic knowledge and practice.

El Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz was not trained in the Islamic sciences, nor was he a college graduate or man without fault, but the knowledge he had, he communicated and acted upon, and for this he is inducted into a tradition of those who “summon” to, “revive,” and “renew” the Faith. That much of his work would be seen as political in nature, is not taken as an aside, but seen as integral to his significance and legacy as a

spiritual figure seeking a truth for which he was martyred. As one narration states, “There will always be a group from my people striving for the truth, unworried by those who frustrate them, until Allah’s appointed hour and even then they will still be at their task” (Al-Haddad 2011). This is a localizing and historicizing cure and salvation, a cure for understanding and acting upon the injustices and challenges of the everyday, towards a salvation in the afterlife based on one’s work on oneself and in the world that has been bestowed upon humanity. As I discuss later, Islam is likewise historicized and localized through other graves, marked and unmarked, throughout the American Northeast and South. As Islam makes historical and spiritual time, it also extends through space, traveling not only from East to West, but also emerging and radiating out from Harlem, Detroit, Chicago, Berkeley, and Oakland to other parts of the Islamic world.

THE WORK OF A BOOK

During his lifetime, Malcolm X brought thousands to both the Nation of Islam and later to “Orthodox” Sunni Islam. In his afterlife, he continues to bring thousands to Islam, while renewing the faith of thousands more. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (X and Haley 1965) continues to be in publication, and countless converts to Islam speak of the book’s role in their conversion, either spiritual, political, or both. For example, basketball legend Kareem Abdul Jabbar discusses his conversion in the late 1960s soon after the book’s publication:

More significant than any mind-altering drug was the overwhelming change in perspective I found when I read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*...He had discovered himself through religion, first the distortions of the Black Muslims and then the more compelling teachings of Islam...I had been totally fed up with Catholicism since midway through my senior year in high school and Malcolm’s

revelations made me want to look for my own...In New York that summer of 1968 I started to learn Islam in earnest.¹⁸⁵

Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, a well-known European American convert and Islamic scholar converted to Islam in 1970 after reading *The Autobiography* in graduate school at Cornell University.¹⁸⁶ In other cases, *The Autobiography* marked a shift in a young person's state of mind or way of being. Bay Area rapper Tupac Shakur's mother Afeni Shakur wanted her son to read *The Autobiography* before he "became a man:"

I used to sit outside by the street lights and read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. And it made it so real to me, that I didn't have any lights on at home, and I was sitting outside on the benches reading this book. And it changed me, it moved me.¹⁸⁷

Spike Lee, the director of the biopic *Malcolm X* (1992) starring Denzel Washington as Malcolm X remembers:

I was a convert when I read the book in junior high school, back in 1968-69...It's the most important book I'll ever read...the book gave me courage to do what I need to do to make the types of films I want to make. It takes commitment and it takes backbone not to go along with the status quo. You could easily be sucked into smiling and grinning and going for the money. That's the route I've chosen not to go.¹⁸⁸

Muslims who were born into the faith, likewise speak of *The Autobiography's* role in their understanding of being Muslims in America. Zaytuna students who had yet to read the book, but who had most likely seen the Spike Lee "joint" (Lee et al. 1992), put it on their reading lists as an "American Muslim must-read" within their first year if not first weeks at Zaytuna. Between the references to El Ḥajj that their teachers and

¹⁸⁵ Jabbar, Kareem Abdul "Giant Steps: A life story by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar." Excerpt published in *EBONY* April 1984 p. 70-72.

¹⁸⁶ Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah biography http://www.nawawi.org/?page_id=79 Accessed 09-11-13

¹⁸⁷ Tupac Shakur as quoted in "Tupac Shakur: The Life and Times of an American Icon" by Tayannah Lee McWuiller and Fred L. Johnson Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press (2010:50)

¹⁸⁸ Spike Lee in *Awake in the Dark: The Best of Roger Ebert* Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2006:78). While Lee speaks of being converted, it is not clear what he was actually converting to – was it a religious or political conversion, or something in between?Ibid.

fellow students made and the stories that they heard about conversions to Islam inspired by the book, most students were struck by the narrative, which gave them insights into an experience often much different from their own. The book was also read or re-read by teachers at Zaytuna and used as part of the English curriculum.

Despite Manning Marable's query regarding the veracity of *The Autobiography*, "How much isn't true, and how much hasn't been told?," (Marable 2011:10)¹⁸⁹ the text and the iconic man it represents continue to impact the American Islamic landscape and can be counted amongst many of the mediated forms of da'wa like printed pamphlets, books, and recordings that seek to bring people into or strengthen their understanding and practice of Islam.¹⁹⁰ Speaking truth to power, "making it plain," and being memorialized in narratives of praise, critique, and accomplishment, El Ḥajj Malik Al-Shabazz as an American Muslim *walī* or saint continues to bring converts to Islam and be an ethical-political model for American Muslims, Black or otherwise. That his ethical work for Black Americans could also translate as an example of da'wa internationally, speaks to the ways and directions in which Islamic knowledge and practice travels.¹⁹¹

The Ḥabībs' visitations to the grave site are a recognition and a blessing, rather than authentication, of a status that Malcolm X already held in the hearts and minds of

¹⁸⁹ The Marable biography of Malcolm X was released during the "Tranquility Amidst Turbulence" Tour, and the ensuing controversy about the book was much talked about as people carpooled around the Bay Area to attend Habib 'Umar's events. "Jordan," an African American Zaytuna student presented the book to his teacher Zaid Shakir. It was particularly striking how El Ḥajj was made present through the visitation to his grave, the build-up to and the controversy about this book, and the passing of its author Manning Marable a day before its release. In addition, the first of five hearings on the radicalization of American Muslims in the US called by Representative Peter King were also held just prior to the tour's beginning. For many in the community, there was a convergence of forces at work in this time of attack, controversy, and blessings.

¹⁹⁰ See Hirschkind (2006), Ho (2006), Mahmood (2005), Messick (1993), Starrett (1998)

¹⁹¹ In November 2008 Ayman al-Zawahiri of Al Qaeda also quotes Malcolm X and cites him as representative of "honorable black Americans" as opposed to "house negroes" like Barack Obama, Colin Powell, and Condoleeza Rice (Marable 2011:487).

many American Muslims.¹⁹² This is an important distinction in terms of the idea that Arabs and Muslims from historically Muslim lands have more authentic knowledge and practices of Islam. Sherman Jackson and others have critiqued this notion, especially in terms of the cultural hierarchies and racism that occur in American mosques that largely displace and discredit the history of African American Muslims in the United States.¹⁹³ Rather, the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad are said to carry his physical essence; in their visitation, they evoke *his presence* on American soil in contemporary time. This enshrining of El Ḥajj Malik al-Shabbaz and the larger “Tranquility Amidst Turbulence” tour enact a global consciousness of the Umma, that positions the American innercity as a critical space and *source* of Islamic consciousness, practice, knowledge, and renewal.

SCENE 2

(CUT TO) INTERIOR - AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY CLASS, BERKELEY HIGH SCHOOL, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, FLASHBACK TO THE LATE 1980s - DAY

The classroom walls are covered with Black History posters - the West African Islamic kingdoms of Mansa Musa and Askia Muhammad Touré. This is the only high school that still has an African American Studies program post-civil rights in the United

¹⁹² Marable writes about Malcolm X as “the Black Power generation’s greatest prophet...he personified for us *everything* we wanted to become: the embodiment of black masculinist authority and power, uncompromising bravery in the face of racial oppression, the ebony standard for what the African American liberation movement should be about. With Talmudic-like authority (not Qur’anic?), we quoted him in our debates, citing chapter and verse the precise passages from the *Autobiography*, and books like *Malcolm X Speaks, By Any Means Necessary*, and other edited volumes. The collected works represented almost sacred texts of black identity to us. ‘Saint Malcolm X-the-Martyr’ was the ecumenical ebony standard for collective ‘blackness.’ (Marable 2009:300). It is striking how “almost sacred” Malcolm X was for Marable, and how he imagines him in Jewish and Christian terms. Islam is rarely taken seriously in Marable’s accounting of Malcolm X, the man in holistic terms. He writes as if Islam was an incidental aspect of X’s worldview. He concludes this particular text stating that El-Shabbaz “was no saint. He made many serious errors of judgment, several of which directly contributed to his murder” (314). Islamic tradition would not hold such “errors” against him, as many of the great Muslim figures of history were fallible and martyred.

¹⁹³ Jackson (2005, 2009), see also Abd-Allah (2004), Grewal (2009), Karim (2009)

States - Berkeley High School. The students are reading The Autobiography of Malcolm X. ERNESTO, a light-skinned African American young man is at full attention as HIS TEACHER leads discussion. This is the only class ERNESTO attends regularly. We hear his voiceover narration:

At that time around '88 in Berkeley High, all I would do was wake up late, go to lunch, meet my friends, cut school all afternoon and do other stuff. Except my Black Studies classes, I would go to, and I would pass. I was in upper-track English, and it was called "World Literature" and all of the books were written by Europeans, so there was an element of just kind of wanting to party and another, feeling disillusioned with the system that I was in. So at that point, when I was beginning to get exposed to Islam, something about Malcolm's life probably was the first inspiration and then the fact that there were those Muslim kingdoms that were African, just gave me, like, kind of a feeling of respect or some sort of an allegiance with Islam and the Muslims and it was very much associated with, you know, being an African American in this context.¹⁹⁴

Young Ernesto was born and raised in Berkeley, California, son of a white activist mother and an African American father, both hospital workers. After his parents' divorce, his mother put him into the care of an African American woman who had moved to Berkeley from the South in order to "know my father's culture." He was reared by this church-going religious woman and on his mother's side, "revolutionaries that were Left, very far to the Left, like we had friends that were Sandinistas that came and lived with us, and we went and visited in Nicaragua and friends that went to El Salvador and all kinds of Central American activists and people associated with that, and so I was around agnostics and atheists on my mother's side." Ernesto's upbringing represents both the stereotypes and the realities of the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1970s and 1980s. Berkeley and Oakland had been at the forefront of civil rights activism in the 1960s as exemplified by the Free Speech and anti-war movements, and the Third World Liberation

¹⁹⁴ Interview with "Abdullah" at Lighthouse Mosque, Oakland, CA September 20, 2012

Front struggles at San Francisco State (1968) and UC Berkeley (1969). The Black Panther Party began at Merritt College down the road from Ernesto's home.

The Bay Area was cosmopolitan. Americans migrated there from around the country, seeking education or a counterculture, while African Americans had been arriving from the South in larger numbers since the end of World War II. Immigrants from around the world arrived in heavier numbers after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which lifted quotas for immigrants from the global South and East. Long-established communities of color were augmented by new arrivals who ranged from well-to-do university students and skilled labor to refugees from war, occupation, and economic upheaval and distress.

After converting to Islam, Ernesto, now Abdullah married a young woman, Nurideen who had been born into the Brooklyn-based Dar ul-Islam Movement, which was most active throughout the 1960s and 1970s throughout urban centers of the United States.¹⁹⁵ Shortly after his graduation from Berkeley High, Abdullah and his young family moved to East Oakland, a block away from Masjid Al-Islam, in order to live near a mosque where he could attend his five daily prayers. Masjid Al-Islam was at that time a thriving community of Muslims, predominantly African American, though including Muslims from all backgrounds. Begun by Oakland-raised Imam Abdul Alim Musa (who had converted to Islam in prison where he had been serving time for drug-related crimes), the mosque would eventually start a school, own properties, and start businesses in the area surrounding the mosque on 82nd Street and MacArthur Avenue (Castlemont High

¹⁹⁵ Dar ul-Islam emerged in the 1960s in Brooklyn, New York, begun by a group of African American converts to Islam who were interested in an Islam that could be an “uplifting force for the poor and downtrodden within the New York slums and ghettos.” The movement would spread to not only major cities throughout the East Coast and Midwest, but also to the South in the Carolinas, Alabama, Georgia, as well as Colorado, Ontario, Trinidad, the West Indies, and Alaska. See “Dar-ul-Islam Movement” Articles 1 and 2 In *Al-Jihadul Abbar* as quoted in Mukhtar (1994).

School, one of the Ḥabīb's tour stops was down the road "in the hood"). Amir Abdul Malik Ali and a core group that included the young Abdullah fostered a dynamic Muslim community that included African American Muslims in the area, university students, Muslim immigrants and their families, and a growing convert population.

People were taking *shahāda*, *yani*, three, four, five *shahādas* a week. And at the *jamā'āt* (Friday congregational prayers), it was literally spilling out of the mosque. We opened a school, *Alḥamdulillāh*. And that was like, they were trying to be an Islamic movement.¹⁹⁶

This Islamic movement was taking place in a section of East Oakland that was also a locus of drug activity, prostitution, and violence.

We were safe in that environment, because of the respect that they had for Muslims and because...probably Imam Musa still knew people in Oakland that if you messed with him and his community you would just be killed, man. And it was just understood. We were fine; we were comfortable; it wasn't no thang...Brothers would be racing down the strip and like honk and hold out a 'black power' [fist] as they rolled by the mosque.

Abdullah attended a local junior college during this time, and then transferred to UC Berkeley, where he was active in the Muslim Students' Association. There was a great deal of exchange between the university communities and the East Oakland Muslim community at this time. Amir Abdul Malik, who managed day-to-day operations in the community and who was a graduate of San Francisco State University, encouraged Abdullah to read the books at the mosque's library, in particular the works of Al-Ghazālī, a Muslim theologian and philosopher. This was Abdullah's introduction to the *Iḥya' Ulūm ad-Dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*, a seminal text of Islamic scholarship. Meanwhile, Abdullah's sister-in-law, Naima was preparing to travel to

¹⁹⁶ The *shahāda* is the testimony of faith, in which a person states in Arabic "I bear witness that there is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." After saying the *shahāda*, a person becomes Muslim. *Yani* can be translated as "like," and serves as a similar colloquial filler word. *Alḥamdulillāh* can be translated as "Praise be to Allah."

Damascus, Syria, to study the Islamic sciences at Abu Nour University. She traveled with a group of girls who were amongst the first American Muslims from the Bay Area to travel abroad as seekers of sacred knowledge.¹⁹⁷ She preceded scholars like Zaid Shakir and Jihad Brown who would rise to great prominence amongst American Muslims, and she paved the way for Abdullah who would eventually travel from Syria to Tarim, Yemen, where he would make *hijra*.¹⁹⁸

On a pre-sunrise Oakland morning in 1996, Abdullah walked down the street to Masjid Al-Islam to pray *fajr*, the morning prayer. He and his family then left for Syria. He was 24 years old. After visiting Tarim in 1997 with an African American brother from Chicago and a African English brother from Liverpool, he returned to Damascus to prepare for a move to Tarim, where they would enroll in what they called “Ghazālī bootcamp” at Dār Al-Mustafa, the seminary begun by Ḥabīb ‘Umar. Abdullah would eventually become one of the primary translators for the program and for his teacher and shaykh, Ḥabīb ‘Umar. He returned to the Bay Area as one of two American translators for the Ḥabīb during the “Tranquility Amidst Turbulence” tour.

While Abdullah’s biography is unique, his life history crosses multiple Muslim spaces in the Bay Area Muslim landscape and speaks to the way Islam was perceived and experienced by African American populations in the 1980s and early 1990s. In the classroom, Islam was African dynasties, kings and queens, and the revolutionary work of

¹⁹⁷ American Muslims traveled to historically Islamic lands prior to this period, but in the 1990s and 2000s the numbers have increased due to the revival of Islam and “traditional” learning amongst American Muslim youth. See Grewal (2006, 2013). The 1970s was also a period of travel abroad by Europeans and Europeans Americans in search of more “spiritual” forms of traditional learning. They often went to Morocco.

¹⁹⁸ *Hijra* literally means migration, but in connotation it refers to the Hijra of the Prophet Muhammad and his community from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE to escape persecution and practice their faith openly. Although Abdullah continues to call Berkeley and Oakland home, his base is now Tarim. Despite this, he spends much of his time in *khurūj*, traveling for the sake of Allah, teaching classes or doing translation (most recently in Detroit, Michigan).

Malcolm X. On the city streets, Islam was Malcolm X and the Black Power movements, converted gang populations, the Five-Percenter (1980s and 1990s hip hop was full of references to Islam), the “bow-tie Muslims” (the Nation of Islam), and later in these decades, the “liquor store Muslims” (initially working class Arab immigrants, predominantly Yemeni and Palestinian (some of whom were Christian), who collectively purchased and worked in grocery/liquor stores in predominantly African American neighborhoods. They were often displaced by war, occupied lands, and poverty). Islam was also the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Iranian Hostage crisis (1979-80). For older African American Muslims who had been Black Panthers, in the Nation of Islam, followers of Warith Deen Muhammad, or otherwise, Islam was and continues to be many things, not only sociopolitical, but profoundly spiritual and internationalist as well. For Abdullah, becoming Muslim was an easy transition. There were a number of small mosques he could attend in the area, where he received guidance from a wide array of Arab, South Asian, and African American Muslims. When he started going to UC Berkeley, he participated in the Muslim Student Association and continued working with Masjid Al-Islam. While changes were already afoot, the Islamic landscape would shift dramatically in the years following his departure for Syria in 1996.

SCENE 3

(CUT TO) A SMALL STOREFRONT CLASSROOM ON MISSION BOULEVARD IN HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA 1995, DAY

A young white man with a short goatee and dark brown hair sits before a group of mostly college-aged men and women in a large room with homemade curtains. There are four TV screens displaying images of audiences in other cities, and large Super VHS cameras pointed at THE TEACHER and the two hundred STUDENTS. Many of the TWO HUNDRED STUDENTS in the room are AFGHANI, but there are also young SOUTH

ASIANS, ARABS, LATINOS, AFRICAN AMERICANS, CAUCASIANS, and FILIPINOS. THE TEACHER is discussing the biography of the PROPHET MUHAMMAD, the Sīra to his ONE THOUSAND STUDENTS.

The Islamic Study School began offering classes with Hamza Yusuf Hanson, a white American convert to Islam in 1995. He had returned to the Bay Area with his family after studying Islam abroad. He was the imam at the MCA (Muslim Community Association) mosque in Santa Clara and was commuting a couple of times a week to Hayward to teach classes to young Muslims rediscovering their faith, as well as to recent converts to Islam. He had been invited by this young group to teach at a new space they had begun renting from a Jewish landlord off a large boulevard in Hayward, California, surrounded by car dealerships and repair shops (the original location is now a parking lot).

Qasim was a young Afghan whose family emigrated to the United States in the early 1980s. He was part of a large extended family of Afghans that had settled in Fremont, California, a section of which would soon be called Little Kabul.

I wasn't a practicing, so-called "practicing practicing" [Muslim]. I wasn't un-practicing. I was never un-practicing, where I left the religion or didn't believe in it or anything like that. I prayed, you know, being raised in a religious family has those benefits, where you see your mom pray five times a day and even if you don't pray five times a day, you pray a couple times a day or one time a day or something, but at one point it has that effect on you.

You know, the spiritual download comes from your mother and your father and your brother and [their] reading the Qur'an all the time. So, even though when we came to this country I kind of lost track of the religion for the first few years, especially in high school and then the first couple of years of college, and then you have that awakening. And [when] that awakening came to me, I was at Chabot College. I was actually the president of the Afghan Club.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Qasim in Hayward, California, May 2012.

Qasim had wanted to become a professional musician, and it was the organizational skills he brought from putting on concerts and events with the Afghan Club that he would redirect towards what would eventually become the Zaytuna Institute. Feelings of loneliness, betrayal, and loss led him to seek out more knowledge about religion. He read Huston Smith's *The World's Religions* (1991),

And that floored me, because it [was] just an overall perspective of human beings, like who we are as human beings, whether we are Christians, Jews, Buddhists. And the beauty of that book that I really liked...he put Islam at the end. And I really didn't want to study Islam.

Honestly, I wanted to know, okay, maybe we are in America, it's all Christian - what do they believe in, what do the Buddhists [believe in]...So the more I read about these, and then when I read "Islam," the last chapter...And I knew about it, the religion, but I didn't know about the religion. I just knew what I heard here and there. That really floored me that all of these things that I just read [are] in here. If I got it, first-time reader, how does everybody miss it?

Jesus is in there, Moses is in there, everybody, you know, the Noble Truth of the Buddhists, you know, "your suffering is from desire." It's in there [Islam], there's a *Ḥadīth* (saying of the Prophet) in there that's the same exact thing. It's all in there. It's just amazing like how the pieces came in my head. [That] was it for me, that book kind of like, I mean there was other stuff that happened, but from a knowledge perspective that was it for me. Like I could understand the thing, and then I started practicing.

As Qasim began to read more about Islam (in particular, an early edition of Ghulam Sarwar's *Islam, Beliefs and Teaching* [1982]), his excitement at this new knowledge mobilized him to share it. He began teaching his nephews and nieces and started the Mustagni²⁰⁰ Youth Center (MYC - there were enough Mustagni children to form a collective, design a logo, and print t-shirts). As this group expanded beyond just the family, it moved from individual houses to the local mosque, and became the Muslim Youth Center (they wanted to keep the logo). At the same time, Qasim and his family and

²⁰⁰ This is a pseudonym.

friends were also meeting non-Afghan Muslims. An African American brother named Bilal became a significant figure in the Afghan community. Having converted to Islam in prison, he became knowledgeable about Islam. He was a student at Ohlone College in Fremont, and he would give talks after football scrimmages. He became a guest teacher at the MYC, and his knowledge and *ikhlāq* (character) influenced not only Qasim, but many in the community.

In addition to Bilal, the Afghans would soon come into contact with local Latino and Filipino converts, as well as Syrians and South Asians who were hungry for knowledge about their deen.

It just grew like fire to the point, within a month and a half, we had three hundred people, and then we had a waiting list of over a hundred people because there was no room in the *masjid* (mosque). I don't know what [it was]. I wasn't a scholar. I knew what I was teaching, but what I was teaching was so basic that now that I think about it, it's funny. Like I was teaching how to make *wuḍū'* (sacral ablution), but I knew like two or three *Ḥadīth* about the purification of the *wuḍū'*. 'Oooohhh!' 'When the water falls from your hand, all your sins are falling the Prophet said.' And people were just amazed at that, because nobody had ever explained it to us that way.

Another brother Qadhi Amin had been teaching a Qur'an class for children whose families were mostly low income or welfare recipients in a small storefront on Mission Boulevard in Hayward. With little money, he and Qasim foolhardily and faithfully decided to expand and move into the larger storefront next door. After running out of money setting up the space, they sat weeping over the rent bill for the following month. With the unexpected arrival of the postman with a \$1000 check from an electronics store owner in New York (the Qadhi had met him months earlier and told him about the Qur'an school on an airplane to Pakistan), they could pay rent, and the Islamic Study School soon began. In the following two years, classes would continue and these East

Bay brothers and sisters also came into contact with Hamza Yusuf who was leading Friday congregational prayers in Santa Clara.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ZAYTUNA INSTITUTE/SEMINARY/COLLEGE²⁰¹

The first time Qasim attended a *Jumu'a* (Friday congregational prayer) of Yusuf's, he was turned off by the turbaned, bearded, and robe-wearing "Arab" who was speaking too much Arabic to a largely non-Arabic speaking audience. Qasim became upset with his cousin for "ruining his Jumu'a" when his cousin replied, "That was Hamza Yusuf, man! That was the white guy!" Stunned, Qasim lamented that he hadn't really listened to the *khutba* (sermon), and he decided he would return the next week. In the following week's *khutba*, Yusuf addressed the issue of debt, interest, and poverty that had been festering in Qasim's mind for the past week. Embarrassed, he felt as though Yusuf was addressing him directly. After Jumu'a prayer a crowd of people gathered around Yusuf, and Qasim snapped a photograph of the moment.

That day I said to myself, "I want to serve this man." I didn't know what that meant, honestly. Up to today, I don't know what that means. I just wanted to serve him. I heard the truth; I heard that there's no way someone can say something and can affect you, affect your heart, unless it's from the heart. Not only it's from the heart, but it's based on solid foundation of this religion...and then what happened? That effect didn't leave me. That was the thing. So up to today, it hasn't left. That same feeling I had that day, is the same today, *increased, daily*. And not only the love increased, but the desire to serve, because [back] then, I...honestly, a lot of the stuff, I didn't know what I was doing, but I just did it. But later on I realized, "Oh, that was a great thing we did."

²⁰¹ This is an extremely condensed and bare-bones version of Zaytuna's history, that occludes many significant events, personalities, and perspectives. A more detailed history would be its own book project. The first and second chapters explore different aspects of this history from different points of view. I plan to produce a more thorough version of events as an interactive digital repository of interviews, images, and personal accounts that will better serve the multiple perspectives and memories of events, personalities, and histories in the hopes that someone who either experienced this history firsthand, or is at least as interested as I have been to pursue this immense undertaking.

Hamza Yusuf was invited to teach one introductory course at the Islamic Study School and would eventually offer multiple twelve-week courses on Islam, the Arabic language, the *Sīra* - the Life of the Prophet, the *Purification of the Heart*, and the *Purification of the Tongue*. These courses were eventually simultaneously broadcast out to gatherings of students in New York, Philadelphia, and Toronto. Qasim used S-VHS recording equipment from the local public access television station (where he had a program) to record these lectures, which would eventually be distributed as cassette tapes, CDs, and videos that would travel the country and then abroad, popularizing the figure of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf and the burgeoning Islamic knowledge-based movement growing in the Bay Area.

The Islamic institute was incorporated into a non-profit called the Zaytuna Institute in 1996. When the property on Mission Boulevard was sold around 1998-99, an Iraqi civil engineer and contractor named Hisham Al-Aloosi assisted Yusuf and his growing supporters and community in the purchasing of a property on Jackson Street, in another part of Hayward. Two sisters from the community donated stocks in Google to Zaytuna Institute, totaling over \$200,000, which helped cover the costs of the purchase. The young predominantly Afghan community in Fremont came in to beautify the property that contained a small house, and an overgrown yard that was bordered on one side by the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) line. Commuter trains would zip by quickly all day, connecting Hayward and Fremont to Oakland and San Francisco. The neighborhood was and continues to be a low income and working class neighborhood, and the particular cul-de-sac in which the Institute was located was popular for drug transactions and other illicit activity.

During this period from around 1998 to the early 2000s, the Zaytuna Institute experienced rapid growth - hiring employees, participating in and producing “Deen

Intensive” and “Rihla” retreats, providing classes, providing shelter, doing outreach, and for many, providing a space of community. From 2004-2008, the pilot seminary program took place, eventually graduating three men and two women, who would go on to further studies, teaching, and leadership positions. A number of scholars from overseas or who had returned from study overseas, including two African Americans from the East Coast, Zaid Shakir and Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, (by way of Syria and Morocco, respectively) would become scholars in residence at Zaytuna and throughout the Bay Area. In 2007 Zaytuna Institute moved to Berkeley, and in 2009 it became Zaytuna College, a Muslim liberal arts college for undergraduates. Zaytuna’s outreach program became the independent non-profit, the Ta’leef Collective²⁰² (est. 2005) based in Fremont, California under the direction of two converts to Islam, Whitney Usama Canon and Mustafa Davis. Other active members of the Zaytuna community participated in the development of Islamic elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as supporting an active homeschooling movement. Much of Zaytuna’s work with prison inmates would continue under the direction of Rami Nsour and Nabil Afifi as the Tayba Foundation (est. 2008), which is currently based at the Jackson Street property in Hayward. Zaytuna began an intensive summer Arabic program in Berkeley in 2008 and the College would open its doors in 2010.

Buildings mark the passages of time and the movements of populations, ideas, and economies, while remaining constant to the ways in which spiritual communities organize themselves spatially. Reflecting the layers of engravings, paintings, windows, and walls of the many mosques, churches, synagogues, and temples around the world that have witnessed religious wars, expulsions, conversions, extinctions, and migrations, the

²⁰² Ta’leef was initially called the Zawiya and met in a rented space in a strip mall in Fremont.

Islamic Study School started in a building owned by a Jewish man; the Jackson Street property had been owned by a Christian group that included a Christian Iraqi; and Zaytuna College would begin in a rented space of a Baptist Seminary. Zaytuna College recently purchased in 2012 a large property on “Holy Hill,” north of the UC Berkeley campus, next to the Graduate Theological Union. It is a former Christian church and school.

The hunger for knowledge that the Islamic Study School grew out of was shaped by the need to understand the meaning behind particular Islamic practices and laws. Although young Muslims were taught how to perform their ablutions, the purifying practices of *wuḍūʾ* and *ghuṣl*, they were not given the reasons why, the spiritual significance and effects of these actions. These classes gave students meaning and were the first drops into an ocean of knowledge. Much like Abdullah’s experience when he first began reading the *Iḥya’ Ulūm ad-Dīn* by Al-Ghazālī, the students who would gather at these classes both at the Islamic Study School and later at the Zaytuna Institute property on Jackson Street, experienced an “awakening” to this world that many had been born into, but of which they only had a superficial understanding.

In these early years of the Zaytuna Institute, there was a great deal of exchange between teachers and students throughout the Bay Area. Muhammad Sharif, a scholar from Sudan lived in Vallejo who was teaching courses and doing lectures, and the Muslim Student Associations across the Bay Area were extremely active, as well as the different mosque communities—like Masjid Al-Islam and the Warith Deen communities in Oakland and San Francisco—community and advocacy organizations, and publications.²⁰³ People were moving to the Bay Area to be a part of this Islamic Revival.

²⁰³ The first chapter of CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) was established in San Francisco in 1995; ING (Islamic Networks Group) was founded by Maha Elgenaidi an Egyptian American in the South Bay in 1993; The American Muslim Alliance was founded by Agha Saeed a Pakistani American in 1994;

At the same time, disagreements and unwieldy attachments could also tear communities and solidarities apart, and external attacks on and internal attacks within the Muslim communities would likewise awaken Bay Area Muslims to new fissures and consciousnesses. In the aftermath of the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, in times of “turbulence” - increasing poverty, incarceration, militarization, and unequal citizenship - the work of rebuilding and cultivating solidarities and strategies of “tranquility” across the Bay Area through da‘wa becomes essential for enacting particular visions of an American Muslim future.

SCENE 4

(FADE IN) INTERIOR – THE TA’LEEF COLLECTIVE, FREMONT, CALIFORNIA, SPRING 2011, NIGHT

A large room with light green carpeting, a kufic calligraphy painting on the wall says Barakat MUHAMMAD, Blessings of MUHAMMAD. WOMEN are seated together on the right side of the room; MEN are seated together on the left side, all are facing an elevated platform with cushions and a small table with floral arrangements. Sitting at the edge of the platform is IMAM ZAID SHAKIR, holding a microphone and speaking to the congregation.

the Ameen Housing Co-operative of California was started in 1996 in Palo Alto, California; NISA (North American Islamic Shelter for the Abused) was established in 2002.



Image 5: Community members arriving in the late hours of the day for the evening program at the Ta'leef Collective in a business park in Fremont.

So who are we? Who is this community? This community is...is displayed here. This community of the descendents of Bilal al Habashi, *Raḍī Allāhu ‘anhū* (May God be pleased with him). So we see in this community Africans, both those who have come here voluntarily and those whose ancestors came here involuntarily. We see the descendents of Salman Al-Farsi; we see many Asians in our ranks – from South Asia, from Central Asia, from Southeast Asia, and they are the descendents of Salman... We have here the descendents of Suhaib al-Roumi; we have many Europeans - Muslims who have converted to Islam; Muslims who have emigrated here from Bosnia or Albania or other parts of Europe. We have here the grandsons and the granddaughters of the Arabs, the grandsons and granddaughters of Abu Bakr and Umar, Uthman, and Ali *Raḍī Allāhu anhum ijma‘īn* (may God be pleased with them all), that’s who we are.

In his introduction to Ḥabīb ‘Umar, Zaid Shakir describes the people seated before him, spiritual and regional descendents of the *Ṣaḥāba* (Companions) of the Prophet Muhammad - Bilal al-Habashi, Salman al-Farsi, Suhaib Al-Roumi, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali. This first generation of Muslims exemplify the diversity of Islam from its earliest days, and they are referenced as ancestors in faith, geography, and tribe.

These are relationships of proximity across distance, intimacy across difference - an Afghan Muslim is bound to an African American Muslim, seated shoulder to shoulder on a green carpet in Fremont. Their being *in common* space and faith embodies an echo, promise, and prophecy enacted by Bilal and Salman, companions to not only the Prophet, but to each other fourteen hundred years ago (Visweswaran 2010). These seventh century *Ṣaḥāba* are a foundation for a multiracial Islam coming into itself through the conscientious work of these American Muslim scholars and their students. The assembling of a collective history through these historical figures as ethical-political models for American Muslims is important for articulating the ethical implications of being Muslim in America in the twenty-first century. The “Tranquility Amidst Turbulence” tour becomes an opportunity to articulate how this history is configured across time and place.

When Shakir refers to the Arabs in the room, he recalls that their spiritual and regional antecedents are Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, the four Rightly Guided Caliphs (in Sunni Islam) who would become leaders of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Although the Prophet Muhammad was an Arab, and Shakir was indeed introducing a descendent of the Prophet to a room in which other descendants were also sitting, he pointedly articulates that everyone in the room is a descendant of the Prophet’s Companions and is connected to the Prophet through this first community of Muslims. This small rhetorical gesture surreptitiously forestalls any claim to racial or ethnic hierarchy or privilege in Islam, despite its historical foundations amongst *Arab* Muslims and in the *Arabic* language. This is an important point to be made in a room of people who were both born into and converts to Islam. Cultural Islam needed to be distinct from “pure” Islam, and for this to occur an understanding needs to

be made about where global Muslims stood in relation to each other. According to Shakir, they were on equal footing as Companions in relation to the Prophet Muhammad.

An oft-quoted verse of the Qur'an states "O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware" (Qur'an 49:13). At the same time, a Prophetic saying also refers to his family, *ahl Al-Bayt* as a means for Muslims. Thus a descendant's blood line is only as good as his or her deeds, and an Arab or any other Muslim who comes from a historically Muslim territory is also judged on his or her conduct before his or her ethnic origin. Considering the deference that Shakir showed Ḥabīb 'Umar—he rushed to him, lowered himself, and kissed his hand—it is clear that Shakir believed Ḥabīb 'Umar to be of the knowledgeable and righteous descendents of the Prophet Muhammad. Ḥabīb 'Umar and others returned the deference, praising Shakir in his teachings of the evening and also making sure that Shakir sat in a chair at the same level as 'Umar and his translator, while the rest of the audience sat facing them on the floor.

SCENE 5

(CUT TO) INTERIOR - ISLAMIC HISTORY CLASS, ZAYTUNA COLLEGE, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, SPRING 2011, DAY

Two-person tables are arranged in a semi-circle around a large teacher's desk at the front of the room. Male and female students are seated in no particular order or arrangement. Some sit alone, others sit in pairs. Books and notebooks are spread out on their desks, and every student holds a paperback copy of Sylviane Diouf's Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas (1998). The instructor ZAID SHAKIR sits off to the side in a black chair as MARY, a mixed Mexican American convert to Islam and Zaytuna College student, sits at the teacher's desk, facing HER CLASSMATES and

leading them in discussion. HER CLASSMATES include a recent AFRICAN AMERICAN CONVERT to Islam, a WHITE AMERICAN CONVERT to Islam, TWO SECOND GENERATION AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIMS, ONE SECOND GENERATION BLACK CARIBBEAN AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIM born to immigrant parents, TWO PAKISTANI AMERICAN MUSLIMS born to immigrant parents, TWO ARAB AMERICAN MUSLIMS also born to immigrant parents, and a NORTH AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIM born to an immigrant father and white American mother. Also sitting to the side by the window with a copy of the BOOK, a NOTEBOOK, and CAMERA is the ASIAN AMERICAN MUSLIM ANTHROPOLOGIST/FILMMAKER born to immigrant parents from Iran and Japan.

MARY

In the examples that [Diouf] is giving, what is the thing that African Muslims really linked to their faith?

ZAHRAH raises her hand. MARY nods to her to speak.

ZAHRAH

Their last possession, I know she mentions one slave and I think this is probably...indicative of other slaves that were Muslim...they actually carried the Qur'ans with them through the Middle Passage, so it...shows if they had anything, they had their faith.

Knowing she is a diligent student and prepared for class, Shakir has asked Mary to lead the discussion. Mary previously received a bachelor's degree in English and is now pursuing a second bachelor's degree in the Arabic language at Zaytuna. Zahrah

came to Zaytuna straight from high school and turned down admissions and scholarship offers at numerous prestigious universities around the country to “become a better person” at Zaytuna. Her parents are from Trinidad and Guyana. Her father converted to Islam in Trinidad, then came to New York where he met Zahrah’s mother who also converted to Islam. Zahrah grew up Muslim in Brooklyn, the youngest of six sisters.

In the class the students are learning about the first Muslims in the Americas and their efforts to maintain their Islamic practices despite the harsh realities of slavery. The students are learning about the estimated 2 to 3 million Muslims who were shipped to the Americas during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. According to Diouf, these Muslims attempted to maintain their traditions, values, and customs and were often at the forefront of rebellions and revolts. She follows traces in stories, languages, and customs to articulate some of the ways that Muslims maintained their identities despite the harrowing conditions of slavery. For homework the students had read through “Chapter 2: Upholding the Five Pillars of Islam in a Hostile World.”

The study of African Muslims in American slavery within the context of an Islamic history class serves multiple purposes towards imagining an American Islamic future through an understanding of its past. As Islam comes under attack for being incommensurable with American ideals and a foreign threat, understanding its long history in the Americas becomes an important articulation for its foundational presence in the establishment of the United States. Diouf states that a lack of educational structures was one of the reasons that Islam did not survive through generations of African American slavery. The linguistic, geographic, social, and kinship ruptures caused by systems of slavery made it difficult for Muslims to pass on their knowledge, belief, and practices. Along with all the other losses that Audre Lorde (1984) calculates in the poetic statement, “We were never meant to survive,” we can include amongst the myriad

frameworks of African religious beliefs and practices, the well-established West African tradition of Islam. Although significant traces remain, Islam as an organized worldview and way of being would not be resurrected (avenged) until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The importance of education in preserving, localizing, and reimagining Islam in the United States thus becomes central to the Zaytuna project.

The presence of these bodies and the force of their devotional practices centuries earlier yield a spiritual and metaphysical force that Shakir recognizes and mobilizes later that evening. Interred in these lands in both marked and unmarked graves, these Muslim saints, forefathers, and foremothers, are part of a spiritual genealogy of American Muslim suffering and resistance. El Ḥajj Malik al-Shabazz is another node in this genealogy, and Zaytuna College attempts to induct a multiracial constituency into this line through the raising of a collective historical consciousness. Organizing around suffering, resistance, and turbulence, Shakir's course and Ḥabīb 'Umar's tour work in tandem articulating multiple histories and ancestors through which contemporary American Muslims can understand their communal and individual roles. When Zahrah recalls that these Muslims carried their Qurans through the Middle Passage, she states that "if they had anything, they had their faith." According to Shakir and his students, when Muslims come under attack and when they feel challenged by the obligations of their faith, it is to their faith that they must hold steadfast, and it is their American Muslim ancestors that they must remember. They are seen as ethical-political models through which to understand suffering and striving, steadfastness and resistance.

At the end of the semester, Shakir has the students recollect the lessons of the semester and to consider their present circumstances as Muslims in America through the lens of Islamic history. Zeinab, a student of North African and white descent remembers Diouf's book, and recalls:

The struggles that the slaves went through in upholding their religion. A lot of Muslims in America, they have this kind of opinion, you know, where it's really a struggle upholding your faith, wearing ḥijab, eating ḥalāl food, and just to read these stories and seeing how...the slaves were able to hold onto their Islam, it's really something.

She struggles to find the words to complete these thoughts, but the other students nod in understanding.

SCENE 6

(CUT BACK TO) INTERIOR - TA'LEEF COLLECTIVE, HAYWARD, CALIFORNIA, LATER THAT EVENING, NIGHT

IMAM ZAID SHAKIR continues his introduction of ḤABĪB 'UMAR:

There is not a place on the face of this earth where people are converting to Islam like they are converting to Islam in America. We should never lose sight of that fact, because sometimes we forget, sometimes we forget. Our community are rich Muslims, [and] there are poor Muslims, and we should never forget the poor Muslims, because that's why Ḥabīb 'Umar is here, it's the poor Muslims. We said he was called by people - they weren't even poor! They were slaves! A poor person owns something, they didn't even own themselves, but they owned their faith, and they fought to hold onto their faith.

We're studying right now in a class I'm teaching, Islamic History, those African Muslims, those poor Muslims who were brought here, who prayed here - under the conditions of slavery - who fasted here, even though they were half starving. You know how much was spent on the upkeep of a slave in America, \$13 a year, \$13 a year, and that slave produced twenty times that investment and could barely eat, but despite that they fasted Ramadan. We have written documentation. They fasted Ramadan. Despite that they put food aside from their meager rations so they could give others "sadaqa," charity. There's written documentation of that. And some of them were 'ulamā (scholars), like Ayyub bin Suleyman, Umar bin Sa'eed; these were scholars, and some of them were *Awliyā'* (saints), some of them had a standing with Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'āla* (Glory be to Him, the Most High).²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ *Awliyā'* is often translated as saints, *walī* is singular. Islam does not have a formal process of recognizing saints, but there exists a long tradition of hagiographic texts accounting the lives of those believed to be saints, or as Shakir mentions, those who "have a standing" with Allah.

Imam Zaid continues to articulate a litany of ancestors, ranging from the Companions to the Muslim scholars who crossed the Atlantic in the Middle Passage. As the voluntary movement across the Indian Ocean (Ho 2006) shaped particular diasporas - their distribution and their relations - so did the involuntary movement across the Atlantic and movements driven by war, occupation, poverty, and hope across the Pacific. These Atlantic and Pacific movements shape the American landscape and the position of people in it. The living and the dead come together through historical texts and remembrance, in person and as ancestral traces. Cure and History. If the history is taken as part of the cure, then Imam Zaid is administering a dose, as well as its instructions. One can neither forget history, nor its ramifications. That history can begin in many times and places, alternatively in seventh-century Arabia, seventeenth-century America, and twenty-first century America.

In Imam Zaid's narrative, it is the devotional force of enslaved Muslims in the Americas centuries earlier whose prayers have been answered. These prayers called for Ḥabīb 'Umar and the Prophetic presence he embodies to be made manifest on American soil at a critical and particularly dark and pivotal moment for Islam in America. Ḥabīb 'Umar's tour in North America began days after the first Congressional hearings on the Radicalization of American Muslims led by Representative Peter King of Long Island, which followed a decade of ongoing American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, profiling, policing, and imprisonment in the US, as well as increased critiques of Islam in the media. Imam Zaid situates this period as one prophesied and prayed towards, besieged and blessed.

And some of them were *Awliyya*, some of them had a standing with Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'āla*, and they prayed for this day, they prayed for one day, one day, they prayed one day there would be free men and free women in this land that say "*lā ilāha illā Allāh, Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh.*" They prayed that one

day there would be people who would come here, and they would bring the light into this darkness, and they would touch the hearts of people, and they would do it at a time when Islam is besieged, when the Prophet of Islam is ridiculed, when the religion of Islam is defamed, and they would be living proof of the power that Allah *subhānahu wa ta'āla* says, when He says “*Yurīdūna liyuṭ’fi’u nūrAllāhī bi’afwahihim waAllāhū mutimmū nūrihī walou karihal-kafirūn, walou karihal-kafirūn, walou karihal-kafirūn* (Qur’an 61:8, he repeats the last phrase three times for emphasis).

That Allah would complete his light even though those who reject this religion, who fight this religion, who hate this religion, even though they despise it. *Lā ’ilāha ’illā-llāh* those are the people of *RasulAllah, ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*. Never forget them. Never forget them because if we forget them, we will forget our way.”



Image 6: The evening prayer in the overflow room at the Ta’leef Collective in Fremont, California with a mural by eL Seed, a Tunisian Canadian “calligraphist.” There is a video projection on the right hand wall, that is simultaneously broadcasting Ḥabīb ‘Umar’s program in the main room.

Imam Zaid invokes centuries-long prayers as they break down on an entrenched history, a dark history. There is a rupture, a break, an indescribable making present, not plain but complex, an upheaval and a sigh, a storm and then a calm, a summoning – more

than emotion, something vast and contained, something expressed in the space of translation insurmountable.²⁰⁵ There is a recollection of a vision, a story told years ago in Damascus, Syria where Shakir studied Islam.

SCENE 7

**(FADE IN) INTERIOR - DAMASCUS, SYRIA,
1990S, TIME OF DAY UNKNOWN**

ZAID SHAKIR sits in a room with one of his teachers, SHAYKH MUSTAFA AL-TURKMANI. TURKMANI is speaking to SHAKIR in Arabic, and SHAKIR attentively listens. TURKMANI's voice gradually fades out as A WOMAN'S VOICE fades in, translating his words into English. The screen fades to BLACK as only the voice is heard.

We begin with a vision transmitted to us over two hundred years ago, a mystical foreshadowing of a time becoming. Sayyid Muhammad Mehdi ar-Rawas, a Rifa'i (Sufi order) scholar describes this vision:

“The stupefying illumination of that scene, whose light was revealed to me, and whose veils were drawn back for me, showed me that Allah would bring forth from depths of the unseen, from the overflowing unseen realities involved in that Muhammadaic state, men from whom the blinding luminosity of that [Muhammadaic] state would be removed from their hearts.²⁰⁶ Thereafter, springs of wisdom will burst forth from their hearts and will flow from the tongues of those men in unperceivable ways. Among them will be those who were the worst of disbelievers yesterday, transformed today into the purest of believers. Allah will surely complete His light.

It is as if I see this being realized and divine forces are moving forth; unseen secrets are being manifested; tongues are speaking [with unprecedented wisdom]; the mystical secrets proving true; the suns conveying the light of divine aid are burning brightly; the fragrances of Prophetic acceptance are diffusing all around. [At that time] a large number of Christians in Western lands, when they are at the peak of their strength and power - a spirit from the proof of the Muhammadaic, prophetic succor will be sent over them - Allah will guide the stray among them,

²⁰⁵ I discuss this moment again in Chapter Five in a reflection on the representative capacities of audiovisual and written records.

²⁰⁶ See note 162 on the use of “Muhammadaic.”

and He will rectify their situation. They will be guided to faith in the pure oneness of God and the message of His Noble, Chosen Prophet, peace upon him. Their numbers will grow.

This is a sign of Allah that He has concealed in the depths of the unseen as a gift to the trustworthy prophet, as a source of aid to the religion, and as a manifestation of divine care for the Muslims. I continued to see that divine aid extending itself outward, and the fresh water of that sea quenching the thirst of all attaining to it, extending its springs and rivulets to the people. Thus does your Lord say, “[Bringing about such things] is easy for me.” A sprinkle from the clouds of His generosity irrigates whole lands. A glance from the eye of His care transforms a bitter enemy of God into a saint. Allah guides with His light whomsoever He pleases.”²⁰⁷

Shakir references the events of this vision that night at Ta’leef. The truth of the vision and the force of what he later refers to as “Muhammadaic breezes” come in the form of Ḥabīb ‘Umar and the multitudes of people embracing Islam. Shakir is reminded that when Islam and the Prophet are under attack, Allah will “complete his light.” The historic, geographic, and mystic convergences of the “Tranquility Amidst Turbulence” tour offered Zaid Shakir, Ḥabīb ‘Umar bin Hafiz, and their students an opportunity to devotionally articulate and engender both global and local relationships across time and space. Through a Prophetic presence embodied in Ḥabīb ‘Umar as a knowledgeable descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, this tour binds the figures of Malcolm X, African slaves in the Americas, and the diverse Companions of the Prophet as spiritual and “tribal” or ethnic ancestors to contemporary Muslim communities in the Americas. These devotional exercises simultaneously reinforce and transgress modern boundaries of nation, race, and time towards an alternative understanding of ways to be in the world as Americans, Muslims, and companions.

²⁰⁷ Shakir (2006). Zaid Shakir wrote of this vision upon the passing of his teacher Shaykh Mustafa al-Turkmani in Damascus. Al-Turkmani, a da’i (Islamic worker of da’wa) and a scholar had, unlike many others, always encouraged Imam Zaid to “return to America to work for Islam.” He shared this vision with him. A woman’s voice translates the man’s Arabic to reflect upon my work in the translation of this mystical vision to a contemporary ethnographic event.

SCENE 8

**(FADE IN) INTERIOR - BACK IN ISLAMIC HISTORY CLASS,
ZAYTUNA COLLEGE, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA
SPRING 2011 - DAY**

At the end of class, Imam Zaid closes *The Servants of Allah*, the book he is holding in his hands and asks the students,

How does this speak to us, as Muslims now, in America? How does this speak to you...now we're reading these, our history, our Muslim ancestors. It doesn't matter your race or ethnicity, if you're Muslim, that unites Muslims. *Lā ilāha illā Allāh, Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh*, not race and ethnicity. Those are [our] Muslim ancestors; they were in horrific circumstances. How does seeing how they strove to overcome their circumstances, how they strove to keep Islam as an integral recognizable religion that any Muslim from anywhere in the world would recognize, as opposed to some syncretic mishmash. What does that say to us?

Zahrah answers Imam Zaid,

It's really inspiring; it inspires me just to see the depth of struggle that they went to, to really practice their faith and being able to practice it in conditions that were really opposing, and that...how easy we have it comparatively and how much more we should be fighting and struggling to shape it in the cultural context and the times we live in.

Zahrah and her classmates were witness to a number of convergences those few weeks in April. While students tried to keep up with Ḥabīb 'Umar's tour, they also took turns leading discussions on *The Servants of Allah*, meeting in the student lounge to discuss the different chapters they were responsible for reading. That same week the Latin American philosopher of liberation and theology, Enrique Dussel visited both UC Berkeley and Zaytuna College. That he and Ḥabīb 'Umar sat in the same library within days of each other, speaks to the expansive possibilities of learning at Zaytuna College, and the potential alternative epistemologies that are being consolidated within its walls.²⁰⁸ Zaid Shakir invited Sylviane Diouf to give a talk a few weeks later, and she laid out a

²⁰⁸ I would like to elaborate on this convergence in future writings.

number of potential trajectories for future research that she hoped Zaytuna students would one day take up. For Shakir it is important that the students have a sense of their collective history not only so that they can recognize the “depth of struggle” of their ancestors, but also so that they can “rally the Muhammadaic forces” (Shakir 2010) of today:

Now is not the time for Muslims in the West to hide or run away in the face of the abuses some elements in western societies are heaping on Islam and its adherents. Now is the time for us to stand up and become messengers and ambassadors of the truth we profess.

Contrary to what one may expect, Shakir speaks not of “uprising during the day” “played out before flashing lights and cameras.”²⁰⁹ Rather,

those who cannot see beyond this physical world have in many instances bitten into the poisonous fruit of material power. As a result, Qur’anic truths, which alert us to sources of metaphysical strength, become marginalised in both our consciousness and in our strategic thinking (ibid.).

Shakir connects the waking up for prayer in the darkness of the night, to the emerging into day, as “the light that a dark world is seeking.” By harnessing or beseeching a metaphysical strength through worship and servitude, Muslims will find purpose in their lives: “This is the basis of the good life and the foundation of a community of virtue and service. This is the foundation of meaningful and lasting social reform” (ibid.). While for some this stance may seem passive, individualistic, and overly mystical, for Shakir this is an effort towards sustainability, both individual and communal, culled from years of experience watching people “burn out” or “lose their way” in sociopolitical movements. This is something to be captured in the breezes that blow between Oakland, Fremont, Berkeley, New Haven, Detroit, Harlem, and Tarim.

²⁰⁹ This statement recalls the words of Gil Scott-Heron in “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” (1970).

The above seven “scenes” attempt to convey one of a multiplicity of ways to narrate a possible history of Islam in America and the establishment and meaning of Zaytuna College. Thinking cinematically enables me to create a montage that traverses time and space in much the same way that scholars and their students localize and historicize Islam in their rhetorical leaps and devotional bounds. Diasporas are produced through knowledge-based genealogies and centuries-long prayers, and Islam radiates outward from the American innercity, impacting the consciousness of Prophetic descendants and Muslims from the historical Muslim lands.

Writing cinematically also enables me to allude to the “pre-filmic” and “pro-filmic” aspects of what is visible “on-screen” in everyday life. The pre-filmic is everything that we don’t see on-screen, what is beyond the frame and behind the camera or mise-en-scene (the lighting, the costumes, the actors, the sets) of the scene - the spiritual forces at work, the long histories, the distant figures of an Islamic past who are present, but not necessarily seen. They are made visible in words, books, and stories, conjured in a cinematic (and spiritual) suspension of disbelief that enables one to succumb to the narrative, the possible explanation for where we are now and why.

In the following chapter, I turn on the cinematic and articulate why this movie will not be made. While writing cinematically enables a different mode of ethnographic theorizing, creating and re-presenting recorded images can produce limits to the imaginative possibilities of the script.

Chapter 5: Out of Bounds

Only when you describe something can you start speculating about it. If something hadn't been described and a record of it doesn't exist—it doesn't matter what form the description takes: a film, a sociological study, a book, or even just a verbal account—then you can't refer to it. You have to describe the thing or situation before you can deal with it (Kieslowski and Stok 1993:58).

Not everything can be described. That's the documentary's great problem. It catches itself as if in its own trap...I'm frightened of those real tears. In fact, I don't know whether I've got the right to photograph them. At such times I feel like somebody who's found himself in a realm which is, in fact, out of bounds. That's the main reason I escaped from documentaries (86).

ON DESCRIPTION

The above epigraphs by the Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski were written within the same text, *Kieslowski on Kieslowski* (1993), which describes his transition from documentary to fiction filmmaker. He wavers between the need to describe as a critical foundation for critique and the impossibility and “out of bounds” nature of description. It is an ethical quandary that marks much documentary and ethnographic work. How does one attempt to describe the *real* everyday of people we encounter in the field; how do we “write culture” in ways that are not injurious, invasive, or potentially “useful” for state actors? For anthropologists, understanding bounds are particularly important as we often conduct research across bounds; the very idea that there is a boundary enables our work. As I mention in the introduction, however, these boundaries are often slippery and ill-defined, and it is the definition and articulation of such boundaries—marking difference and commonality, geography, or economy—that often become useful analytics.

Kieslowski, however, refers more to ethical boundaries, some notion of when our good intentions, solidarities, and aims may not be well-served by our works of

description. Kieslowski asks whether he has *the right* to film real tears. What justifies my work of observing, taking notes, and filming at Zaytuna over another. While I was given authorization (in the form of letters, IRB forms and signatures, and verbal acknowledgement), what right did I really have, except that self-appointed right situated within the context of the discipline of anthropology. While my academic credentials may lend some authority and perhaps sincerity to my research, it does not give me any right.

On a number of occasions, images or audio that Kieslowski had recorded had been confiscated by officials for purposes with which he was not aligned nor concerned. This manipulation of his footage and the potential impact it could have on people's lives made him feel like "a small cog...in a wheel that is being turned by someone else for reasons unknown to me" (Kieslowski and Stok 1993). When looking at and researching Muslim communities in the United States, I can not help but be conscious of the possibility that my work echoes, complements, and serves the work of the FBI, CIA, NSA, Homeland Security, and metropolitan police campaigns of surveillance in American Muslim communities.²¹⁰ My work can potentially be used by the Islamophobia industry, and it contributes to a contentious state and media landscape in which Muslims are already written within particular frames. These representational modes increasingly produce more complex characterizations in a moralistic attempt to be diverse and multicultural, while still producing the terms of "acceptable" Muslims and Islam (Alsultany 2012, 2013, Mahmood 2006, Mamdani 2004, Shohat and Stam 1994). These "simplified complex representations" aim to make particular Muslims sympathetic, while more importantly reinforcing notions of American benevolence and post-racial equality

²¹⁰ See Apuzzo and Sullivan 2012, <http://www.aclu.org/national-security/foia-documents-show-fbi-using-mosque-outreach-intelligence-gathering>; <https://www.aclu.org/mapping-fbi-uncovering-abusive-surveillance-and-racial-profiling>; <http://www.aclu.org/racial-justice-religion-belief/aclu-and-asian-law-caucus-seek-records-fbi-surveillance-mosques-and-u>; <http://ap.org/media-center/nypd/investigation>; <http://nation.time.com/2013/08/28/nypd-designates-mosques-as-terrorism-organizations/#ixzz2dHBmfyhJ>

(Alsultany 2012). Munir Jiwa identifies the contemporary “Five Media Pillars” of representing Islam, which include September 11th, 2001, violence and terrorism, Muslim women and veiling, Islam and the West in terms of compatibility and values (“sharī‘a law”), and the Middle East as “the geographical and spatial zone through which to understand Islam and Muslims” politically (Jiwa 2012).

These media pillars call to mind similar modes of defining peoples, places, and ideologies that Lila Abu-Lughod identified as “central zones of theorizing” in her review of ethnographies of the Arab world in 1989: 1) segmentation (tribalism and “men, politics, and violence”); 2) the harem (women, gender, and sexuality); and 3) Islam (Abu-Lughod 1989:280,285). Since 1989, the anthropology of Islam as it relates to the Arab world in particular has evolved, responding to the challenges and theorizations put forward by Abu-Lughod and Talal Asad (1986), as well as to the geopolitical and historical transformations in the global landscape and the theoretical shifts within the larger discipline of anthropology (Deeb and Winegar 2012). I would add that a significant aspect of such shifts has been the critical mass of “halfie-anthropologists” (Abu-Lughod 1991) and others who are conscious of and engaged with their “narrative relationship” (Asad 1986) to Islam and/or majority Muslim lands. These relationships, “whether one supports or opposes the tradition [Islam], or regards it as morally neutral,” include connections and disconnections based on nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, geography, marriage, sex, sexuality, family history, life experience, economics, and/or politics. Asad draws attention to such relationships and how in terms of Islam:

The coherence that each party finds, or fails to find, in that tradition will depend on their particular historical position. In other words, there clearly is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a universally acceptable account of a living tradition. Any representation of tradition is contestable. What shape that contestation takes, if it occurs, will be determined not only by the powers and knowledges each side deploys, but by the collective life they aspire to—or to whose survival they are

quite indifferent. Moral neutrality, here as always, is no guarantee of political innocence (Asad 1986:12).

Associated with the form and content of the work is the potential impact of that work itself. Taking seriously Asad's point and recognizing how my research participates in what Edward Said describes as "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts" (1979:12) necessitates my consideration of how my writing and filmmaking are situated within and of "a power with definite interests in [the people associated with] the Orient, and more important, that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient" (1979:11). Considering the multiple relations that mark my positionality, as well as the relations and positionalities of the individuals amongst whom I conducted research, I must ask myself: for whom am I writing? And is there a way to write to multiple audiences within the same text in a way that pushes all (including myself) to think differently?

It is with such questions and quandaries in mind that I consider the topics of this chapter. This chapter begins with some of the background of a moment discussed in a previous chapter ("Muhammadaic Breezes") and discusses the limits and purposes of description and representation. I then consider tears shed in this first ethnographic and filmic moment in a wider conversation about the indexical potential of tears as a pedagogic tool and embodied sign of a type of learning and knowing. Tears of an intimate distance lead me to a discussion of spatiality in the places of the Zaytuna School. I especially consider what it is to experience learning and devotional activities from women's spaces, and what that kind of "distance" and gender specificity inhibits and enables. Different women and men whom I encountered in the field helped me think through the power of images and the power of refusal in being produced as an image.

How current and former students collaborated in their own self-representation in my portrait film *IQRA' is READ* sheds light on the expansive ways in which they imagine themselves and the ways in which they are creatively inhabiting the discursive tradition of Islam. I return to the work of the camera at the end of this chapter, considering how the camera, and I as its operator, are situated in and transcend gendered spaces in ways that always remind us of our multiple relationalities and how knowledge impacts the terms of such relationships.

OUT OF BOUNDS

I had filmed and audio recorded most of Zaid Shakir's introduction of Ḥabīb 'Umar at the Ta'leef Collective on that cool and still early April evening in Fremont (discussed in Chapter Four). The room was split in half - men on the left side, women on the right side. There were cushions along the outer edges of each section, reserved for the elders amongst us, while the rest of us sat on the floor in haphazard shoulder-to-shoulder, knee-to-knee rows. In the front of the women's section was a crescent-shaped row of black floor seats, reserved for the VIP women in the congregation, mostly elder honored guests of the Bay Area and the Ta'leef Collective. Hadiya,²¹¹ a Yemeni American Ta'leef volunteer was standing in front in a vibrant and brightly colored blue and green 'abāya-like dress and emerald green ḥijab.²¹² She helped escort women to this section and generally managed seating in the area. I was sitting in the women's section towards the front of the room, but several rows back from where the *shuyūkh* (plural of shaykh) were sitting on an elevated and cushioned platform. Much of my view was blocked by an

²¹¹ This pseudonym is named for Hadiya Pendleton, a 15 year-old girl, who was shot and killed in Chicago's South Side on January 29, 2013. Her name means "gift" in both Swahili and Arabic. Her death has served as a clarion call for more attention to gun violence in Chicago.

²¹² An 'abāya is a cloak or robe-like dress that is loose-fitting and typically worn by women in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The wearing of the 'abāya is increasingly common in the United States as well as they have become more available as an import.

ornate floral arrangement of white casablanca lilies, orange birds of paradise, white dahlias, white tube roses, and gold leaves, designed by Sister Khadija O’Connell, the beautification matriarch of the Zaytuna community.

Zaid Shakir and Ḥabīb ‘Umar were introduced by Usama Canon, wearing a 1960s-70s style safari suit, bowtie, and fez/tarboosh (his outfit connoted an homage to Black internationalism, Arab nationalism, and Sukarno and Nehru of the Bandung conference moment, as well as to the Nation of Islam). As a prologue to Ḥabīb ‘Umar’s lecture, Shakir situated the historical, spiritual, and political significance of the gathering. As I held my camera up to capture some of Shakir’s introduction, my arms beginning to shake from the weight of the camera, there ascended in the room an intensity of feeling and spiritual presencing that is difficult to describe. As Shakir spoke the following words related in the previous chapter, he began crying, becoming momentarily overwhelmed as he recalled, experienced, embodied, transmitted, and heard, heard, heard those prayers of his racial and spiritual ancestors, African Muslims brought to America as slaves:

And they prayed for this day. They prayed for one day, one day. They prayed [that] one day there would be free men and free women in this land that say “*Lā ‘ilāha ‘illā-llāh, Muhammad ar-Rasul Allah*” (There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His messenger).

By “heard” I mean, heard that Black suffering and some-kind-of spiritual fortitude forged in the Islamic civilizations of West Africa, disrupted by the Middle Passage, endured through generations of slavery, generations of racism, his own family’s experiences in the migration from the Jim Crow South to the cold, industrial, and racially-structured North, his own conversion to Islam and sitting with scholars and everyday Muslims from Morocco to Iran, and the continued spiritual *ṣamad* (steadfastness) and suffering that characterized so much of Black life in America. Those who had been in the classroom earlier that day or knew the work of Shakir as an imam,

scholar, student, husband, father, teacher, gardener, and activist were likewise privy to the possible torrent of words and images that seemed to rush through him. In a previously recorded lecture, “The Unfulfilled Legacy” (2007), Shakir discusses how the historical experiences of African Americans and the early history of Islam in America made them particularly receptive to the message of Islam; he felt that this window of receptivity was not going to last into the next generation, however, and he conveyed a sense of urgency in trying to mobilize American Muslims towards directing their da‘wa to this population.²¹³

Usama, Shakir’s student and the co-founder of Ta’leef, was sitting directly in front of Shakir. He suddenly flinched back, lowering his head and closing his eyes tightly, struck by the force of Shakir’s words and perhaps also by the physical and emotional state of his teacher. Many would say they had never seen Shakir like that. Other men around him were beginning to tear up and quietly weep; others watched Shakir intensely, trying to understand what was happening and to not miss a moment of instruction. In the women’s section—equally rapt—one heard sniffing and saw wetness on the cheeks.

And as quick as it came, it moved on, and Shakir continued with a passion and force in his words, strengthened by the proof of revelations, the proof of centuries past visions, and the proof of academic research in the form of Diouf’s and others’ texts, as he recited God’s revealed text and God’s creative “work” in these turbulent times in global Islam:

They prayed that one day there would be people who would come here, and they would bring the light into this darkness, and they would touch the hearts of

²¹³ This lecture was part of a two day conference in Santa Clara, California, entitled *Ethnic Jihad: the Struggles of Muslims in America* that was presented by Zaytuna as part of their Minara (lighthouse or tower of light) program in 2005. Shakir’s lecture was produced as an audio CD, sold, and distributed.

people, and they would do it at a time when Islam is besieged - when the Prophet of Islam is ridiculed, when the religion of Islam is defamed, and they would be living proof of the power that Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'āla* says, when He says “*Yurīdūna liyuṭ’fi’u nūrAllāhī bi’afwahihim waAllāhū mutimmū nūrihī walou karihal-kafirūn, walou karihal-kafirūn, walou karihal-kafirūn* (Qur’an 61:8, he repeats the last phrase three times for emphasis)

“That Allah would complete his light even though those who reject this religion, who fight this religion, who hate this religion, even though they despise it.”

A pause. A catching of breath. I had the greedy gratefulness of a videographer who had captured that incredible moment of “truth,” mentally congratulating myself on pressing record and positioning my camera just in time. But within seconds I also self-admonishingly told myself that I would never show this footage. Though this room was full of hundreds of people, and there was another camera filming/streaming directly in front of Shakir, it felt like a private moment, as Kieslowski says, “out of bounds.” Regardless of whether he would be “okay” with it or not, for me inserting it into a documentary somehow seemed like a violation, whether it be of the Imam, the gathering, the ancestors, or that particular historical moment in time. This brief clip would never convey the intensity of that moment; it would feel like yet another historical betrayal.

This single video image yields little of the back story and shows a man with a microphone in one hand, pointing with the other, choking on his words. Moved, surrounded by other men. To represent the multiple histories of this moment would require a centuries-long and globally-expansive montage of images, voices, smells, and landscapes. It would also need to convey something of the performative labor of African American men within American Islam (Khabeer 2011), and the performative and real labor of African Americans in building the United States, the labor of Black American Muslims in dealing with, educating, and providing the affect and parlance for other American Muslims (Arab, Asian, white, etc) who were just figuring out (or still had not

figured out) that African Americans were authentic Muslims too. Living and dead African American Muslims were “still working,” still “without compensation,” in contemporary efforts to locate and historicize Islam in the Americas (ibid.). In addition to all this “work,” the images must also convey the transmitted visions of Arab scholars who foresaw Islam in the West, and the work such visions did in constituting Shakir’s faith. The audience consisted of those who were devoted students of Shakir’s, those who were more ambivalent about his role in the community, and those who did not know who he was and had come to see and hear Ḥabīb ‘Umar. How would one also represent all the other histories and genealogies in the room that constituted the multiplicities of this critical transmission?

There was also a significance to where we were, at the Ta’leef Collective. This was a place where despite all the negative media about Islam, young people were embracing or returning to Islam. Started by Usama Canon and Mustafa Davis, Ta’leef Collective is a space where one could “come to Islam as you are, to Islam as it is.” Both young men had studied extensively with local scholars, as well as those abroad, from Mauritania to Yemen. To have two of one’s teachers, one from Tarim, Yemen, and one from the American inner-city together in the same room and on the same stage, brought together critical influences for the direction of American Muslim institutions such as Ta’leef and Zaytuna. For Shakir, the circumstances of this gathering is a part of God’s completing his light—Ḥabīb ‘Umar’s tour, this multiracial congregation, and the establishment of a Muslim college—they are all signs of God’s eternal work marked in the vicissitudes of human life.

When Kieslowski refers to the filming of real tears, he refers to those tears that fall as a camera observes life as it happens. Although interviews are also “real life,” interview tears conjured by the telling of a memory or a present situation are

ontologically different. These tears, though “frightening,” register less as out of bounds because they are tied up in the performance of a structured sit-down interview. The interviewee has agreed to enter into this reflective space of the interview, where one is asked questions, and one is already, in a way, out of bounds, in a space exterior to and contemplative of the normal utterances of their everyday lives. The vulnerability marked by real tears and the hush that can accompany them can potentially be a space of reflectivity, but when represented out of lived time and space, put on display, they participate in a regime of visual pleasure that posits power in the spectator.

Slavoj Žižek describes the filming of tears, this encroachment “upon the Other’s intimacy” as a function of shame “at its purest,” not necessarily for oneself but more likely for “what another did” (Žižek 2001:73). For me there is less a sense of shame, but more a sense of what is necessary, what is not necessary, and what purpose does its representation hold. For Kieslowski his shift to fiction film was also a concern that he not become an informer or police collaborator by virtue of unintentionally documenting something that could be used by the state. It is not a matter of shame, but a matter of power and purpose. Posing the question to myself, what were my images, my descriptions trying to achieve? Why not show tears, the ultimate expression of humanity and human feeling? Would crying Muslims humanize them, or would these images of crying (Black) Muslims relegate them to the irrational and to victimhood - the wailing Muslim mothers and fathers that we experience on the news? These too emotional, extreme, and irrational Muslims. How is their cinematic representation distinct from experiencing them face-to-face? Shakir’s tears and others compel me to consider tears beyond shame, as ethical and intellectual markers of particular experiences and relationships.

I allude to some of the impossibilities of description implicit in the above moment of multiple historical citations. While one could attempt a filmic description in order to claim space in a politics of visibility, perhaps a description that leaves more to the imagination elicits more radical possibility and wonder. Recognizing that there is an out-of-bounds is a mystical, critical, and ethical submission to the potential and limits of the image. If “the politics of visibility conducted on the terrain of the cinematic is inevitably reformist” how does one produce an image that “breaks free from the world, the cinematic, itself” (Keeling 2007:10)? Representation for visibility’s sake often only holds common sense assumptions intact, whether it is that of the “irrational Muslim” or translatable visions of the “black preacher.” Challenging the voyeuristic, and exploring the possibility of “boredom” that elicits a space for a classically open form of “storytelling” becomes one way of breaking free from the ways we are conditioned to consume images of particular types of bodies (Benjamin 1968). In thinking about the radical expression of those tears and my potential purpose in representing them, I can’t help but let them have their private space.

INDEXICAL TEARS

I benefited more from his crying than his simply transmitting the Ḥadīth.

- Ibn al-Jawzi (Brown 2009:189)

Within Islam, tears perform a certain work. Tears mark a certain sincerity and intensity of feeling that can also be manufactured as a pious display. Following the Ḥabīb ‘Umar tour, I heard Zaytuna staff speaking curiously within their office cubicles about the congregation being moved to tears during his supplications. There was a sense of amazement at such stirrings²¹⁴ amongst otherwise stoic populations. Recordings of the

²¹⁴ I was less surprised because as a Shi’a Muslim of Iranian heritage, I was witness to and aware of the normative role of tears in devotional activities.

final event of the tour, also held at the Ta'leef Collective, were made available on YouTube. Ḥabīb 'Umar spoke of future mediated viewings of this event, closing a thirty minute supplication (*du'a*) and a three-week North American tour,

I am leaving you in the protection of God, what He has granted you from His generosity that some of those who have not yet come into existence are going to receive...and then there [are] people hearing you in far off places now [through live streaming] and there [are] people who are going to hear this tape sometime later [via Youtube, community websites, family, and friends], and all of the good in this moment is going to reach them there. This is the gift of Allah.²¹⁵

Ḥabīb 'Umar had begun this supplication in remembrance and recognition, “We gather to remember Sayyiduna Muhammad, and that this land has been connected to his land by means of these hearts that are irrigated [by divine grace].” Throughout the *du'ā* 'Umar used spatial imagery to convey the opening of paths and a proximity that was made manifest through the supplicating gathering. Repeating a phrase from the Qur'an “*F'innī Qarīb*” (Indeed, I am near) over and over again, the congregation was raised to a fevered pitch, men and women beseeching in screams, whispers, and thoughts for divine grace, mercy, proximity, and connectedness.

And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me - *indeed I am near*. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided (Qur'an 2:186).

The sublimity of nearness to God (whether imagined or actual), being up to the threshold (from the Latin *sub-* ‘up to’ followed by *limen* ‘threshold’ or *limus* ‘oblique’), shudders the self. The physical manifestations of such momentary or sustained encounters may find a place in the outpouring of tears.

²¹⁵ trunkz007, *taleef night to remember: Habib Umars powerful dua part 3*, 04 12, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZiURqV2cVM&sns=em> (accessed 05 20, 2013), translation is from the live simultaneous translation that was provided by Yahya Rhodus

The conversations that followed in the Zaytuna College office cubicles were significant in that they signified the rarity of such tears and emotional displays amongst Muslims in the Bay Area. This was not an ordinary event in communities that were typically gathered together around particular texts and lectures. Usually people held pens and notebooks, not tissues and handkerchiefs. Yet in some ways, it was all the knowledge that this community had benefitted from that enabled Ḥabīb ‘Umar’s supplication. As Hirschkind has stated, “one is capable of hearing the sermon in its full ethical sense only to the extent one has already cultivated the particular modes of sensory responsiveness presupposed in the discourse’s gestural vocabulary, a vocabulary rich in affective, kinesthetic, and visceral dimensions” (Hirschkind 2006:101).

Capacities had been increasing since the mid-1990s in the Bay Area; Hamza Yusuf and others’ classes in sacred knowledge and well-worn paths of travels back and forth between Yemen, other sites of Islamic learning, and the Bay Area had engendered in this community a higher than average level of “seeing hearts.” Even in the overflow room at Ta’leef Collective where the speakers kept cutting out and a dark projected image of Ḥabīb ‘Umar and his student and translator John Yahya Rhodus covered the wall, there was a profound swell and approach “towards God.” The distance and mediated nature of the du‘ā’ did not preclude an experience of nearness with God. This nearness, rather than a movement was more a recognition, a being made visible, an apprehension of His constant presence.

In Hamza Yusuf’s classes, his tears marked an intensity and intimacy with his subject matter, most often with the Prophetic biography. These tears were indexical, marking an embodied and cultivated love for the Prophet and a moving “encounter” with his image. Students had different reactions to such moments. Some sat in rapt attention, marveling, sometimes tearing up themselves. Others found it unsettling and strange. Side

glances would be exchanged; there was an occasional smirk or nervous giggle from students who were caught off guard and did not know how to react to or were unfamiliar with an embodied display of love for the Prophet. For students seeking an “intellectual” or informative understanding of Islam, such “emotional” expressions seemed out of place, and perhaps unteacherly, in the classroom. The chasm between some students’ and Yusuf’s experiences with and knowledge of the Sīra was conveyed in such moments, and it was this distance from and lack of knowledge of the life of the Prophet that Yusuf seeks to remedy. Hirschkind refers to *ḥuzn* (sadness, melancholia, or mourning) and tears in response to sermons as

not simply expressing the spontaneous movements of an autonomous inner self. The response of the heart, while never entirely knowable by others, nonetheless produces a performance—often an affective-gestural expression...As a skilled response of the learned body/soul to the khaṭīb’s oratory, the performance of *ḥuzn* both hones and expresses the listener’s ethical character as enacted and practiced in accord with authoritative standards of moral rectitude (2006:100).

As the ultimate ethical model for Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad embodied through his words and actions a lived reality of Islam that for modern-day Muslims often gets lost and seems irreparably distant and unfocused despite the focus on Ḥadīth, the Prophet Muhammad’s words and actions. Yet, in this class especially, a unity of knowledge was being sutured, connecting a cognitive understanding of the Prophet’s life as an historical event and the ethical implications for and an embodied relationship with the Prophet for Muslims today.

Yusuf marked his own attention to physical manifestations of belief, proximity, or presence in class one day during a discussion of the Sīra. Yusuf was telling the students about the Prophet Muhammad’s modesty and sense of shame. He was telling them about an incident in which a cloth covering the Prophet fell off, and he quickly called for cover, anxious. One of the students laughed. Yusuf immediately responded, concerned about

stirring a less than dignified response to the Prophet's life. "I have goosebumps" he said, and he left the classroom. The students were left a bit stunned. This was a similar moment, marking the different levels of experience with the Sīra – whether adolescent reactions to the mention of nakedness or the intimacy and solemnity with which Yusuf approached the Sīra. Similar to a *khaṭīb* (one who performs a sermon), Yusuf's task "includes not just the modulation of emotional intensities, but also the orienting of those emotions to their proper objects" (100). This is not an instrumental "rhetoric practice of evoking or modulating the passions as a means to sway an audience toward a point of view," but rather an aim (not necessarily intended in the moment, but intended as a larger institutional project) of "constructing the passions in accord with a certain model" (ibid). Laughter and goosebumps join tears as embodied physical manifestations, passions, to be shaped, indexing an expansive range of feelings, proximities, capacities, and experiences.

Such encounters mark the Zaytuna classroom as a space of negotiation, and at times confusion. They mark a range of capacities and Yusuf's expectation of particular modes of response and understanding from his students. While students arrive with a sense of the historical and spiritual significance of the Prophet Muhammad, they do not necessarily have an embodied passionate nor an intellectual understanding that Yusuf is attempting to model for and impart to the students. Such cultivation distinguishes the Zaytuna approach from the "secular" Islamic Studies approach to the pedagogic transmission of the Prophet's Sīra.

During one of our one-on-one interviews, sitting opposite each other on the floor of her dorm apartment, Zahrah began to tear up when she spoke of her love for her teacher Zaid Shakir. While reiterating her love and admiration for her parents, she spoke about Shakir's special place in her world. He was like a father, a spiritual model and teacher—one who would help her achieve a desired spiritual and intellectual state. All

this was achieved from a physical distance (though indeed, God is near) dictated by particular notions of gender propriety that the female students noticed early on in their academic careers. “I’d like to hug Imam Zaid, but I can’t do that.”²¹⁶

Upon entering a space, Zaid Shakir would share high fives with the brothers and give them strong, loving hugs of support, encouragement, and spiritual vigor, while the girls would stand awkwardly, almost despondent, yearning as he greeted them, “Sisters!” with a grand sweep of his hand to his chest and a slight bow. While they don’t all want to necessarily hug Imam Zaid—it both mortifies and intrigues—the female students recognize that they are situated differently in relation to their teachers than the male students, and that they are in a gendered space with gendered practices, which they both recognize and desire, but which also proscribes certain intimacies and relationships with their beloved teachers:

You see the scholars, and they are like sometimes patting the students on the back, and you know, just like really close and really friendly, and...just that interaction...you know, it can’t be that personal between a man and a woman, obviously. Even though, obviously, you can still be very friendly, but you know it just wouldn’t reach that other level of physical, sort of friendship...

I wouldn’t say the barrier is necessarily that great between women and male scholars, but there definitely is that room where, you know, you just can’t... There is a line that you can’t cross, which I think can be kind of sad for women if you just really admire the scholar. But, you know, I don’t know, I guess it kind of, it is what it is. But I’m sure there are ways in which women can be able to interact closely with scholars without there being an issue, you know? *We just have to kind of work on it.* I think it’s just kind of new for us, here in the States, and *we have to figure out something to have a model for it.*

Students like Zahrah actually did yearn for a father-daughter-type hug, or a physical gesture that expressed and symbolized her respect for and intensity of feeling toward Imam Zaid. That she felt that these forms of relationality could be “worked on”

²¹⁶ Interview with Zahrah and Aminah, April 2011

and “figured out,” speaks to how she and other female students consciously experienced distance and intimacy simultaneously, and how such experiences and positionalities enabled them to think about how to engage such forms of relationality critically within Islamic frameworks. Zahrah articulates a possibility of “working on” the gendered aspects of seeking Islamic knowledge and being in relation to male students and scholars in ways that still uphold homosocial norms. She still desires to be within such bounds of pious behavior, yet she points to ways in which such bounds may be unnecessarily limiting and unegalitarian. At the same time, however, such boundaries also inculcate a particular recognition and gender consciousness for the young women of Zaytuna. They are especially aware of their passionate responses to teachers and each other, and they exercise self-discipline, not always self-directed, accordingly.

Zaytuna College in many ways is attempting to be a model for female and male students “to interact closely with scholars without there being an issue.”²¹⁷ While all the female students recognized that they were in a privileged space regarding their proximity to scholars and access to sacred knowledge, they still saw the ways in which they were slightly distanced. Brothers would receive individualized greetings and words of support, while sisters would often be grouped together as a single entity. In the classroom, though, the teachers would single out individual female students, addressing them by name and

²¹⁷ Such issues are typically unspoken, alluding to inappropriate gender mixing, sexual conduct, and influence. Gender mixing in and of itself is a debated issue, yet proscriptions regarding it tend to index the fear of illicit sexual activity and suspicions that can arise, thereby disrupting communal relations. Such gender relations are a critical issue for young Muslims throughout the country, where they are instructed to negate their sexualities, but then find a spouse and get married somehow. They avoid gender-mixing to “show respect” for each other, yet it often amounts to an upholding of Muslim women’s sexuality as especially sacred, vulnerable, and receptive (as opposed to active). As in the wider mainstream American culture, it is often young Muslim women who bear the brunt of societal expectations of maintaining cultural norms of piety and honor. At Zaytuna dating is prohibited, so instead students propose marriage, enabling courting within strictures mandated by consistently shifting and negotiated social norms. One distinction that a Muslim milieu assumes is the level of mutual respectability that should exist between men and women.

recognizing them as individuals. Hamza Yusuf would especially focus on individual students, both male and female, looking at them intensely with concern, asking “how they were doing.” Abdullah bin Hamid Ali was recognized by the students as being someone who especially addressed issues of gender and gender relations in terms of the reality of what was happening on the ground.²¹⁸ As many of his Mālikī fiqh students were female, he often found himself addressing female specific issues, and the young women felt that he did so in a matter of fact and frank ways.

The younger brothers I spoke to rarely recognized the gender differences. Such above encounters were subtle, but telling. They marked the unremarked upon ways that students recognized gender difference at the school, in ways that women students recognized more often than male students. In my interviews with students, I asked the brothers and sisters whether they thought their gender affected their experience at Zaytuna College. In most instances, the sisters were immediately able to articulate the differences, whether it was in terms of not being able to hug or high five their teachers or in terms of the differences in expectations and pressures regarding future roles as imams or community leaders. The brothers often did not consider the gendered natures of their experiences. They were not aware of the subtle differences of their experiences or did not quite know how to articulate how difference was experienced. They often did comment on how amazing they thought the sisters were (*Mashā’Allah*),²¹⁹ and all the students wondered about what their future leadership roles would look like.²²⁰

²¹⁸ This directness was usually appreciated, but at other times some students felt that the public nature of disciplinary advice/action was unethical. Pastoral and institutional roles at the school, especially in terms of student privacy, were constantly in flux and “violated” by teachers and students. As Zaytuna has hired more administrative and student affairs staff, such fuzzy territory and problematic arrangements have been reduced.

²¹⁹ *Mashā’Allah* can be translated as “God has willed it” and it is typically used to express an appreciation or recognition of God’s work in something good, joyous, or beautiful that has happened. For example, if one wants to complement another person’s appearance, personality, achievement, or item of clothing, the complement would be followed by “*Mashā’Allah*” to acknowledge God’s will as opposed to the

Salman told me about how his awakening in Islam was the result of his friendship with two young women at his mosque. They had participated in a youth program together as teenagers, and the girls' interest in sacred knowledge modeled for him a relationship to Islam he did not know was possible and to which he now aspired. He acknowledged that such male and female friendships may be looked upon with concern and suspicion in many Muslim communities, but he could not negate the fact that these friendships brought him closer to his faith. His intimate relationships across gendered and geographic distance continued during his time as a student at Zaytuna as they sent each other books and gifts, encouraging each other in their sacred pursuits.

Some sisters welcomed the differences they were afforded due to their gender. Aminah often discussed with her older brother his experiences with his teachers, and after one discussion she reflected on their different experiences:

I was happy that I was a lady, because sometimes, you know, when your shaykh is there, he kind of gives you that look, you know, either he's pleased with you or he kind of knows what is going on with you. But a lady, he usually won't look at for long periods of time, so you are kind of spared from that, like, intense glance. So, because my brother was telling me it was really intense...I was like "thank goodness, I'm a lady."²²¹

Because the women did not expect to become imams, they often felt less pressure about their future roles and responsibilities. Not necessarily having to provide financial support for a family in the future was also a potential relief. One student remarked that if she did not get married or have a career, she knew she could always count on her working class parents to support her. I was surprised by (and slightly envied) her sense of security

individual's. In the case above, the male students would use the phrase after praising the sisters to show respect and deflect any sense of inappropriate "appreciation" of them individually.

²²⁰ I do think that such (lack of) reflections were based on the fact that I asked this question of freshmen and sophomore male students. I think that by their senior year, most of the male students were very conscious that gender impacted their experiences, though perhaps not so much *how* it affected them.

²²¹ Aminah's use of "lady" also connotes a sense of being a woman who respects herself (by dressing, acting, and comporting herself in a particular manner) and likewise commands a certain respect.

and lack of a professional ambition that did not necessarily translate into a nonchalant or non-aspirational attitude towards her studies. Rather, she was especially serious, studious, and intellectually sophisticated, a liberated mind indeed. Aminah, at least during her first year, found that knowledge was knowledge, whether it came from a male or female scholar:

I feel like, at least for myself, like everything that I need is there. I just have to see how it fits into my own personality and kind of give it that “Aminah-touch,” I guess. I don’t necessarily feel like I’m missing out too much. Like, I don’t ever think like “Oh, I wish there was this female scholar.” Like although it would be nice, but I don’t feel like I’m necessarily, like “Oh my gosh, like I can’t move on with my studies like this...I can’t handle them all being males.” That never crosses my mind, really.

Over time, however, such ideas did cross her mind as she thought more about what kind of future she would have after Zaytuna. She felt like she needed to see and be in proximity to more women who embodied the Prophetic way of being, and she thought about traveling abroad to do so.

INTIMATE DISTANCE

When Shakir addresses the audience at the Ta’leef event, he mostly addresses the men’s side of the room. The women watch, listen, and witness this exchange, and experience it from an intimate distance. In my videos and photographs, I emphasize this distance and spatialization by showing the backs of both men and women’s heads, as well as the often mediated forms in which these spaces are negotiated. To compensate for distance or separate spaces, there are often live video or audio feeds to women’s sections. Showing how women experience these spaces draws attention to ways that engaged distance marks their experiences with male leadership and scholarship.

Because women were often further away from the imam or teacher, they had to engage in an “intense listening” to maintain focus on and attention to their words and

gestures. This type of hearing and seeing was not only cultivated and shaped by a “shared disciplinary context” but also by the distances and intimacies through which texts and sermons are experienced. These sensibilities “are not something purely cognitive but are rooted in the experience of the body in its entirety, as a complex of culturally and historically honed sensory modalities” (Hirschkind 2006:101). The spatial dimensions of one’s experiences thus affects how cognitive and bodily capacities are mutually developed and engaged. While intense listening across distance was easier in smaller spaces like Zaytuna College’s library or the Lighthouse Mosque, in other Muslim spaces this could be quite difficult.²²²

At the former Zaytuna Institute, students were separated horizontally by gender with wooden arabesque lattice dividers standing between them. This seating arrangement was later taken up by the Ta’leef Collective, although the dividers were short bookshelves, enabling sight lines across the space. These same dividers were later used in the Zaytuna classroom ornamentally to break the monotony of the white walls and the eraser-board. These fixtures added an “Islamic aesthetic” to the otherwise nondescript classroom, giving the teachers and students a more visually-pleasing space while also providing Haroon, the camera person a better framing for his documentation of teachers’ lectures. The frames also lent the space a sense of continuity from the original Institute to its new formation as a College. Other aesthetic elements also made the journey north from Hayward to Berkeley, including an elaborately carved wooden door that Sister Khadija and her husband had converted into an elegant glass-topped table that now sits in the library, often laden with books, laptops, and students’ elbows.

²²² For instance the Friday congregational prayer at UC Berkeley was held in a gym on campus. The hard wood floors and concrete walls created an echo chamber in which a khaṭīb’s words often became quite muffled by the time they reached the women’s section. I would find myself and others straining to understand what was being said in the front corner of the room. Despite intentions and efforts to hear the khuṭba , acoustics and distance sometimes got in the way.

The Ta'leef Collective refers to itself as a "third space," although I do not know if they are familiar with Edward Soja's (1996) concept of "thirdspace." Both uses articulate the need to think through space critically in relation to its historical and lived materialities and possibilities of living in other ways. Soja's use of bell hooks' claiming of the "margins" as a strategic space, speaks to the "fringe" quality of a space like Ta'leef within a wider American Islamic landscape. Ta'leef staff members refer to it as a "third space" in terms of it not being a mosque, home, or school with particular notions of what is appropriate. This enables Ta'leef to welcome a wide swath of individuals who may feel alienated by or not welcome at mosques while still providing Islamic knowledge, guidance, and a sense of community. Ta'leef staff stress that people "come as you are to Islam as it is," meaning that this is a space of non-judgment, but also a space where Islam is not negotiated or compromised to fit individual or societal needs or expectations. While Islam is flexible, there are certain "non-negotiables."

"Third spaces" like Ta'leef Collective maintain gender-designated spaces that are more egalitarian in that the speaker sits elevated in the center of the room while men sit to his right and women sit to his left on the carpeted floor, separated by hip-level open bookcases. Usama Canon has stated that women in the community had requested this seating arrangement. Separate seating enables women to sit more comfortably (there is often more space in the women's section), and children run back and forth between the two sections, as older children and young men and women serve tea and pastries.²²³

Such alternative seating arrangements are conscious, and at times contentious, efforts to think through the impact of space and spatial relations. Just as Hamza Yusuf and others were aesthetically conscious in the design of spaces and products, as well as

²²³ One can see traces of the Nation of Islam in such a seating arrangement, where men and women sat in their separate sections, although in chairs, itself a transformation of church pew arrangements. This seating arrangement is also seen in Morocco and other majoritarian Muslim countries.

their own self-representation, there is also a consciousness of how people experience space in terms of aesthetics, gender, authority, learning, and culture. By bringing Arabic calligraphy and graffiti together, by serving tea and pastries, by burning oud,²²⁴ and lining the walls with cushions, spaces like Ta'leef treat their congregations like guests, guests who are encountering an Islam that is more than just legal rulings (although those legal rulings are fundamental).²²⁵

During the first student orientation at Zaytuna College, the students were assembled in three long rows in which the male students sat in the first row, while the female students took up the second and third rows. Within the first week of classes this mosque-like seating arrangement was quickly subverted. Male students took the rear rows, while the female students sat in the front. Hamza Yusuf had the students rearrange the desks into more of a semicircle in which students sat in pairs. While they initially sat in same sex sets of two, they later sat in mixed pairs at times, depending on what seats were available when particular students arrived in class. After one pair of students became engaged, they always sat together. Female and male students sat in both the front and back rows of the classroom, providing students with their desired proximities to their teachers.

By not replicating more typical American mosque formations (men in front, women in the back or in a separate room), Zaytuna and Ta'leef suggest that there are other ways to enact gender specific spaces and consequently, attitudes about and practices of gender. Seeking knowledge is a duty for all Muslims. Because there seems to

²²⁴ Oud is aloeswood typically found in parts of Southeast Asia and the Middle East that can be burned as wood or oil. It is used ceremonially, medicinally, and in everyday practice. Oudimentary, a company that sells oud in multiple forms from multiple countries was founded by Usama Canon and Micah Anderson in Oakland in 2004. See www.oudimentary.com.

²²⁵ Canon, with the assistance of his volunteer staff and community members, incorporates North African and Arab practices of hospitality, Moroccan tea with American pastries, while also articulating the “cultural imperative” of Islam that accommodates “American culture.”

be a dearth of female Islamic scholars in the United States, Zaytuna and related organizations see the education of women as paramount in addressing attitudes about gender and the roles of women in both public and private spheres. I say “seems to be” because there actually are many female Islamic scholars in the United States, and there are critiques directed towards institutions like Ta’leef and Zaytuna for not promoting more female scholars (or particular types of female scholars) to positions of power and visibility.²²⁶ At the same time, some of these female scholars do not aspire to such positions and are reluctant to be public figures. Whether their refusal comes from hegemonic or personal notions of female piety and modesty, a sense of maintaining private spaces for female scholarship, or a sense of having responsibilities elsewhere, their personal decisions, institutional possibilities, and social expectations are a complex web of power and private relations.

Cultivating “feminine links of cooperation” or education that are “independent of those formed by the male’s kindred of cooperation” may, following tradition, “operate to redress the balance of power between men and women” (Nelson 1974:557).²²⁷ There is often a critique of women who whisper and talk in the back of masjids or gatherings, understating an assumption that they are not as devout or pious as men, or not held to equal responsibilities in terms of Islamic learning. When one cannot hear the teaching or

²²⁶ There are a number of female (and male) scholars situated in American and European universities who are often considered “outside the fold” of a “traditional” or “orthodox” Islam. This includes women like Amina Wadud and Leila Ahmed who received varying amounts of “traditional” versus “secular” Islamic scholarship. The dynamics at play in terms of which female scholars are deemed “authentic” and “authoritative” has as much to do with the ways they interpret Islamic texts and their relationships to and compartments within particular Muslim communities. When Zaytuna College invited Dr. Zareena Grewal of Yale University to deliver the address at the fourth convocation, they made an indirect statement about the potentiality of drawing knowledge from women educated outside particular channels (despite the fact that Grewal had sat with scholars in Egypt, Syria, and Michigan). Who authorizes such claims for whom is perhaps the more important line of questioning and speaks to the potential in the politics of citation.

²²⁷ Nelson quotes Tapper (1968) who gives the example of Mashadis in Iran whose opinions “in matters of family law and custom are sought by both men and women and her advice is given equal weight with that of a man” (Nelson 1974:558).

the khuṭba or when one is not given space to be there, how should one (re)act? By the same token, when women are rarely “seen” as Muslim scholars or leaders, there is perhaps less aspiration, desire, or encouragement of younger women and their families to pursue such roles and training.

Much of my research at these sites was from the perspective of women’s spaces, whether the women’s section at a mosque, a community center, or in the Zaytuna library. It was also in women-only or in women-dominated gatherings. The exceptions were interviews and portraits I did with students and staff, as well as the classrooms of Zaytuna, which were always mixed, left to right, front to back. The library was a shifting space, at times seating was mixed, at other times, it was quite gendered.²²⁸ Much like in my discussion of Imam Zaid’s hugs, this was a situation of which the young women were especially aware. The young men were not usually conscious of these subtle differences in their mutual experiences of the different learning spaces. Matthew, the student life coordinator was quite aware of the issue, however, and he often wondered about how to be proactive in creating egalitarian experiences for the brothers and sisters.

We need to understand as a community, the default is that sisters are not welcome, they don’t have much access to scholars and to knowledge, and so we need to think a bit more almost like affirmative action, you know like doing a bit more to balance it out, by kind of involving the Sisters a bit more.

²²⁸ Because the library was also the *muṣalā* (the place in which prayers would be done), the seating would sometimes replicate that arrangement, brothers in the front, sisters in the back. If a class was happening in the library, there was less attention to seating when there was a lot of space, but more often than not, students were organized by gender. Both students and teachers were aware of these distinctions and wondered about how to shift the seating arrangements in the library to better replicate the classroom, rather than the mosque, especially during teaching moments. Students did not seem especially bothered by gendered seating as long as they were equidistant from the teacher. In the mosque, most women I spoke to preferred separated prayer halls in which they sat and prayed behind the men in the same room, as opposed to prayer halls in which they were in separate rooms or were behind a curtain or screen. This was not everyone’s preference, however, there were other women who given the choice would prefer to pray behind some type of barrier between them and the men.

I think when I say these things, I say it more in terms of dynamics and some feelings that can develop, but in terms of the day to day things, many of the Sisters here are leaders, just as much if not more so than the Brothers are...but still there's a potential for dynamics to develop, especially when we have some classes in the prayer room, or around prayer times, when the Brothers are just right up front next to the scholars, and the Sisters are ten feet back. We have to be proactive in terms of balancing out the effect that that can have on the dynamic.

Matthew expressed that part of his understanding of such issues came from being in conversation with his Muslim wife. By listening to her and by thinking about her experiences as a woman in the same spaces, he came to have greater understanding and consideration for the female students' experiences. In Islam marriage is considered half the *deen*. This is one of the most significant relationships one will have in a Muslim life, and understanding and relating to one's spouse and his or her gendered experience enhances one's ethical capacities in terms of social relations outside the home as well. If one is not married, however, how does one then learn to understand gendered difference?²²⁹ The work that scholars and students are doing in terms of drawing attention to racial and ethnic difference could be a model for how to draw attention to how differences in gender and sexuality are experienced in and impact everyday life as well.

The distance of space was likewise felt in texts, where the assumed reader was typically male. Female students had to traverse gendered distances when reading texts that were rarely written with them in mind as readers (although their teachers would often mention that pronoun usage in Arabic often implied both sexes in the use of male pronouns). This was similarly or doubly encountered by teachers and students who were similarly "othered" in texts that discussed race and ethnicity. African American students

²²⁹ The significance of heterosexual marriage in Muslim social formation and ideas about and performances of gender are important issues in American Muslim communities, yet I do not want to discount or diminish other forms of relationality across gender. Parent and sibling relationships, as well as friendships and media discourses, are foundational and potentially critical sources of knowledge about gendered difference and expectations. Matthew is also particular in his receptivity to his wife's words and experiences; his notions of Muslim marriage and gender relations are not so entrenched in cultural norms, whether a particular Muslim or American culture.

and scholars had to navigate racializing and racist texts written in previous centuries. While Muslims often assert that there is no racism in Islam, this does not discount the-through contemporary eyes—racist attitudes and commentary that pervade in texts and practices, both historical and contemporary.

Abdul Malik, an African American student asked Hamza Yusuf, his white American teacher, why such texts continued to be passed on and taught when they contained explicitly racist views. For Abdul Malik, this was one category by which to judge the validity or legitimacy of a scholar's works and adherence to the *dīn*. His question was a sincere, critical, and potentially complex legal question that was also a challenge to what place the "tradition" should hold. In this particular case, Yusuf cited that the writer was a man of his time and that he shared the majority opinions of his time; they would need to contextualize and situate such writings historically. Abdul Malik accepted this answer, but still seemed unconvinced. Professor Abdullah Ali, who like Yusuf is a *Mālikī* scholar, but is also an African American is taking up the issue as part of his doctoral work. He has had similar concerns about such texts despite his immense belief in and upholding of the scholarly tradition. For his doctoral research, he is interested in examining notions of race within the *Mālikī* tradition, particularly important because the *Mālikī* tradition is dominant in North and West Africa, and its texts have global impact.

Such encounters with texts and with attitudes of racism force a kind of double and triple consciousness for Muslims who must engage with and potentially submit to scholarship within their faith, a most intimate relationship, with a suspended sense of what resonates personally as truth. In some ways, it assists them in a gnostic pursuit of negating the self, but if knowing thyself is essential to knowing God, then knowing thyself as less than leaves some critical questions for the tradition and one's place within

it. This distancing and complex consciousness towards space, tradition, and text can be a great reserve of critical inquiry and possibility when engaged within knowledge-based practices and discursive traditions that cultivate, rather than silence difference and critique.

Michel Foucault discusses the possibilities of relational rights in thinking through homosexuality and a potential gay culture that suggests other forms of relationality (Foucault and Rabinow 1997:161-3). As (upper and middle class white) gay culture becomes increasingly characterized by “a new homonormativity” (Duggan 2003) and “homo-nationalism” (Puar 2007), the alternative potentialities of monosexual forms of relationality become increasingly marginalized. Turning notions of relational sexual rights to gendered space, is there a way of thinking about gender specific spaces and relational forms as a Muslim queering of American gender relations and gendered space? Must we always relegate gender separation as a backward thinking, conservative space, or can we think about it as a relational right that suggests other possibilities of agency and being with?²³⁰

I spoke with a female Muslim scholar who was uncomfortable with the prospect of teaching men in a time when women’s Islamic education was lacking in the American landscape, let alone a global Islamoscape. There was something significant and powerful

²³⁰ I realize that this consideration of queer theory as a way to think about Muslim communities may seem theoretically disconnected, considering that most Zaytuna scholars have majority tradition-based points of view on issues like what defines marriage and particular sexual acts. They draw attention to the ways that their religious opinions are distinct from their abidance of “secular law,” and the distinction between same sex desire and particular sexual acts from the position of Islamic law. Increasingly, Muslim leaders’ point of views on homosexuality have been used as a litmus test of their modern and liberal potentiality, as well as their abilities to lead a liberal arts college (Korb 2013, Romig 2013). Such attention and compulsion to discourse is another “frame of war” in terms of ways of categorizing Muslims, seeing their opinions as static, and further limiting our understandings of gender and sexuality to what is defined by state law. The ways in which liberal, state, and particular feminist discourses often frame appropriate forms of gender relations and sexuality often maligns Muslim populations and practices as deviant, illiberal, and unmodern (See Puar 2007, Rana 2011). Queer theory allows for a space to think through other forms of relationality being negotiated within multiple authoritative frameworks.

that she was working to maintain and preserve, and she did not seek the type of visibility to which male Muslim scholars are often drawn into or see as a necessary part of their da'wa. Throughout my research I met and heard about a number of women scholars who teach in relative anonymity, yet command immense respect and adoration in their female students and male counterparts. They are typically opposed to being audio or video recorded, thereby limiting the potential for their becoming Muslim media personalities (like many of the male Zaytuna scholars). Their preference for relative anonymity marks a particular form of relationality that stands against liberal notions of what the potentiality of female scholarship should be. As Muslim women seek greater "equality" in Muslim spaces, it is important to consider what it would mean to keep such notions of gender separation, privacy, and intimacy intact. When equality is common sensically relegated to a visibility politics, what other forms of egalitarianism are left behind? Is there a way to think through ways to fight domestic abuse, sexual harassment, war, occupation, health disparities, poverty, and marginalization through alternative structures of the political?

In a time when we "see" everything, all the time, there is a power to the unseen. When our lives are so public, what is held in the reserves of the private? I do not want to reify notions of public (political) and private (domestic) realms that are distinct and determined. Nor do I want to reify thinking of gender through a man/woman binary, which Afsaneh Najmabadi suggests is a "very modern imperative" (Najmabadi 2005:3).²³¹ Rather, I would like to reinvigorate Diane Nelson's analysis of the private and

²³¹ In Najmabadi's work and others, there are numerous contemporary and historical examples of a more fluid and complex gender spectrum and performative modes in Muslim-majority societies. Such social realities consistently undermine attempts to reinforce particular binaries and the attendant dominant Islamic legal perspectives on gender and sexuality. The incitement to discourse regarding sexuality (Foucault 1978) that has extended into the twenty-first century in particular ways situates sexuality in the public and legal sphere as legislative forms that shift alternative homosocialities towards homonormativities that are registered in a politics of visibility and moralizing frameworks of the nuclear family, rather than more

public as gendered spaces of reciprocity and negotiation that complicate liberal expectations and understandings of visibility and representation as markers of equality (that do not necessarily translate into equal power, agency, or improved material realities “behind the scenes”). In her analysis Nelson recognizes “segregated social worlds, but rather than seeing this as a severe limitation on women, the evidence suggests that the segregation of women can alternatively be seen as an exclusion of men from a range of contacts which women have among themselves” (1974:559).²³²

THE SIDES OF A SCREEN/SCENE

I had heard the story of Imam Malik’s daughter Fatima on a number of occasions.²³³ She had memorized his great work *Al-Muwatta* and was a transmitter of the text. As Imam Malik ibn Anas (d.795) would conduct his lessons, Fatima would listen from behind a door and tap with her nail when his students made errors in their recitation. Imam Malik would understand the tapping and make corrections to the student. This story was told by male scholars at Zaytuna to express their admiration for female scholarship both historically and in the contemporary moment, in which they recognized the intelligence and diligence of female students. The story was also told as an expression

communal and ethical forms of relationality that may continue to emphasize the importance of family, but in perhaps more flexible terms.

²³² During Ramadan in 2011, Bassam Tariq and Aman Ali of “30 Mosques” ventured into a women’s section of a mosque in Arkansas. There was heated debate and tension both within the blog posting and the comments section regarding their stepping into that space with no prior announcement (they received authorization, although from whom Bassam does not say. In many ways, their entering the space demonstrated an attitude about women’s space as being dictated by men as a limitation to women’s freedom, as opposed to a space that excluded men. Because they may have understood the making of women’s space as a male project (or felt ambivalent about separate gendered space), they felt empowered in crossing its borders. That most women were kind and hospitable to them spoke more to the women’s hospitality than to the young men’s right to be there. See <http://30mosques.com/2011/08/mind-the-space/>

²³³ Besides conversations and classrooms, there is a recorded example in a video of Hamza Yusuf published in 2011 - *The Daughter of Imam Malik by Sheikh Hamza Yusuf*. I don’t know when the actual lecture occurred, however.

of Imam Malik's daughter's modesty in that she "taught" from behind a screen and with the tapping of her finger.

When a female scholar told me this story again, she told it in terms of the "sway" that scholars have over their students and its potential danger when the teaching was done across gender. In that telling what is drawn attention to is the vulnerability of male students to the potential power and effect of a female scholar over them. That young women more commonly study with male scholars may speak to an essentialist assessment of young women's abilities to parse out a teacher's sway intellectually from other potential realms of influence, as well as a male scholar's own ability to be conscious of and responsible to his potential influence. Such power relations between student and teacher are not unique to the Islamic tradition, past or present, and Muslim scholars were aware of the types of monosexual forms of relationality that occurred in pedagogic settings in ancient Greece. Afsaneh Najmabadi writes of the ways that gender and sexuality were complexly nuanced in Iran until the "heteronormalization of eros and sex became a condition of 'achieving modernity,' a project that called for heterosocialization of public space and a reconfiguration of family life" (Najmabadi 2005:3). Relationships between teachers and students were impacted by such social shifts in category and practice. Teacher-student relationships, manipulation, undue influence, and scandals remain fodder for modern literature and news headlines. The intimacy and trust involved in teaching and learning are important ethical considerations in the shaping of *any* school.

Female scholars demonstrate a critical aspect of feminist pedagogy in that they very consciously consider how *who* they are affects how and what they teach. That they are engaged in maintaining a tradition of female scholarship speaks to their commitment of creating subjects rather than objects of knowledge that have a transformative impact on the world and the people around them. It is important to distinguish here between

forms of knowledge and particular approaches to them. Zaytuna does currently have a number of women lecturers who teach both male and female students in courses like Arabic (at the Summer Intensive), English, Rhetoric, Ancient Civilizations, and Philosophy. While Ustadha Rania at Zaytuna teaches both men and women in her professional life as a resident in psychiatry at Stanford University, her preference for teaching only women in subjects of sacred knowledge (Shāfi‘ī fiqh and women’s fiqh) is significant and speaks to the particularity of the relationships that develop in the transmission of sacred knowledge. What would it mean for women teachers at Zaytuna to teach sacred subjects to men from behind a screen or door as Imam Malik’s daughter Fatima had done? How would such forms of pedagogy impact young male students? What would it enable for female students? How would such designations reify or transform our notions of gendered forms of relationality, visibility, space, and power? Such distances and intimacies do point out that regardless of the “sacredness” of knowledge, human fallibilities and vulnerabilities were always and continue to be at the forefront of institutionalization and normative practices.

In *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Visweswaran argues that one “cannot assume the willingness of women to talk, and that one avenue open to [feminist ethnography] is an investigation of when and why women do talk—assessing what strictures are placed on their speech, what avenues of creativity they have appropriated, what degrees of freedom they possess” (1994:30). Saba Mahmood describes how pious Muslim women’s willingness to submit forces us to rethink the liberal subject and forms of agency (2005). Abu-Lughod likewise challenges us to think resistance differently, as a diagnostic of power rather than romantic trope (1990). Visweswaran suggests a kind of agency in which resistance can be framed by silence, a refusal to speak, a being-represented-as subject refusal (1994:51). This space of critique and critical agency forces

us to consider our attempts to describe, name, historicize, and locate subjects within particular frames.

Throughout my research I came across men and women who refused to speak and become subject, or placed conditions upon the circumstances of their speaking and subject-making. Some because they had “bad” experiences with journalists and writers, others because they did not yet trust their own abilities to express themselves or my ability to express them. Still for others, it related to a particular way of being in the world, an increasingly mediated world that beckons (perhaps demands) one to “expose” and represent oneself in increasingly public ways.²³⁴

During the “Tranquility Amidst Turbulence” tour, Ḥabīb ‘Umar did a women’s event at a mosque in an East Bay suburb. He was introduced by an Arab American female scholar who had studied with him and other Ḥabā’ib in Tarim. I had observed a group of women in *niqāb* (face veil) at many of the events, and she was of the more prominent with chic bejeweled sunglasses perched on her head. I had been audio-recording and taking video and photographs at many of the tour events. I asked one of her students if she would be okay with me audio-recording her introduction. Her student stated that her teacher would not want to be recorded in any way, but that she appreciated that I had asked for permission, obliquely implying that people often attempted to record her without asking permission.

Sitting there in the front row, I listened to her describe her first experiences in Tarim. How her son who had been studying there begged her to wear a *niqāb* while she visited because this was how things were done there. She expressed her initial shock and reticence at such a request. Why should she? She was a pious Muslim woman, a grown

²³⁴ Consider the calls for “moderate” Muslim voices to speak to Islamic terrorism, the compulsion/incitement to speak for, to speak to, to speak about Muslims.

woman with young adult children! When she arrived in Tarim, however, she became in awe of the women there. “I want to be like these women...who is their teacher?” She wanted what these women had, what they expressed in their eyes, their walks, their words, and their ways of being. She covered her face and began her studies with the Ḥabā’ib.

In her introduction/lesson, after uncovering her face for her female audience, she described how Ḥabīb ‘Umar affected and changed her as a woman, how she “tasted things I never tasted in my life before...the smell, [the] taste of the Prophet.” She beseeched us, her audience of women, to erase our sins and turn our hearts, to recognize the

light in this *majlis* (gathering)...not only for you, but for all the women out there...When you look to the face of the walī (representative), they have *imān* (faith) and they have *taqwā* (God-consciousness)...Allah chose you from the Umma. This is a moment as if you are in heaven. You are sitting in *Janna* (heaven) now.

It is striking how she urges the female students to look to the face of the walī (here she is referring to Ḥabīb ‘Umar), while she emphasizes what she saw in women whose faces she could not initially see. They were able to express such imān in their eyes, walks, words, and ways of being. She spoke of a legacy of knowledge in which Muslim women were connected to “the mothers of the believers and his pure daughters” and Khadijah who held a “most abundant knowledge.” A woman “should take her portion by gaining knowledge” and engaging in pious deeds, “through this she is affirming the meanings of love...and defending the sacred law.” She urged us to consider our intentions as we sat in this majlis, to gain benefit from it and to recognize our privilege in and accountability to being able to experience such a gathering, to be in the proximity of a walī. Much like Haroon Sellar’s experience with Usama Canon (student of Hamza

Yusuf), which I discuss in Chapter Seven, I gained an understanding of Ḥabīb ‘Umar through my experience of his student, this female scholar; I received my lesson for the day.²³⁵

For the last twenty years, this sister has been teaching classes in the Middle East, the East Coast, Southern California, and online. She does not produce the videos and audio-recordings that would bring her more visibility and wider audiences and popularity. She has devoted female students and has the respect of male scholars who know of her education and influence. In her biographies on websites, she names the men she has studied with as a form of authentication of her scholarly credentials. These are her public teachers. My initial reaction to encountering sisters like her and Ustadha Rania who currently teaches the female students at Zaytuna was “why aren’t they more public in their teaching?” Many people grumble about the lack of female scholars at national events and conferences. They wish there was more “equal” representation in Islamic leadership.

When women are in public roles, there is a noticeable prominence of white women who have converted to Islam in such roles,²³⁶ women who often pursued their educations and social roles prior to converting (like Ingrid Mattson, former president of the Islamic Society of North America [ISNA], former professor at the Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, now at the University of Waterloo). While the female students at Zaytuna did not initially feel impeded by the lack of female scholars, they also agreed that male

²³⁵ There is an oft-recited story about an old man who would travel a great distance everyday to sit with a scholar. His daughter would always accompany him. One day he stopped part of the way there because he needed to relieve himself. His daughter gave him advice about how to position himself to not soil his garments. When he was finished, he turned back to the direction of their home. When she asked him why, he told her that he already learned something that day. This story was told to express how knowledge did not always have to come from some great scholar, it could also come from a young girl. This story also spoke to the old man’s ability to recognize knowledge as knowledge.

²³⁶ This observation was mentioned to me by a number of women and men in the field.

students would benefit greatly from taking sacred knowledge from women. In questioning my own reactions and expectations, I had to consider that these private teachers were well aware of such issues, and they had their reasons for controlling their mediated and public presences. Keeping things for the sacred?²³⁷

One frame for thinking about the da‘wa work that Muslim men and women are engaged in is to consider it as movement-building work. It is only in the last few decades that the work of African American women in the American civil rights movement has come to the fore. Women like Ella Baker worked “behind the scenes” building movements of young people and coordinating the work for which male public figures like Dr. Martin Luther King, James Farmer, and Stokely Carmichael received much of the credit and glory (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001, Ransby 2003). The Black Panther Party also depended on the work of key female figures who did much of the organizing of campaigns and social projects (Brown 1992, McGuire 2010). Recent ethnographies specifically about Muslim women (Deeb 2006, Go‘le 1996, Hafez 2011, Kanaaneh 2002, Khalili 2007, Mahmood 2005, Rouse 2004) articulate the way Muslim women are active agents in imparting knowledge, organizing for social and political justice, cultivating ethical subjectivities, and impacting the lives of their respective communities, though they are not well-known figures like their male counterparts. For example, at Lighthouse Mosque in North Oakland, Sister Alice founded and administers a weekly community feeding program in East Oakland in which hot meals and groceries are distributed to a mostly non-Muslim population. She is not necessarily considered a “leader” of the

²³⁷ Hamza Yusuf essentializes the sacredness of women in a number of his lectures, while Annemarie Schimmel writes about how it is through a woman’s eyes, Khadija’s, that revelation and the sacred were recognized. Khadija was the one who calmed the Prophet Muhammad when he was unsure of the Angel Gabriel’s visit. She made him “see” (Schimmel 1997). (See also *Power of a Woman Shaykh Hamza Yusuf*, 2011. film) The Zaytuna students’ blog also describes Khadija’s role in “Khadijah Knew” <http://zaytunies.tumblr.com/post/6028403521/khadijaknew>

community, although she has provided consistent long-term leadership in this on-the-ground service program.

As Diane Nelson pointed out over forty years ago, we must recognize the “ongoing dialectical process of social life in which both men and women are involved in a reciprocity of influence *vis-a-vis* each other” (Nelson 1974:554). Men and women are always in relation and in negotiation. Realms of private and public are transgressed in instances of necessity. A good example of this was the video by the young Egyptian Asmaa Mahfouz who called upon Egyptian men to act upon their culturally prescribed gender roles by defending women against potential attacks in Tahrir Square. Men’s ethical responsibilities to women were already failing, such that women felt a compulsion to speak out. They were already activists in their communities, but this was a “going public” of another sort. Zaid Shakir assigned the students to watch the Mahfouz video for homework, and he briefly discussed the Islamic terms of her political address and the fact that her actions had been instrumental to Egypt’s burgeoning revolution. In another class, Hamza Yusuf stated that after centuries of stewardship perhaps it was time for Muslim women to take the mantle of Islamic scholarship. What would this look like?²³⁸

Shirin, a freshman at Zaytuna College had declined to participate in one-on-one interviews for my dissertation research, but when I approached her about the film portraits, she expressed interest in participating. I was surprised by her willingness and enthusiasm about being filmed since I had previously associated her disinterest in interviews as a shyness and reticence about her own self-representation (she actively

²³⁸ At the same time, a boycott was recently instituted against Fatima Mojahed, an American Muslim *da’iya*, in Dewbery, England, where she was a featured speaker in a Muslim women’s gathering. The critique is that she is a woman who does not practice *purdah* and is seen laughing and joking in videos to mixed audiences. Imam Tahir Anwar (a San Jose-based imam who teaches at Zaytuna College) posted a reaction from British ‘ulama in support of Mojahed. This incident demonstrates both the wide range of opinions regarding female scholars and the potential critiques Zaytuna scholars and students will face based on the co-education, gender-mixing, and promotion of particular forms of female scholarship.

participated in group interviews, however). Shirin's disposition was quiet and thoughtful, both in the classroom and in social settings. She was cautious with her words and conscious of the spaces she occupied. Yet, she also had a playfulness that emerged in her everyday self-expression and situations of performance. In her description of Oscar Wilde and what drew her to her particular textual choice, she spoke of his manner, "he's a flashy guy," as he posed in cape and floppy chapeau on the cover of the used paperback she picked up at a bookstore. She was drawn to poetry, theater, and performance. For her final project at Zaytuna's Arabic Intensive two years before, she and a classmate had dressed up as men, donning mustaches and turbans to perform a comedic dialogue in Arabic.

I realized that for Shirin, the prospect of imagining herself through an other person's words, let alone a particularly witty and flamboyant nineteenth-century Irish writer and poet, was a thrilling prospect. Her desire to read poetry for her portrait, and her choice of Wilde's "Tristitia" articulated an ecumenical approach to self-making and self-representation.²³⁹ She articulated her own God-consciousness and directionality towards God through Wilde, "But well for him whose foot hath trod/ the weary road of toil and strife/Yet from the sorrows of his life/ builds ladders to be nearer God." The poem speaks to the virtues of suffering, striving, and reflecting as a way "to be nearer God," in a world where an other "...lives at ease/ with garnered gold in wide domain/ nor heeds the splashing of the rain/ the crashing down of forest trees." Wilde articulates for Shirin a way she desires to be in the world, paying attention to not only the workings of nature by way of the rain and forest trees, but also "the travail of the hungry years/ a father grey with grief and tears/ a mother weeping all alone." Her ethical self-making is

²³⁹ Most likely the genitive form of *tristitia*, meaning sadness, sorrow, melancholy or the sad state of things. Shirin did not know the meaning of the title at the time she performed the poem with me.

shaped through her recognition of a kindred spirit in Wilde, one who recognizes that there are different ways to be in the world. Both Wilde and Shirin's performances within the world simultaneously relate processes of individuation through disposition, affect, and dress and processes of relationality through seeing God's natural and human creations in all their glory, suffering, and cycles of life and death.

Shirin was not the only student who appreciated Oscar Wilde; his books were present on many shelves in the girls' apartments. Shirin and other students' appreciation for Oscar Wilde represents another aspect of their abilities to traverse intimate distance. Poetry is an especially intimate form that "travels,"²⁴⁰ and its esteemed position as a language art within Islamic tradition is well known. The poetry club at Zaytuna is perhaps its most active amongst both male and female students. The female students were also attracted to Wilde's wit and humor and his acute attention to the mannerisms of people and social performance. They were able to relate to and admire his classical education, the moral strictures of Victorian life, and also perhaps, his articulations of difference in his everyday ethical practices and observations.²⁴¹

"Life's ideal is love; it's purification is sacrifice" – Oscar Wilde. Zahrah posted this quote on her blog, amidst sayings from her teachers, Islamic scholars, poets, writers, and suras from the Quran. Wilde's ethical sensibilities and similar aspirations towards truth and purification found common company in philosophers and jurists of the Islamic tradition. The students' appreciation of and identity through Oscar Wilde speaks to the

²⁴⁰ I am reminded here of Ruth Forman's "Poetry Should Ride the Bus" (1993).

²⁴¹ I do not know if the students were aware of his being a significant historical and literary figure regarding "the love that dare not speak its name," although any quick research would soon reveal these associations. The students were quite conscious of debates about homosexuality both within the wider American context and within Islam. They raised the issue in their Islamic law classes, as well as in gatherings with scholars elsewhere. Members of the community had family members and friends who identified as gay, and they struggled to negotiate majority teachings about sodomy as an act as distinct from same sex desires and relationships.

(often unspoken) tensions and potential openings regarding gender and gender performance in spaces that are often over-determined as oppressively patriarchal.²⁴² While the students are not necessarily seeking out such connections, they are ecumenically able to seek out wisdom and models of sacrifice and God-consciousness across diverse waters.

QUEER KINO-EYE

Following the Sunna in which the Prophet Muhammad would name inanimate things, I named my Canon 7D camera “Nour” (Nūr) which means “light” in Arabic. While I did not consider it at the time, naming my camera “Nour” spoke to the gender flexibility of Nour, the camera. While “Nour” is considered a masculine word, it is a name often given to women, as well as the more overtly feminine form, “Noura.” Nour, was a license to traverse spaces, to occupy space differently by virtue of being connected to this apparatus, the kino-eye, without gender (Vertov and Michelson 1984). Like light itself, Nour was able to travel. During the fajr classes in the library, I sometimes moved behind Nour and my tripod and left the women’s space, which was towards the back of

²⁴² In *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (2005), Khaled El-Rouayheb examines a multitude of feelings, understandings, expressions, and actions that were theoretically, legally, and practically categorized and understood before the concept of “homosexuality” took root in both the Arab-Islamic world and in the West. El-Rouayheb argues that the discrepancies in use and the inadequacies of description of the blanket terms “homosexuality” and the related derogatory Arabic term “*shudhudh jinsi*” (sexual perversion) that emerged in the 1940s or 50s fail to elucidate the diverse range of behaviors and attitudes that existed in the Arab-Islamic world prior to the late 19th century. Amongst the failures of such terms were the lack of distinction between active and passive sexual partners, “passionate but chaste love and carnal lust,” and permissible and prohibited acts according to Islamic law. El-Rouayheb contends that seeking out these distinctions provides us with a more accurate and nuanced view of the “multiplicity of ideals” that existed in the periods and regions he researched namely the urban centers of the Ottoman Empire - Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Mosul, Baghdad, Mecca, and Medina (153-155). The contemporary liberal litmus test regarding Muslim views on homosexuality or gay marriage attempt to assimilate Islamic legal traditions to particularly modern notions of gender and sexuality, such that early and contemporary nuances and contradictions are obscured. One example of such complexity are the Iranian Shi’i legal rulings on sex change operations, which reify gender roles and heterosexuality while complicating the biology of sex and the experience of gender.

the library, and entered the *barzakh* (an intermediary realm) space in between the genders (Mittermaier 2011). Off to the side, Nour and I would film brothers from the side or from directly behind them and the sisters from in front of them and to the side. The only time we filmed brothers from in front in such a space was when we filmed a portrait of a former seminary student as he led the tarawih prayers during Ramadan.²⁴³

Ebad and I discussed how we would achieve such a shot while respecting the rules of prayer in such a way that would be acceptable to all those who would be praying behind him. Following his graduation from the pilot seminary program at Zaytuna, Ebad enrolled as an undergraduate at New York University's Gallatin School. He was an active member of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) at NYU, and he returned to the Bay Area every summer to be a teaching assistant in the Summer Arabic Intensive at Zaytuna. When I asked him what he would like to read for his portrait and when we should film it, he suggested that I should film him reciting the tarawih prayers at NYU during Ramadan. He thought that the verses of Surah Yusuf (the twelfth sura) would be especially fitting since it was one of his favorite sections of the Qur'an. Since he was a *hāfiẓ* (one who has by way of memorization preserved the Qur'an) of the Qur'an, he felt that it made sense for him to choose something from the Qur'an. But how would we go about filming?

After receiving approval from Imam Khalid Latif of NYU's Islamic Center and announcing the recording to the congregation, Ebad and I figured out the layout of the shot. In order to pray in the direction of Mecca, Ebad had to lead the prayer from a dimly-lit corner of the room. There wasn't space for me to stand to the side, and I really wanted a frontal shot of Ebad and the congregation, since this would formally resemble other

²⁴³ Tarawih prayers are night prayers done during the month of Ramadan in which the entirety of the Qur'an is recited. Each night about 1/30th (a *juz'*) of the Qur'an is recited (sometimes more sometimes less, depending on the conditions of the prayer leaders/reciters, the length of the prayer, nights assumed to be left in the month, availability of the prayer space, and so forth).

portraits I had done. While Nour and the tripod were a partial barrier between myself and Ebad, neither of us was particularly comfortable with me standing in front of him as he led prayer (even a brother standing in front of him, despite the tripod, would have been uncomfortable, distracting, and possibly nullifying of the prayer). We determined that I would set up the shot press “record” and then move behind the Brothers. Because the tarawih recitation is longer than a usual prayer, I would need to restart the recording after Nour automatically shut it off after twelve minutes. We decided that I would run up between *rak'ats* (units of prayer) and restart Nour's recording so that I would get all of the prayer. In all of the excitement of running back and forth, monitoring sound levels, trying to stay out of the shot, and minimizing the disruption of the prayer, I missed one of the breaks in the prayer and therefore missed a section of the sura. During that particular break, Nour films Ebad visibly waiting for me to run up, while I am trying to decide whether to rise or not, and then he decides to continue on and Nour shuts down.

When I assembled a trailer for *IQRA' is READ*, one of the female students told me that this was one of her favorite parts, while a non-Muslim observer wondered if this was too typical a shot to begin the trailer with, a shot of mostly South Asian and Middle Eastern men praying. While we see many shots of men praying in the news, and we may see fictionalized stagings of men in prayer (a recent example is shots of the white British actor Damien Hirst's character in *Homeland* [2012] praying covertly in his garage), we do not usually see shots of men praying from the front. When one is praying in congregation, one never sees others praying from the front. And women almost never see men praying from the front because they do not usually occupy the spaces at the “front” of a prayer space. This shot was enabled by a disembodied, mechanical eye, Nour - Vertov's Kino-eye that can traverse space, gendered space, in ways that people cannot. This shot was also enabled by Ebad, Imam Khalid Latif, and their mixed congregation

who were open to working *in relation* to Nour and I within the legal rulings of prayer to be a part of an academic and artistic endeavor.

Because that corner of the room was so dimly-lit, Ebad and the first rows of men had to endure a bright light in their faces as they prayed. Their focus was challenged, but to our collective knowledges, the sanctity of their prayer remained intact. Prayer requires intention and certainty in addition to the following of legal conditions and prescribed acts. Because Ebad has an understanding of fiqh, he was able to ascertain what would be legally sound while also being generous in accommodating the project. In his portrait, he shows the significance of a particular text (the Qur'an) in his life, as well as how he applies this text and the legal tradition in his everyday life.

All three of the five seminary graduates of whom I filmed portraits requested that I film them reciting texts in everyday practice, whether it be in the classroom, an informal gathering of students, or in prayer. Their choices demonstrate one way in which they fulfill the 'amal (good works) of knowledge, that it be applied to practice, to good work, to service of the community. The portrait choices likewise show how different individuals at different levels of learning envision their roles as students and teachers of sacred knowledge. While current Zaytuna students demonstrate the aspirational aspects of their study, Zaytuna teachers express the more meditative, solitary, and intellectual processes of their continued study. While the seminary students continue in their studies, they are also acutely aware of their current roles as leaders and teachers. Their choices in self-portraiture demonstrate that awareness, as well as their openness of allowing me, a young female (Muslim) anthropologist/filmmaker to direct that process.

Chapter 6 - Cultivating Awe and Certainty

It is He Who made the sun to be a shining glory and the moon to be a light (of beauty), and measured out stages for her; that ye might know the number of years and the count (of time). Nowise did Allah create this but in truth and righteousness. (Thus) doth He explain His Signs in detail, for those who understand.

❖ Qur'an 10:5²⁴⁴

[T]he sight of day and night, the months and returning years, the equinoxes and solstices, has caused the invention of number, given us the notion of time, and made us inquire into the nature of the universe; thence we have derived philosophy, the greatest gift the gods have ever given or will give to mortals. This is what I call the greatest good our eyes give us.

❖ Plato *Timaeus*

This chapter discusses Islamic time keeping and how devotional activities are organized through practices of observing and calculating lunar and solar cycles of the cosmos. In the first section “Everything in its Time,” I discuss the role of astronomy and timekeeping in Islam, a brief description of astronomy within Islamic scholarship and its relationship to mathematical astronomy, and how this is articulated at Zaytuna College. In the second section, “What Time is *Zuhr*?” I discuss the Astronomy class at Zaytuna College in which students learn to measure time with their bodies, using techniques transmitted to them by their teacher Hamza Yusuf who received them from his teacher Murabit Al-Ḥajj in Mauritania. The third section, “What Time is *Zuhr* Resolved?” discusses the issues that occur when the students attempt to apply what they are learning in the everyday. There is a disruption of collective practices as students attempt to gain individual certainty in their understanding of time’s passage. The fourth section shifts from the daily to the monthly. “When is Ramadan?” discusses local and national debates regarding the beginning of the sacred month of Ramadan, which is contingent on the

²⁴⁴ Translation from Ali (2002).

sighting of the new moon. In the final section, I discuss how these processes of observing and measuring time through the cycles of the cosmos cultivate a sense of awe in both teacher and student, opening up new ways of being in the world and being with God. Through the integration of embodied knowledge and scientific facts, Zaytuna students gain a new sense of meaning in their devotional practices, as well as a new appreciation of revelation and the natural world.

EVERYTHING IN ITS TIME

Of the five pillars of Islam, four require the entry of a particular time, realized through the measurement of particular celestial phenomena. The fifth pillar, the *Shahāda* (the testimony of faith) can happen at any time a person feels ready to enter into Islam. The entrance of that moment is a self-measurement of one's consciousness, compulsions, and desires to vocally express one's belief in the truth of One God and that Muhammad is his Messenger.

Practicing the pillar of *Ṣalāt* (prayer) requires astronomical knowledge of both space and time. In order to know what direction to pray in, one needs to know the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca. In order to know when to pray, one must understand and measure the movements of the sun: the precise moments when the first light of dawn appears as a sliver on the eastern horizon (*fajr*), the moment the sun appears on the horizon, the time in which the sun has risen off the horizon, the time it passes its highest point (*al-istiwā'*) in the sky (*zuhr*), the time that shadows cast by the sun are double (or 1.5 times, depending on the school of law) the length they were at *al-istiwā'* ('*asr*'), the end of sunset (*maghrib*), the entrance of the night ('*ishā'*'), and the portioning of the night into thirds until the entrance of dawn again, repeating the cycle, incrementally shifting

into longer days, shorter nights, or shorter days and longer nights according to the cycles of the year.

Ṣawm (fasting) must be practiced during the sacred month of Ramadan, whose beginning is measured, unlike prayer, on a lunar cycle as are all months of the Islamic year.²⁴⁵ Months in Islam can be twenty-nine or thirty days, contingent on whether the new moon is sighted just after sunset on the twenty-ninth day of the month. If it is sighted by at least two men of trustworthy character, the following month has begun. If it is not seen, than the current month will have a thirtieth day.

Zakāt (almsgiving or charity) is incumbent upon Muslims who have the means to give. If *zakāt* is incumbent upon a person (based on specific calculations of wealth, debt, and time) than they are required to pay a percentage of their wealth annually (at the very least) to be distributed amongst those in need (everyone else).

Hajj (pilgrimage) like fasting is required at a particular time of the Islamic year consisting of particular acts to be done on particular days of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah.

Astronomy (*‘ilm al-falak*, observational or folk astronomy or *‘ilm al-ḥay’a*, mathematical astronomy) holds a prestigious position in the discourses of Islam and Science, particularly in the ways that medieval Islam was the conduit for the transmission and advancement of Hellenistic astronomy that would lead to and some scholars say anticipated the “Copernican Revolution.” Muslims were always able to perform the devotional obligations of prayer, fasting, and so forth based on naked-eye observations and an inheritance of pre-modern forms of reckoning. The further development of Astronomy as an Islamic science, led to greater accuracy, the preparations of charts and calendars, and other administrative uses, putting Astronomy and astronomers “in service

²⁴⁵ There are other days of the Muslim calendar in which it is recommended to fast, as well as particular days of the week. But Ramadan is the most recognized and significant time in which more Muslims fast together than any other time.

to Islam.” F. Jamil Regap suggests, however, that it was actually Islamic practices that were really serving astronomers by providing “a degree of social legitimation” for the work they were doing and giving them “a set of interesting mathematical problems to solve.”²⁴⁶

A number of theological quandaries would develop for astronomers, especially in terms of what could be measured as mathematical fact, and what was conjectured based on theories of natural causation, which would present problems for some schools of Islamic theology. Although Ptolemy’s geocentric model was a basis for Islamic astronomy, Muslims astronomers and theologians discursively rendered it “metaphysically neutral.” The theologian and astronomer al-Sharif al-Jurjani (A.D. 1339-1413) would reply to these concerns with a more nuanced approach to the mathematical and metaphysical:

Even if they do not have an external reality, yet they are things that are correctly imagined and correspond to what [exists] in actuality (*fi nafs al-‘amr*) as attested by sound instinct (*al-fiṭra al salīma*); they are not false imaginings such as ghouls’ fangs, ruby mountains and two-headed men. By means of these [astronomical] notions, the conditions of [celestial] movements are regulated in regard to speed and direction, as perceived [directly] or observed with [the aid of] instruments. [By means of these notions also] discovery is made of the characteristics (*aḥkām*) of the celestial orbs and the earth, and of what they reveal of subtle wisdom and wondrous creation—things that overcome whoever apprehends them with awe, and facing him with the glory of their Creator, prompt him to say: “Our Lord, thou has not created this in vain.” This then is a valuable lesson that lies hidden in those words [of the astronomers] and that ought to be cherished, while ignoring whoever is driven to disdain them by mere prejudice.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Ragep, F. Jamil. “Freeing Astronomy from Philosophy: An Aspect of Islamic Influence on Science” In *Osiris*, 2nd Series, Vol. 16, Science in Theistic Contexts: Cognition Dimensions. David King’s *Astronomy in the Service of Islam* (1993) is essential here, as well as the work of A.I. Sabra and George Saliba.

²⁴⁷ quoted from al-Iji, *Kitab al Mawaqif fi ‘ilm al-kalam* (with the commentary of al-Jurjani) ed. Muhammad Badr al-Din al-Na’sani (Cairo, A.H. 1325/A.D. 1907), pt. vii, p. 108 in Sabra, A.I. “Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islamic Theology. The Evidence of the Fourteenth Century.” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-islamischen wissenschaften*, 8 (1994),(cit. n. 2) p. 39

It is the *ikhtyār* time to pray the ‘*ishā*’ prayer. It is the “choice” or ideal time to pray the night prayer. The halls are empty and still. A few students find corners in classrooms to study. Zeinab and I sit in the library away from the windows that reveal the blue-black not quite darkness of city night cast with city light. We are in the middle of the first third of long winter nights. *Ghurūb* [sunset] is currently around 5pm. As the Prophetic saying says, “Winter is the springtime of the believer. Its nights are long so he spends them in worship, and its days are short so he fasts them.” Zeinab reflects on conversations back home in Southern California.

Nobody really studies Astronomy anymore. I remember I was talking to someone, and they were asking me...what classes I am taking here, and so I mentioned “Oh, I’m taking Astronomy.” “Why are you taking Astronomy? What does that have to do with anything?” or like, “What does that have to do with Islam?” And so I told them about the ten foundations of it. (*She laughs*). But then I said “Well, for us as Muslims it is really profound. And that in knowing...we learn about God...It’s really important.”

Zeinab refers to the “ten foundations of knowledge” which describe and contextualize particular fields of study within the Islamic Sciences. Zaytuna students were introduced to a didactic poem in Arabic that outlines these ten foundations at the beginning of their first semester. They were then expected to memorize it and apply it to each of their subjects. Most classes would begin with these ten foundations: 1) definition, 2) subject 3) benefit, 4) virtue, 5) relationship to other sciences, 6) founder, 7) name, 8) source, 9) legal category, and 10) topics.

According to Yusuf, the sciences of Timekeeping (*‘ilm al-tawqīt*) and Astronomy (*‘ilm al-falak*) are defined (1) as sciences that enable “knowledge of the passage of time,” which includes the “measurement of the days, nights, months, and years” and the “nature of observable phenomena” that are used to produce such measurements. As a subject (2),

this particular form of Astronomy takes the orbital movement of the sun, moon, planets, stars, and constellations as they appear to the naked eye. Its primary benefit (3) is knowing the times of prayer, the direction of prayer, and the days and months of the year such that one can observe holidays and other significant days of the year. A secondary benefit and according to Hamza Yusuf, “primary from another perspective” is the “generation of awe in Allah’s creation” that takes place when one is one of those who, “reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night” (Qur’an 3:190). The fourth foundation is the virtue (4) of knowing the times and direction of prayer in that “prayer is the foundation and greatest pillar of Islam and the best of our bodily acts of worship.” There is likewise great virtue in being able to recognize other significant days and times of the year, in particular the month of fasting, Ramadan in which the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

Astronomy is related (5) to the other sciences as a sacred legal science, working in tandem with the jurisprudence around devotional acts and obligations. Its founding (6) is attributed to the Prophet Idris (Enoch). Yusuf also goes on to cite the Sumerians and Babylonians, mentioning the evidence at “pre-historical astro-archeological sites” around the world for a global recognition of celestial patterns. Ptolemy brings the Hellenic systematization; Al-Sufi records and maps “the entire visible night sky of his hemisphere,” while “Modern Astronomy is founded upon the work of Galileo and Copernicus.” Yusuf reinforces certain civilizational narratives that demarcate western advancement and eastern advancements of Astronomy. A number of historians of Astronomy suggest that there existed more fluid exchange and building on ideas that occurred throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ See notes 246-7

The seventh foundation is its name (7); Yusuf focuses on an observation-based, naked-eye, or folk astronomy, which in Arabic is called *'ilm al-miqāt*, *'ilm al-tawqīt*, *'ilm al-falak*, and *'ilm al-nujūm*. Mathematical Astronomy is called *'ilm al-ḥay'a*, which refers to a sense of “form,” in terms of mapping a realistic image of the cosmos. While Yusuf’s focus is on a naked-eye astronomy, the students also learn a great deal of “modern” astronomy. The science’s sources (8) are mathematics and observation. Its legal category (9) is that it is *farḍ 'ayn*, meaning that it is incumbent upon every individual to at least have the means to determine prayer times and direction of prayer, for example. The validity of one’s prayer is contingent on these aspects of prayer, such that praying in the wrong direction invalidates one’s prayer (Unless one prayed under the assumption that she was praying in the right direction, in which case, her prayer would still be valid in most schools of law. If she later learns that she had been praying in the wrong direction, she would have to make that prayer up). In most situations it is *farḍ kifāya*, meaning that it is incumbent upon the community to have at least one timekeeper. These days most American Muslims rely on prayer calendars either provided by their respective mosques or calendars that one can produce or find on the Internet. The final foundation is the subject’s topics (10). In this course they were focused on “the sun’s *apparent* movement across the sky, and through the zodiac throughout the year,” and the phases of the moon. The students also built sundials and conducted independent research on a subject of their choice.²⁴⁹

WHAT TIME IS ZUHR?

Zaytuna College’s Hamza Yusuf (re)orients students’ understanding of space and time through the teaching of the devotional and physical sciences of timekeeping (*'ilm al-*

²⁴⁹ These definitions are compiled from a handout and lectures over the Fall 2011 semester. Yusuf, Hamza. “Ten Foundations of the Knowledge of Tawqit wa Falak” handout, Zaytuna College. September 2011

tawqīt) and Astronomy (*‘ilm al-falak*). Through learning about the “ordering of the cosmos” and a physical engagement with it as observers and potential scientists, students gain an awareness of not only the natural world and the passing of time, but also the human attempts at ordering and making sense of them. This strand of knowledge is enacted on campus with varying results as students spend more time “looking up,” measuring shadows, and experiencing doubt about mathematically-calculated prayer times. This minor crisis is resolved through a school dialogue that negotiates multiple authorities, assumptions, and aspirations. The drive to nurture students’ agency as Muslim subjects through the acquisition of knowledge and certainty (*yaqīn*) is tempered by attempts to cultivate community through congregational prayer and hierarchies of authority.

Yusuf encouraged the students to make an intention to consider the study of Astronomy as a fulfillment of their individual obligation (*farḍ ‘ayn*, see #9). Having a timekeeper is a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*), and most communities tend to rely on prayer timetables produced and distributed on the Internet or at local mosques (ex. moonsighting.com, islamicfinder.com, crescentwatch.com). As Zeinab stated above, there is a general assumption that the study of Astronomy is no longer necessary considering the developments of mathematical astronomy and the ability to calculate prayer times and new moons.²⁵⁰ For many Muslims the direct relationship between the celestial movements, their experiential knowledge of them, and their worship has been severed. Instead, they are bound to clocks, smart-phone applications, websites, or printed timetables. This unconsciousness of celestial movements is not so different from relying on the *adhān* (call to prayer) from one’s neighborhood mosque if one never steps outside

²⁵⁰ Most American mosques do not have official timekeepers and instead rely on other sources to determine prayer times specific to their respective localities (dependent on longitudinal and latitudinal location). Most Muslims do not clearly understand the methods and conditions of determining prayer times.

or looks out the window to confirm the entering of a particular prayer time. As Zahrah says to her teachers:

For someone like me who had no idea...before coming here, I didn't really know anything about what time *zūhr* came in, it was just the time on the chart like I didn't even think about, 'Oh there is a reality to this particular time.' I had no consciousness, no awareness of that. So to be able to actually know, 'Oh ok, there's a reason why I'm praying at this time; it's not just a number on a chart.' I think that's sort of what the [astronomy] class is about, like you were saying, Mary, it's about that empowerment and that certainty, and the reason behind all of these things.

The five obligatory daily prayers each coincide with a particular placement of the sun in relationship to the earth that can be visibly appraised by changes in the color of the sky, at the horizon, and in the lengths of shadows. Like Zahrah many Muslims pray these prayers according to a timetable with a vague sense of how these times relate to natural phenomena. For Hamza Yusuf, Zahrah's Astronomy teacher, this loss or lack of sense is a distancing from one's *fiṭra*, which refers to the original state of innocence and inclination towards oneness (*tawḥīd*) that children are born in, which is transformed through social experience. While his "Astronomy with Imagination" course fulfills the physical science requirement for Zaytuna College's undergraduate liberal arts degree, it also aims to fulfill the benefits and virtues discussed above (#3-4). "*The generation of awe of Allah's creation*" is intimately connected to a firm adherence to Islamic law and the performance of the required pillars: *shahāda* (testimony of faith), *ṣalāt* (prayer), *ṣawm* (fasting), *ḥajj* (pilgrimage), and *zakāt* (paying alms). With the exception of the testimony of faith which can happen at any time, the other four pillars all require some form of reckoning, whether of the day, months, or years.

Unlike introductory astronomy courses at other colleges, this Astronomy course is taught from a geocentric perspective:

It is an Astronomy course designed to open the student up to the elements of wonder that surround us and relate to earth and sky phenomena. We are embodied creatures in a time/space continuum of bodies...Our experience of the world around us is based upon each individual being the center of the universe. This centrality is a divinely designed perspective to ensure that humans understand their centrality and importance in the plan of the universe itself. We are intended.²⁵¹

The centrality of human experience in the course's approach is not aimed at regarding the human race as the center of the universe, but rather to ascribe meaning to creation and humanity's role within it. For Yusuf "there are ways of looking at the world and these different ways have philosophical, spiritual, and psychological implications... and this is what I want to explore in this class." Zeinab comes to recognize how this perspective is unique for a Western academic setting and how this particular approach gives her meaning:

There is the heliocentric perspective but...we are actually studying it from a geocentric perspective which is so, it's so awesome to me because, first of all who would study it from that perspective here, like no one would probably teach it like that. But that just makes so much sense. And that I never thought of it that way because you grow up and think, you know you learn, "Ok, this is science, and...now we know that the earth goes around the sun, but like Shaykh Hamza told us that if we deny what we are experiencing...how can you deny your experience? So our experience is that the sun is moving across the sky so that it appears that the sun is moving around us around the earth. And so that is just so profound to think about...where we are.

Zeinab recognizes that most college courses teach Astronomy from a heliocentric perspective. The "here" she refers to is somewhere between Berkeley, the United States, and "the West," despite the fact that Astronomy is most likely taught similarly in most universities around the world. Her sense of "here" likewise connotes a sense of the historical present, modernity. She articulates the significance of taking into account and drawing attention to and meaning from one's embodied experience of the cosmos. She

²⁵¹ Class syllabus, Spring 2011

articulates how growing up the idea of science was somewhat removed from any social or spiritual meaning. To resituate the pursuit of science as a devotional exercise that acknowledges its multiple truths (both the heliocentric and geocentric, mathematical and humanly-visible perspectives), acknowledges the possibility of “science” and “religion” being compatible. For students who are not interested in pursuing science as a career, their introduction to it from this perspective yields a different relationship to the natural world, full of meaning and insight. It is interesting to consider what Astronomy for non-science majors at secular universities would look like if they were to take on such approaches. Indeed, many interdisciplinary programs take on such approaches, especially in terms of the history of science, echoing an earlier period in which natural history was taught in a way that unified the scientific study of the natural world with theology and other liberal arts (Reuben 1996, Veysey 1965), albeit in ways that often authenticated racial and cultural hierarchies.

Between the end of Shawwal and through much of Dhu al-Qa'da (1432 A.H.) (late September to mid October 2011 A.D.), an awkward tension arose as the time for *ẓuhr* prayer drew near. These were the annual bright and sunny days of a misplaced summer in autumn. Shadows were sharp and the sun blazed down as a high noon. It was the end of the lunch break, and the *adhān* would be called from the hallway. Most of the staff, faculty, and students would make their way to the library, which also serves as the communal prayer space. After the *iqāma* (a secondary call for people to stand for prayer more immediately), all would line up to begin the midday prayer. Yet one could always see some students shifting, weighing their desires to pray communally and their uncertainties about the prayer time. A number of students would be standing outside with pencils and pieces of paper, measuring their shadows and checking their watches and markings. They would pray later, either in the library or in their rooms. Matthew, the

student life coordinator had been pushing for more conscientiousness about praying communally. There are great blessings in praying in *jamā'a* (congregation), and it is legally recommended whenever possible. Noticing that less and less students were attending the communal *ẓuhr* prayer, he began questioning students on the reasons why they were not joining the prayer.

Weeks earlier in Astronomy class, Hamza Yusuf had taught the students to recognize *ẓuhr* and *'asr* with their bodies and shadows, showing them the method he had learned in Mauritania. The sun was approaching *al-istiwā'* (the meridian or zenith) as Yusuf took the students outside to measure their shadows. He urged them to take measurements in ten-minute intervals so that they could trace the sun's ascension to the meridian, its "pause" and then its descent into *zawāl* (the post-meridian). He advised them that this method of observing shadows would not give an astronomical *zawāl* (the exact movement of the sun post-meridian), but "you'll have absolute certainty" based on the decrease and increase of shadows, eventually visible to the human eye.

Yusuf had mentioned to the students that:

Prayer can be calculated if you can calculate it with certainty, and we believe that the *'ilm al-falak* is *qaṭ'ī* (not open to interpretation). That's the dominant opinion of our *'ulamā* is that it is a[n] absolute science. The problem is it's still based on averages and you have to be careful, right? And this is something that a lot of these guys don't take into account when they calculate *ẓuhr* time, and that's why in a lot of the prayer schedules *ẓuhr* is just wrong because it's done based on a standardized time zone, and they actually use NASA's computational tools to do it... We've been so out of the game for so long that we rely for our religion on people that have **different sets of criteria**, but people don't take those sets of criteria into consideration... that's why I would always leave ten-fifteen minutes on *ẓuhr*... after the schedule says that it's come in, to be on the safe side.

Yusuf articulates an alternative agenda for astronomical calculation, and thus alternative criteria for interpreting data. While he does not dispute NASA's tools or findings, he makes a distinction between how their computations are understood and

applied. He likewise warns that averages, though helpful and scientifically sound, are not sufficient measures for prayer-time accuracy when according to Sharī‘a, particular events *must* occur before the prayer can be valid. Yusuf antagonizes an assumption of modernity (greater truth) that both Muslims and non-Muslims share and has planted a seed of doubt in the students’ reliance on calculated prayer schedules. This leads to an active, though contested pursuit of accurate prayer times.

The sophomores started to notice that the *zuhr* prayer on the printed timetable did not accord with their bodily measurements. The schedule seemed to announce *dhuhr* early, before the sun had passed the meridian into *zawāl* (post-meridian), let alone reached the meridian or *al-istiwā’*. As days passed, the gap between the printed time and their measured times gradually lessened, but not before a noticeable confusion had arisen for the other students.

WHAT TIME IS ZUHR, RESOLVED?

Mid-afternoon, ‘*asr* had come in for most of the students, shadows were one half longer than they were at *zuhr*. When they doubled their *zuhr* length, Ḥanafī Muslims would be able to pray ‘*asr* as well. Students, administrators, and teachers assembled in the library, sitting in a circle on black chairs. The Faculty Forum was initiated as a space for students and teachers to ask questions about and discuss current events both at the school and beyond. This particular forum engaged the following issues: the Occupy movement, the Anwar Al-Awlaki and Osama bin Laden assassinations, the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, *dhuhr* prayer, and the Arabic curriculum. Abdullah Ali, professor of Mālīkī Fiqh and Ḥadīth Sciences lead the discussion on “What time is *zuhr*?”

Abdullah Ali, professor: There was some confusion that was caused here at one of your classes regarding, not regarding the classical ways of determining *zuhr*, but more so it was in the context of, I would say, a *fatwā* about *zuhr* not

being in accord with the normal schedules that we have available to us, you know the prayer schedules, the online schedules...if I'm understanding the issue correctly.

The students begin to describe that they are not following a *fatwā*, or a direct order from their teacher, but that they were taught a method for determining *ẓuhr* and that they wanted to attain certainty (*yaqīn*) according to this method of calculation. Thurayya describes how the students were taught how to recognize *al-istiwā'* (the sun at the meridian) and the beginning of *ẓuhr* (the moment the sun moves one degree past the meridian). When they started measuring, they noticed that the prayer times listed on the chart were too early according to their calculations. They emphasize that their goal was not to discredit the prayer chart, but to witness the beginning of *ẓuhr* through their own measurements. Ruqayya relates how Yusuf had told them that averages are used in calculations and how the printed time may be applicable to one place, but it won't be applicable to all places in a given region.

Hatem Bazian, professor: We have different ways of arriving [at] what we perceive for ourselves [to be] certainty for the time of *ẓuhr*... Now we have a problem where we have a discrepancy between one set of standards versus another set of standards that the students are learning...so we need to figure out how either we can reconcile if it is possible...

Zaid Shakir, professor (quietly): It is possible.

Hatem Bazian: Or if it's not possible than what are the measures that need to be taken, because as far as the time of prayer, it is an individual obligation to be certain (*yaqīn*) to pray. So how can we deal with that in a structured way? That would be the defining of the problem.

Mary, female sophomore student: Just to add to that, really the focus, one of the main perspectives of this class, Astronomy is being active in observing the natural phenomena, and being a part of that and not removing ourselves, like abstracting ourselves from the natural phenomena...so I think that is a particular perspective.

Zaid Shakir: I think the important thing is to understand that there can be reconciliation

and the importance of just having harmony. Because these things, people assume...“Well I’m not going to pray with you guys.” And so the people praying start thinking, “Are we doing something wrong?” And then human beings being the way we are wired, the people that aren’t praying, “we’re definitely doing something right. I saw it right there, my shadow. I measured it myself; I counted it off myself.” So I think it’s important to reconcile. In that regard, I think that, I was asked about the prayer time. The 1:15[pm] time, I didn’t have a problem with it. But I think it could be expanded, you should have at least fifteen minutes because within fifteen minutes you can discern the movement of your shadow, you can discern the increase of your shadow.

Mary: Just to have that...it’s not just having a difference of opinion for the sake of having a difference of opinion but just wanting to have that reconciliation just based on the knowledge that is coming to us. Not to say that this is wrong, you know, we don’t have knowledge of that, but just to have...

Abdullah Ali: Confidence? I guess you’d say.

Mary: Yeah, and to reconcile those two different...

Zaid Shakir: I think what’s really important is just to understand that there’s more than one way to determine the time of zuhr. I think that’s the most important thing.

Zeinab, female sophomore student: I just wanted to make a clarification was that in class Shaykh Hamza did mention to us, he said that following the astronomical calculations is a valid method. He wasn’t saying, we weren’t going and measuring our shadows in order to determine that the prayer schedules were wrong. It was just a matter of like Dr. Hatem said, having the certainty that the prayer time was actually in. So when we were first going out the first... I think now it’s not so much, the prayer times are...

Zaid Shakir: Nearly half an hour after the zawal now almost.

Abdullah Ali: I’m hearing something different from the students. What I’m hearing from them is that I’m fine with the prayer schedule, okay we’re getting a little bit more confidence. But “I wanna be sure that what I’m learning, I’m learning it correctly.” Right? For you, Mary, that’s really your issue? You wanna be sure that you are learning this correctly?

Mary: I think that’s just one part of the bigger...

Abdullah Ali: One part of it, okay.

Hatem Bazian: But in general, every faculty who is teaching the students is teaching the best they have to the students, so the student has to trust that the teacher is giving them the accurate [information]. Because the assumption that it's not, creates a greater discrepancy.

Zahrah, female sophomore student: I think I pretty much agree with everything that the rest of the sophomore sisters have said. And I think at this point, and especially Zeinab raised a really good point that Shaykh Hamza said, that having the astronomical certainty is fine, it's a valid form of certainty, so like you were saying, Shaykh Abdullah, it's not really about that any more, and *Alḥamdulillāh* (Praise be to God) now we can pray with the jamā'a here, so that's wonderful. But I think if we sort of left this, or left this semester and what we resolved was that now we can finally pray with the jamā'a, I think would have missed the point of the class.

For someone like me who had no idea, I didn't know before coming here, I didn't really know anything about what time zuhr came in, it was just the time on the chart, like I didn't even think about, "Oh, there is a reality to this particular time." I had no consciousness, no awareness of that. So to be able to actually know, "Oh, ok there's like a reason why I'm praying at this time, it's not just a number on a chart." I think that's sort of what the class is about, like you were saying, Mary, it's about that empowerment and that certainty and the reason behind all of these things.

Zaid Shakir: You have to periodically verify the calendar to make sure it is accurate... You can rely on the calendar, but the calendar is not the source of your certainty. As a religiously-responsible individual periodically you have to go and see, is it fajr? Do you see the light of the rising sun ascending in the sky or not?"

The conversation continues and the faculty reminds them to check the methodology of calculated prayer times, as well as their own methodology. The students ultimately are advocating for a visual determination of zuhr, based on their own measurements, as well as a "reconciliation" of what they are learning in class with the realities of praying with certainty. If it is agreed that multiple ways of determining zuhr are valid, then students would like that to be reflected in the everyday. When Shakir

suggests delaying the prayer to ensure seeing the shadows, the students still seem unsatisfied.

The students' would like to realize rather than relinquish, as Zahrah says, "the reality to this particular time" and not just the "number on a chart," regardless of whether it is accurate or not, given the multiplicities of legal methods of determination. Students felt empowered by this knowledge and were reluctant to relinquish it, holding firm to their desires. They draw attention to how they want to gain an embodied sense of knowledge regarding prayer times, where they inhabit the passing of time in ways that are connected to the movements of the cosmos and their embodied ways of apprehending them. While they recognize the validity of calculated times, they aim to be conscious of the natural bases for such calculations, following a Qur'anic invocation to "reflect" upon these cycles. Their determination in attempting to clarify their motivations, beyond their teacher's "fatwā ," speaks to their gaining confidence and ability to debate their (other) teachers. While recognizing this impulse and desire amongst the predominantly female students, the faculty also consistently reminded them of the need to further research the calculation methods of online timetables and to consider the uncertainty in others that was caused by their "delay" of prayer.

Another important issue that emerges in the above discussion is the way the students cite each other and their teacher, Hamza Yusuf. When Abdullah Ali refers to a "fatwā " that the students received in class, he is referring to an unspoken sense that exists amongst some of the students (and other community members) that there is a scholarly hierarchy amongst their teachers. Hamza Yusuf, despite his lesser presence physically at the school, maintains a noticeable charismatic power and influence amongst students and administrators. His opinions and pronouncements often carry a heavier weight than other figures at the school, causing confusion for students (and sometimes

teachers) when they get opposing points of view from administrators and other teachers (regarding the importance of their grades and examinations, for example). As I discuss in the following chapter, there is a particular form of *hayba* (fear and awe) that accompanies Yusuf into the classroom, composed through his performance of knowledge, the particular intensity of his disposition, and his achievement of mobilizing American Muslims in profound ways.²⁵² As the initial founder and figurehead of the original Zaytuna Institute (albeit with the assistance of many others), he continues to be the President of the College and his word (when it is sought) is often the final one on major decisions for the school's direction. The students see Yusuf's teaching and his genealogy of knowledge as authoritative, but they also form their own arguments based on his teaching and cite each other in their articulations of why what they are learning is important and should have a practical application in their everyday lives.

In this discussion students confront the authority of established prayer timetables, compiled by invisible timekeepers, algorithms, and angles. Instead, they authorize their bodies to become ways of knowing via a tradition passed on through their teacher Hamza Yusuf. The students engage the cycles of night and day through these embodied measurements, accessing an alternative epistemology narrated in revelation, transmitted in the classroom, and confirmed through the body. When their other teachers interrupt these practices, the students defend and further articulate their position, while likewise recognizing how to negotiate the needs of the community and the greater need for

²⁵² It is difficult to ascertain what role Yusuf plays in shaping the influence he has amongst his students. While he is open to dialogue and argument, he is particular about the people who compose his inner circles, or there is a particular type of person who continues to work in his service. While Haroon (who has worked for Zaytuna the longest) consistently reminds people that Zaytuna for him is about a particular principle, rather than particular figures (like Yusuf), for others—both supporters and critics—Zaytuna continues to be associated with the teachings and personality of Yusuf. Moving into the future, this will be one of the College's great challenges - enacting a vision that moves beyond the charismatic force of individual figures towards a the charismatic force of (Islamic) knowledge and the institution itself.

certainty in their own methodologies. Their teachers become involved out of concern for the students being impressionable and easily influenced by Hamza Yusuf, their respected colleague with whom they are sometimes at odds. While the discrepancy in shadow measurements and calculated prayer times ceases to be a problem, a resolution still hovers on the distant horizon. In the end, the teachers acknowledge that there needs to be certainty, whether through more investigation into methods of calculation or by embodied ways of knowing.

Through such practices, there is a cognitive shift in how the world (and God) is recognized and perceived. An intimacy emerges, where God's signs can be read as ever-present assurances and reminders. Grewal writes about young Muslims who travel to the Middle East in pursuit of Islamic knowledge, as well as the experience of an "authentic" and "authorial" Islam (2006, 2013). While Hamza Yusuf was also one of these students in the seventies and eighties (he studied in Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States mostly), his work for the last twenty years has been the cultivation of a "traditional," though dynamic, American Islam. By drawing attention to how God's work is literally universal, Yusuf makes a claim for the relevance of Islam in "non-Muslim" lands, as well as the need to have local specificity and authority in legal matters. For the students, there is a greater sense of God (*taqwā*) and unity/oneness (*tawhīd*), and the development of their embodied relationships to their own knowledge and practices of Islam.

Brooklyn-raised Zahrah considers her reorientation to the cosmos, as the sun is just post-meridian, in the *ikhtyār* of *zuhr* prayer. Indirect sunlight reflects into the room, mixing with the tungsten light of her desk lamp.

[Astronomy] is based a lot on observance, and so you know, using yourself as sort of a tool for knowing God. And so I've been able to do that a lot more because it's forced me to do things like measure my shadow for the prayer times, to try to look for the sun at *fajr*, even though it's difficult obviously in this environment,

but to watch the sunset and to observe the movement of the moon, and the movement of the sun, the movement of the planets...the movement of the stars and all that...It's not necessarily something I have to express verbally, whereas in certain aspects of theology I have to, but in terms of looking at the natural environment and just being able to have, you know a sense of just 'that's God.' You know what I mean? And it's hard to express because I feel like it ends up sounding a little blasphemous. But you know, just to have that realization, 'God.' You know? That's just what I feel when I observe the moon, I just feel 'oh...God.' And so, yeah, that's why I felt like astronomy was a good follow-up to Theology. Because Theology, a lot of it was in our heads, but Astronomy is very much so in our hands.

WHEN IS RAMADAN?

Sister Rabi'a and I are shuffling around her living room, collecting jackets and blankets to take with us to go see the Ramadan new moon at the Berkeley Observatory, *inshā'Allah* (by the will of God). We will not see it; it is way too cloudy in our Western horizon over the Pacific Ocean. "I'm so tired of this," her husband says as he comes up the stairs, grumbling loudly, perhaps to us or to himself. "Every year it's the same thing, you'd think we would have figured this out by now. Some people started fasting today...I already went to *tarawih* last night, but my family isn't starting until tomorrow." Sister Rabi'a asks him, "Well, what are you going to do?" He answers,

Well, I'm going to fast with the family, what can I do? Every other year I switch off, but this is supposed to bring us together, am I going to do things differently? I'm so tired of this, going through this year after year. When are we Muslims going to get it together?

Sister Rabi'a's husband is referring to the annual "Muslims in the West" crisis of "When is Ramadan?"²⁵³ For the beginning of Ramadan (the sacred month of fasting), Muslims in North America begin fasting according to rulings by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), websites, their local mosque, the pronouncements of the mufti of Saudi Arabia, or their relatives in a "home" country. Local communities end up with

²⁵³ There are actually global debates about moon sighting as well.

staggered Ramadans, a day or two off at the beginning or at the end, resulting in tensions, doubts, schisms, and difficulties in planning Eid celebrations (marking the end of Ramadan), getting state-recognized holidays and media-coverage, and printing annual calendars. These practical challenges often mask the spiritual dilemmas of lacking certainty (which is a condition and ideal of prayer and fasting) and having the sense of an *umma* (community of believers), both local and global.

Calendars have always been a problem...The beauty of the lunar calendar is its the only truly scientific calendar because you don't have to intercalate. It's like the leap year fixing things in the human-imposed models. With the lunar cycle you have, twenty-nine point five is the average but its going to be below and over and therefore you are going to get some days it's twenty-nine days and other days it's thirty, it will always be either twenty-nine or thirty, which leaves eleven days short of the solar calendar. So Muslims allow the months, seasons to change. Every thirty years it goes back to the start...Let's say Ramadan was in September of 1977 it's going to be in September thirty-two years later. So it takes about thirty-two years for it to go through its complete cycle and return to the original solar point.

Now Qadi abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi in the *Ahkam Al-Qur'an* says that the Muslims use the lunar calendar because it is a calendar based on night and based on change and because this Umma is an "Umma of the Night" because we know that we were created not to sleep, but to worship, and so he says God gave us a way of telling time that was related to the night, whereas other communities think that the reason they were created was to eat, and so their calendar is based on farming, so the solar calendar is a calendar that is based on seasons, and the cycles of the seasons, the four seasons. Alright? Anyways, that is his opinion.²⁵⁴

"Reliable" websites publish their methods for calculating prayer times based on specific locations and seasons; thus, one must typically input one's location and in some cases, one's school of law (Shāfi'ī, Mālikī, Ḥanafī, Jafari, or Hanbalī, for example) because there are slight differences in how the different schools have come to determine the beginning and ending of specific prayer times. Occasionally these slight differences,

²⁵⁴ Hamza Yusuf, Audiorecording, Astronomy class.

as well as the use of averages in some calculations may cause friction amongst Muslims with differing opinions (see above).

On the other hand, determining the beginnings and endings for Islamic months (which are based on lunar cycles) is a contentious issue, especially in North America. Individuals and groups differ based on contending opinions on the validity of astronomical calculation versus local sighting versus global sighting of the new moon. For the majority of Muslims this is most significant in terms of the month of Ramadan.

Hamza Yusuf has taken on the issue of determining lunar months by publishing a text entitled *Cesarean Moon Births* (2007), which alludes to cesarean births that may be induced to conform “to the scheduling requirements of modern bureaucratic societies” or to the “the edict of Caesar that was instrumental in forcing the Jews to abandon their lunar calendar based on actual sighting and resorting to one based on calculations.” For Yusuf, these issues are of serious consequence in that they affect the legal validity of one’s devotional practices and the cohesion of local communities. In many ways the new moon sighting issue is emblematic of greater issues regarding authority, plurality, modernity, and their relationships to an American Islam. With this in mind, the study of Astronomy at Zaytuna College is particularly relevant and consequential in how it impacts students’ understandings, experiences, and agencies in regards to their *dīn*.

DESERT DESIGN AND AWE

Science will not collapse if some practitioners are convinced that occasionally there has been creative input in the long chain of being.

- Owen Gingerich (2006:70)

Throughout the semester, Hamza Yusuf would tell stories about his experiences in Mauritania, or the experiences of his teachers there. “The desert” becomes emblematic as an Islamic ideal, where a blanket of stars would bring Yusuf to tears. He would relate to

the students how his teachers thought him crazy for thinking that the earth orbited the sun. And how when scholars visited San Jose, they created problems when they waited to witness zuhr by their own bodies and eyes. Yusuf creates an exotic vision of desert Islam - simple, noble, and harsh, part Orientalist, part T.H. Lawrence, part Muhammad Asad, part-Californian, and part anthropologist. This oration is both authorizing of his religious authenticity (paying dues in the desert and “sitting at the feet” of his shaykh) and pedagogic in terms of expressing to the students the co-temporality of another way of being Muslim and knowing Islam.

Some of Yusuf’s favorite American writers, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, and Frost, wrote extensively of a “withdrawal from society into an idealized landscape” (Marx 1964:5). Leo Marx writes of how a “diffuse nostalgia, and a naïve, anarchic primitivism” in regards to the pastoral ideal against an onslaught of technology and industrial society can be transformed in writing to “enrich and clarify our experience.” Marx asks, “What possible bearing can the urge to idealize a simple, rural environment have upon the lives men lead in an intricately organized, urban, industrial, nuclear-armed society?”(ibid.). For Marx the answer is in an imaginative and complex pastoral design. The pastoralism of the mind, imaginative and complex, brings the forces of the pastoral idyllic and the industrial or technological together as design, rather than a remove. In contrast to a type of nostalgia that provides some escape from the world, this form of understanding of where one is and what time it is becomes wholly about being present and locating oneself in a greater cosmos. I suggest that Hamza Yusuf engages in a type of *desert design*, that invokes the pastoral as desert, the landscape of revelation and of his teachers, brought to bear on the urban and suburban landscapes of American cities.

Yahya Rhodus is a student of Hamza Yusuf, as well as Mauritanian and Yemeni scholars. He teaches Shāfi‘ī fiqh (law), Qur’anic Studies, Theology, and Taṣawwuf (often

translated as Islamic mysticism or gnosticism) at Zaytuna. He told me that Zaytuna runs on the *baraka* (blessings) of Murabit Al-Ḥajj, the Mauritanian scholar whom Yusuf often references and who epitomizes the desert existence that Yusuf both evokes and invokes.

For Yusuf this desert design means distinguishing between the benefits and pitfalls of scientific inquiry and technological advance.

Yes, there are discernible patterns in the world that make up the empirical sciences, but they have limitations, and we should take care lest in our arrogance we think that we have control over our lives and natural order:

“Then when the earth takes on golden ornamentation, and is all adorned, and people think they have power over it. Our order comes to it by night or by day; then we have it mown down, as if it had not flourished the day before. Thus do we explain the signs to people who reflect. And God calls to the abode of peace, and guides anyone at will to a straight path” (Qur’an: 10:24-25).²⁵⁵

In the context of Astronomy class, Hamza interprets “golden ornamentation” as electricity and light, light that prevents us from seeing the stars in the night sky that is adorned with God’s signs to a people who reflect, stars. This manipulation of divine design contributes to what Al-Attas considers “the disenchantment of nature...[which] has divested nature of any cosmic significance and severed its symbolical connection with God; it deprived man’s respect for nature to the extent that he treats nature which once held him in awe with a ruthless sort of vindictiveness; it has destroyed the harmony between man and nature” (Al-Attas 1985:37).

Aminah and I lean on bright orange pillows in her early afternoon sunlit room. As the sun approaches *al-istiwā’* (its zenith), casting shorter shadows, but always leaving that *fe’* (the leftover shadow due to our latitudinal location north of the equator), Aminah ponders markers of time as she is coming to understand them:

²⁵⁵ Hamza Yusuf, audio-recording Astronomy class

It's crazy to think that our lives are made up out of days, and we just waste days. And we don't even remember what happened on Monday or Tuesday...what day is it today? You know, like we don't even know. And I feel like that a lot of the times, the blessings are taken out of the days because of that. And...even in *The Book of Assistance*²⁵⁶...we were reading the other day that Imam al-Haddad was saying that there are certain chapters in the Qur'an that are supposed to be read on certain days. There's this whole, you know, adhering to being in this life and realizing that you know there is time for a reason, there are days for a reason, there are weeks. It all means something, it's not just, like, you know, coincidence that there are seven days and four weeks and twelve months.

We are sitting again in the library, approaching the end of the first third of the night, longer in the winter than in the short nights of summer. As the mysteries of the sky become unveiled to her, Zeinab reflects on the increase of awe. As opposed to learning the mechanics of a magic trick, knowledge of the cosmos, instead of diminishing her wonderment, magnifies it. It likewise increases her attachment to other aspects of Islam, the Qur'an, in particular.

I like to observe the sky a lot, but I always just like wondered. There was always this mystery, so now I feel like, it's like unveiling all of these mysteries. Every class is totally eye-opening for me. It has totally changed the way I look at the sky, and like my environment... it's just really exciting...

I feel like the more we learn about the heavens and constellations, say, or like the planets and the earth, and all of these, everything that we are learning...the more that we learn, it just increases awe in the Creator and that directly relates to theology. I mean this is just a quote from Shaykh Hamza or from class. We were learning the foundations of astronomy, or why we are studying astronomy and one of them is that it actually creates an awe in a person, like, for Allah. And you get to know Allah through learning about the Heavens. And there are so many *āyas* (verses) in the Qur'an, that like I never really...it wasn't that I didn't...now they just jump out at me now. Reading the Qur'an—all of the sudden after Shaykh Hamza pointed it out to me—there are so many *āyas* in the Qur'an that point to, you know, “Do you not reflect.” “Do you not look to the heavens and the earth” or like “how We have positioned the stars” “Where Allah has positioned the stars” or that “He has placed the sun and the moon in the sky, and do we not

²⁵⁶ During her freshman year, Aminah read sections of this book with her roommates in the evenings. One of the students also selected a section of Imam al-Haddad's biography (Badawī 2005) for her self-portrait in my film.

reflect on that.” And now when I open the Qur’an, I feel like those verses are just like jumping out at me, like I see them all the time and everywhere and throughout. I am like *subhan’Allah* I never... *subhan’Allah* (Glory be to God).

The above accounts demonstrate the (re)orienting aspect of an Islamic way of being in which cosmic phenomena figure prominently in everyday life and practices. While this chapter is limited to the issues that arise within the Muslim community, the questions raised have greater applicability. New York City has recently started to recognize Muslim holidays in their public schools. Will they refer to calculation so that they can determine holidays in advance or will they refer to human moon sightings that will require flexibility in planning for such holidays. An academic calendar would have to provide a range of possible days, where the exact day would only be determined the night before. This would create a great deal of difficulty for parents who would need to rearrange schedules for childcare and time off work, an unknown in advance.

Such issues get at the meanings and limits of such forms of multicultural recognition vis a vis the state and capital. Is the purpose of a Muslim holiday a symbolic gesture symbolizing an inclusive national community or is it a way to enable devotional practice and freedom of religion? What does submitting to the temporality and spatiality of a higher power really mean in everyday terms? That Muslims themselves do not necessarily agree on such questions speaks to the different ways that they confront the technologies of our contemporary moment and how to negotiate such capabilities with the more demanding aspects of the tradition. The students are reoriented in their space and time through their experiences in Astronomy. While they do not necessarily continue to measure their shadows in the afternoon, they are more attuned to the relationship between the natural world and revelation, while also having a better embodied and cognitive sense of “the reality of this time.”

Chapter 7: An Image of the Whole World

For God has made the pupil of your eye in such a way that, in spite of its smallness, there is pictured within it the image of the world, the heavens and the earth, with all their widespread extent. Then it goes on from existence in the realm of sensation to existence in the imagination, and from it to existence in the heart. For you can never apprehend anything save that which has reached you; and were it not that He has placed an image (*mithal*) of the whole world within your very being you would have no knowledge of that which is apart from yourself.

-Al-Ghazālī (2010b:59)

THE GIFT OF (IN)SIGHT

Hamza Yusuf was standing in the front of the class and was putting his things into his briefcase, signaling the end of class. He had just finished describing how the Prophet Muhammad had been born on a full moon in the “joy of joys,” a particular station of the moon’s cycle that related to the visibility of stars in the zodiac constellations. “Astronomy with Imagination” (discussed in the previous chapter) was a course that fulfilled the students’ natural science requirement and many of the students had a difficult time understanding the cycles of the moon, its mansions, its relation to the cycles of the sun, constellations, and the earth’s rotation. As a couple of students kept asking for further clarification on what they needed to know for the class, Yusuf listed a few topics and then tried to convey to them his hope that they would be “excited about astronomy” the same way he was. He described to them how while living in the desert, he had spent one year looking at the stars every night and measuring his shadows during the day to understand the sun’s movement and prayer times. He would “literally cry...[because he] couldn’t believe how beautiful it was.” His nostalgia for the desert, and his desire to transmit this experience and longing to his rapt students was tempered by their concern for academic survival and his approval. While Yusuf tried to convey a desert sky awash

in stars, the students imagined with him and struggled to understand such an experiential reality in a city where few stars were visible and where the sun could not cast shadows on foggy days.

Yusuf expected students to delve into the subject on their own, and he was there to add insights and provide clarifications along the way. The students were often not prepared for this level of expectation and were still trying to get their heads around the mechanics of it all. They expressed their anxieties with his style of teaching and the role of this course in their wider studies by emphasizing a concern with what would be on a test. Although he believed certain metrics did need to be in place, Yusuf did not believe in testing, and said to the students, “for me I can do that in other ways. I can see in your faces whether you understand or not.”²⁵⁷

This statement both terrified and enlivened the students. The classroom was thick with *hayba*, and it was statements like that which only increased Yusuf’s socio-spiritual capital. Messick and Mottahedeh discuss *hayba* meaning “awe,” “fear,” “respect,” as that which “refers to the sensations aroused in one individual by another, and to the social atmosphere that obtains in interactions between superiors and inferiors” (Messick 1993:165). Yusuf’s *hayba* comes from his own comportment, intensity, and distancing, how he has come to embody and translate his specific experiences as a student and scholar of sacred knowledge and the actual textual substance of that knowledge. As Messick states “a scholar’s *haiba* [*sic*] is specific to his knowledge: it is a *haiba* [*sic*] related to the text the scholar embodies and interprets” (165). The embodiment and textuality come together as a performance of authority and pedagogic affect.²⁵⁸ So when

²⁵⁷ Field Notes – Astronomy class

²⁵⁸ This *hayba* is not exclusive to Islamic scholars, many of my “secular” professors have commanded similar awe, fear, and respect.

Yusuf says “I can see in your faces whether you understand or not,” the students took it quite seriously, though they did not always know how to respond practically.

Although being able to assess whether a student comprehends what is occurring in the classroom or not is a skill cultivated by most experienced teachers, in the case of Yusuf (and some of their other teachers and spiritual advisors), the students took his words to mean something more than his knowledge of whether or not they had “done the reading.” They associated this ability to see with the more mystical skills of *baṣīra* (mental perception, associated with seeing) or *firāsa*: “insight; or intuitive perception; or the perception, or discernment, of the internal, inward, or intrinsic, state, condition, character, or circumstances, by the eye.”²⁵⁹ Yusuf’s *firāsa* could potentially read the surface of students’ countenances, towards assessing their inner states. His gaze was penetrating, and for these sophomore students, it meant that he could see not only if they were prepared for class, but how hard they were working spiritually, whether they were working on themselves ethically and whether they were purifying their hearts (*taṣawwuf*).

Amira Mittermaier describes a similar interaction in the relationship between a dream interpreter and a dreamer in Cairo. Many of the qualities that her interlocutors looked for in a dream interpreter are similar to those one seeks out in a teacher, that he or she be “pious, knowledgeable, virtuous, well-read, scholarly, linguistically skilled, divinely inspired, alert, and tactful” (2011:63). The face-to-face encounter is likewise important as the interpreter “did not simply listen to what the dreamers told him about their lives; he also looked into them through the skill of *firāsa*, an intuitive, divinely inspired knowledge that extends one’s sight beyond the visible” (62). Living embodiments travel through chains of teachers and students reaching all the way back in

²⁵⁹ “Firasa” (Lane and Lane-Poole 1968:2368).

some cases to people who witnessed the Prophet directly with their own eyes and hearts. The knowledge gained through these encounters is ideally transmitted from teacher to student, crossing continents and oceans, century upon century, through to our contemporary moment.

In his Arabic-English lexicon, Lane further describes *firāsa* as “a faculty which God puts into the minds of his favourites, in consequence whereof they know the states, conditions, or circumstances, of certain men, by a kind of what are termed *karāmāt* (miracles) [or thaumaturgic operations], and by the right direction of opinion and conjecture; and also a kind of art learned by indications, or evidences, and by experiments, and by the make and dispositions, whereby one knows the state, conditions, or circumstances, of men” (Lane and Lane-Poole 1968:2368). The *karāmāt* he refers to are understood as gifts or abilities bestowed upon particular believers, that are distinct from miracles, which are the wonderous works of prophets.²⁶⁰

The mode of seeing that takes place at Zaytuna College is an ethical seeing, though it is not limited to ocular sight. Similar to *firāsa* is the concept of *baṣṭra*, “mental perception; the perceptive faculty of the mind,”²⁶¹ which shares the B-Ṣ-R root with other words related to the faculty of sight, usually with a connotative meaning related to cognitive perception. Forms of B-S-R are extensive in the Qur’an, and may refer to the act of seeing (iBṢaR), vision (aBṢaR), sight (BaṢaR), signs or proofs (BiṢa’iR), seeing clearly or clear sight (BaṢiRan), and so on.

²⁶⁰ Mittermaier describes how some gifts are not always received by those deemed most pious. In her ethnography, a young Egyptian woman who does not seem to embody piety or capacities in socially recognizable and authorized ways receives night visions of the Prophet. Such sightings confound the community’s expectations and conceptions of spiritual hierarchy in regards to who should receive such gifts/miracles (2011).

²⁶¹ Lane and Lane-Poole (1968, 211).

No vision (aBŞaR) can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision (aBŞaR): He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.

Now have come to you, from your Lord, proofs (to open your eyes)(BaŞa'iRu): if any will see (aBŞaRa), it will be for (the good of) his own soul; if any will be blind, it will be to his own (harm): I am not (here) to watch over your doings.

- Qur'an 6:103-104²⁶²

The Qur'anic verses and concepts above allude to the complexities about what it means to think visually, especially in a Muslim milieu. The visual as sense is multilayered, at times limited to the muscles of the eye, but more often connected to the workings of the brain and heart. When "the image of the world" is already imprinted within the pupil, but not yet seen, the active and passive modes of seeing become complicated. According to Ghazālī, seeing is incomplete until the image is physically sensed, then "seen" in the imagination, and then "seen" finally in the heart. Ultimately though, the agentive act of seeing is not wholly ours, for it depends on God enabling us to see by His grace. Within Islam there remains this tension between the limits of an autonomous subject who experiences the world through her senses, and that which is enabled by external forces. For Ghazālī, the Muslim must protect one's (seeing) heart so that access to images are not cut off, and at the same time nurture its ability to see (Al-Ghazali 2010b).

In thinking about the visual within the context of this Muslim college, I think not only about aesthetics and media, but also about the ways that people in a space became aural-visual-spiritual models subject to an intense attention and appraisal. Considering Al-Ghazālī's ordering of our image-making capacities, I am interested in exploring the relationships and processes of representation from an ocular visible reality to a spiritual reality, both of which can be known in the heart. By putting Al-Ghazālī's articulation of

²⁶² Translation from Ali (2002)

the image, the intellect/heart, and the senses in conversation with contemporary theories of sense and visibility, I hope to expand our understandings of the work that images, whether man-made or divinely designed, do. In addition, I am interested in the techniques of the self that cultivate one's looking and seeing and how processes of knowledge acquisition figure in this cultivation.

I began and end this chapter with accounts of looking and making visible that occurred both within and beyond the classroom. I continue to explore this intense visual and visualizing landscape by exploring image production and critical gazes that cross boundaries of race, gender, space, and time. Female scholarship is one of the critical projects of Zaytuna College, and numerous "stories" of historical female figures are told in and around the school. I begin with a classroom account about the Prophet's great grandmother and her clan, the Benu Najjar and then continue with an event outside the classroom that poetically conveys the Prophet's wife Khadijah.

During his visit to Zaytuna College, the visiting scholar Ḥabīb 'Umar bin Hafiz transmitted accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Fatimah to his mixed audience, conveying and embodying the importance of a female aural-visual-spiritual model through which young Muslims can shape their ways of being and understand their roles in the community. The students later brought Muhammad Adeyinka Mendes, an African American scholar from Atlanta, Georgia to speak to how "masculine" and "feminine" attributes of God do not necessarily translate into ideal types of gender roles. Through the student council's invitation, the students enact the seeking of diverse scholars and scholarship that their teacher Abdullah Ali advocates for in Chapter Two, bringing an outside scholar to discuss issues of race and gender (his first lecture is on the early history of Blacks and Islam), while they also seek out knowledge that enables them to engage more with gender issues within Islam.

VIRTUAL STATES AND VIRTUOUS SCAPES

Charles Hirschkind discusses how the circulation of Islamic cassette sermons create ethical soundscapes in Cairo, Egypt. These cassettes produce a mediascape of attentive listening and are received as active mediums for ethical cultivation, space-making, and consciousness. At Zaytuna College, individual dispositions also generate such affective and mediating forces – the students, teachers, and staff are assembled with spiritual forces that are mobilized and recognized through a knowledge-based genealogy. People are told, described, and transmitted as ethical-political models. The living co-exist with the remembered, who “continue to exist in a virtual state,” and are made perceptible through the mediations of the living (Marks 2009:89).

Ghazālī’s assertion that an image of the world exists within our beings alludes to a potentiality in our ability to perceive it. Relating this to the Bergsonian notion of the universe as the “infinite set of all images,’ image-making in the human sense becomes a translation or “capturing” of this infinite divine realm in humanly perceptible forms. Laura U. Marks considers the image as something beyond the strictly visual, including images perceived through touch, taste, and smell. Ghazālī may expand her definition towards images that are likewise perceived by the heart through the openings created by the training of one’s modes of perception and the grace of God.

Images of the Prophet Muhammad were “captured” at the time of his actual historical life in the memories and experiences of those who witnessed him. These images form the corpus of a rich tradition of oral and written descriptions and quotations - text-based descriptions that discuss his manner, his actions, his words, and his way of being. Students of the discursive tradition receive his genealogy, stories of his ancestors and immediate family, and descriptions of his appearance, his hair, his clothes, his skin, and his scent. In addition to text-based images, there are also the embodied forms of his

being, captured in the mimetic practices and comportments of his Family and Companions. These ways of being are likewise transmitted through the face-to-face and experiential contact between individuals, whether between parent and child, teacher and student, or other types of encounters. Through these textual and embodied traditions, the Prophet Muhammad, as well as members of his family and his Companions, become ethical images and models for all Muslims. They are doubly virtual, possessing of virtues and virtually real. This virtuous virtual reality produces its own ethical force just as it is pedagogically mobilized to cultivate particular kinds of Muslims and particular kinds of imaginations. The visualizing of this reality is the work of teacher and student. Knowing the Prophet Muhammad's story and actively receiving textual and embodied transmissions are critical processes of, in Hamza Yusuf's words, "cultivating love for the Prophet"²⁶³ and practicing the intention of "hoping for the countenance of Allah (*ibtighāha' wajih illāhi*)."²⁶⁴

Yusuf's Sīra, Prophetic Biography class is the ideal location in which to demonstrate and convey hope and love for God and his Messenger. In the class Yusuf would sometimes tear up mid-description (discussed in Chapter Five). These moments expressed an intensity of feeling that came from a description of the Prophet's life that brought the historical past into a seeable imaginable contemporary reality.²⁶⁵ A similar intensity of feeling occurs at Ta'leef when Zaid Shakir discusses the practices and prayers of African Muslim slaves in the Americas. It is important to remember, however,

²⁶³ Fieldnotes, Sīra class March 2, 2011

²⁶⁴ This is a phrase featured in a particular dua' for study (it is placed at the beginning of this text). The concept of hoping to experience, "see" the countenance of Allah is common in other dua' and in verses of the Qur'an, once again alluding to this spiritually nuanced way of seeing.

²⁶⁵ Yasmin Moll (2010) discusses a similar phenomenon in her work on Egyptian televangelists on satellite television. There is a great deal of overlap in the worlds she describes and the mediated celebrity of Zaytuna scholars. The challenge for Zaytuna teachers and staff is to push students out of "fandom" into interlocution. Their habituation as spectators is challenged and reconfigured in the classroom, through direct address not easily replicated in digitally mediated forms.

that such intensities do not always draw tears or other physical manifestations. They can also involve intense frustrations regarding injustices, marginalization, and perplexity, as during Zaid Shakir's du'ā' and khuṭba at Occupy Oakland or in Economics class, when Hatem Bazian and the class took time out to watch the "Radicalization of American Muslims" hearings on CSPAN.

Back in Sīra class, Yusuf describes the circumstances of Muhammad's great grandmother, Salma, the daughter of Amr of the clan of Najjar. Descendent from an Arab clan of matriarchal traditions, she stipulated terms regarding where their children would be raised prior to her marriage to Hashim, the Prophet's great-grandfather. Yusuf draws attention to the power that Salma had in this situation, thereby emphasizing the role of women in not only the Prophet's life, but in his genealogy as well. In telling of this account, Yusuf asks, "Now who greets the Prophet when he comes into Medina? The women of Benu Najjar..." Yusuf tears up as he reminds the students that it is descendants of Muhammad's great-grandmother's clan that welcome Muhammad, their relative into Medina when he makes hijrah from Mecca. They sing the Prophet's welcome, and Yusuf silently remembers, sees.

By witnessing Yusuf's encounter with the Sīra - with Salma, the women of Benu Najjar, and the Prophet, the students are being drawn into a tradition of knowledge transmission, dependent on "face-to-face" or "heart-to-heart" encounters. The reading of a biographic text alone will not suffice in yielding one's understanding. It is the relationship cultivated between teacher and student, where the student encounters the countenance of one's teacher and witnesses "the living embodiment" of Islamic knowledge. Walter Benjamin cites memory as that which "creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation" (Benjamin 1968:98). This memory, this transmission of knowledge, is not only cognitive, but embodied.

The students are not given a clear interpretation of their teacher's embodied knowledge. Instead they must draw their own interpretive conclusions about the significance of this story in the contemporary moment. Yusuf mobilizes the "germinative power to this day" of this account, which sprouts with every telling and listening (Benjamin 1968:90). The students are invited to consider why does this story matter? Why is Salma a significant historical figure? What does it mean that her clan welcomes her great-grandson to Medina where he will establish the first Muslim society? What is the story's relevance—its germinal power—to students in a twenty-first century classroom?

Benjamin laments the loss of an "ability to exchange experiences...for never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power" (1968:83-4). Despite the reality of such losses, Hirschkind recognizes "the ways in which practitioners of a tradition, through innovation and adaptation, attempt to cultivate and sustain the sensory conditions and the modes of attention and inattention that make that tradition viable within modern contexts" (2006:104).

Such sensory conditions and modes of attention are cultivated in the mediated circulation of Zaytuna scholars' classes and lectures that are discussed in Chapters Two and Three, as well as in the approaches to sacred knowledge that are discussed in Chapter One. The work of the Zaytuna classroom is to balance an information-driven social landscape with a "spirit of storytelling" in which the "psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader [or student]. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks" (Benjamin 1968:89). This is a liberal arts education in which students use "the

great books,” fiqh, “stories” of historical Islamic figures, and training in logic and rhetoric towards a simultaneous and supposed “passive” inculcation of memory and an active engagement with the discursive tradition of Islam and the contemporary landscape of their everyday.

Such encounters also manifest in the interchange between the poetics of the imagination and poetry itself. We were sitting in the library one Friday evening, a gathering of students and community members. Someone asked Thurayya to recite some poetry. Thurayya, an African American daughter of converts to Islam by way of Los Angeles and Kansas City, Missouri, had decided at the last moment to attend Zaytuna College. She already had an undergraduate degree and a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with an emphasis on Poetry from the University of Michigan. Her presence on campus has been especially important for the younger students who entered with her. She has taken a number of leadership roles on campus, student union president, teaching assistance at the Summer Arabic Intensive, and student spokesperson at Zaytuna College fundraisers and events. She is also deeply invested in cultivating the younger students into leadership roles for the future, organizing the Zaytuna Teaching Project with a couple of other advanced students in which they mentored younger students in teaching community fiqh classes.

Thurayya recited a poem that a number of us had heard many times before, but which always beckoned another listening. In its brevity and “chaste compactness” (91), the poem produced an exquisite image of the Prophet Muhammad and his first wife, Khadija. In the poem, Thurayya conveys and makes visible Khadijah’s ability to *see* in her husband a potential prophethood while he was uncertain and shaken.

Your Man

*I love you for your kinship with me, and for that you are ever in the center,
not being a partisan among the people for this or for that. And I love you
for your trustworthiness, and for the beauty of your character
and the truth of your speech.*

--Khadijah bint Khuwailid to Prophet Muhammad

O Khadijah, you found your man
in our Rasool, who God sent to you
like instinct sends sheep to pasture,
like the moon pulls the tide in
and in. You knew your mind.

His gleam limned
that first meeting, your goods
he caravanned to Syria and Yemen,
the merchants' bargaining hands, your eyes,
until all you could do was marry him
and watch him lift your small daughters
up to the shine of his face,

watch him head toward the cave of Hira
and return home a beacon,
so that even when you cover him—
the cloak of wool and your hands—
he's uncovered,
your fingers' flesh made translucent,
their bones incandescent and slim.

Thurayya translated information she had acquired regarding the relationship between Khadijah and the Prophet, his work for her as he “caravanned to Syria and Yemen,” from Martin Lings’ biography of the Prophet Muhammad, which the students read in Hamza Yusuf’s Sīra class. Thurayya imagined it anew in her poem, “spontaneous, primary, graphic” (Benjamin 1968:76). In her first reading of it that evening, it seemed to pass too quickly. The gathering of young people wanted to be in that moment again, see Khadijah’s delicate fingers, and feel her affection and strength. Her recitation left the gathering in a quiet repose, and Thurayya was asked to read/recite her poem again. Once

again her words were absorbed, and visions were seen behind closed eyes, listening, looking, and being with.

ICONIC IMAGES

Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.

- bell hooks²⁶⁶

Watch your eye, should it ever reveal to you the faults of others, say to it: “O my eye, other people have eyes too.”

- Imam Ahmad Zarruq (d. 1493)²⁶⁷

Not having a representative image of the Prophet, leaves much to the imagination, much that can be imagined. With a lack of visual images, the edifying imaginary of the Prophet is constructed through textual description, most ideally performed in the oratories of a teacher, *khaṭīb*, or *da'iyā*. The cultivation of this imaginary, and the Prophet's particular place within it, is one example that Saba Mahmood gives of ways in which thinking through Islamic subjectivities expands our notions of the autonomous subject (2005, 2009). By thinking through notions of relationality, she considers how the iconic “image” of the Prophet Muhammad is bound to particular Muslim subjects by virtue of his being an “object of veneration” and a model for mimetic practices (2009:77). This relationality is mediated and cultivated in Muslim bodies through the circulation of oral transmissions, written texts, and/or human dispositions.

By thinking through the work of the image and the visual in constructing subjectivities, whether gendered, racialized, or otherwise, I believe we can get at the ways in which particular Muslim subjectivities are produced, sustained, or suspended in

²⁶⁶ Hooks (1992, 116)

²⁶⁷ This is a much cited saying of Imam Ahmad Zarruq, which is also quoted on Zaytuna College's website under “Perennial Faculty.”

ways that are both nurturing and injurious. The intense looking that happens between individuals at Zaytuna College does critical work in cultivating American Muslim subjectivities in a time when mediated images of Muslims impose a “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 1975) that leaves many young Muslims ambivalent about the representation of Muslims and Islam (Alsultany 2012, Maira 2009). Having models for an American Muslim way of being sutures the dissonances of mediated images that consistently reinforce the incommensurability of Islam and America and the desire to find ways to be “at home” in both.

The incitement to discourse about Islam and Muslims after September 11th, 2001, reinvigorated a “to-be-looked-at-ness” for the Muslim subject, whether one was produced and appraised with horror, curiosity, pity, or unease (Jamal and Naber 2008).²⁶⁸ Laura Mulvey (1975) demonstrates how cinematic technology produces and sustains the terms and object of its gaze.

It is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it...Going far beyond highlighting a women’s to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to [be] looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire.

Rather than specific types of framing, in which the woman is made object of the gaze (the slow pan up a women’s body for example), Muslims are framed within particular narratives, conjuring “old” storylines of the conniving Asiatic or the primitive African. Orientalism, which defined, produced, and elaborated a discourse of the Oriental

²⁶⁸ In Mulvey’s seminal essay “Visual Pleasure...” she discusses women’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” as their “traditional exhibitionist role [in which] women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact...she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire” (1975)

(Muslim/Asian/Arab/Semite) was also an intellectual, cultural, political, and moral project, which was less about knowing these “objects” of difference, but rather about distinguishing oneself outside of this difference, thereby establishing a categorical Other (to the white Christian male). Said examines such representations as representations, as “presences” that have “excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as ‘the Orient’ (Said 1979:22).

The banal hysteria of earlier films like *Not Without my Daughter* (1991, based on the book [1987]) or others well-documented by Jack Shaheen in *Reel Bad Arabs* (2001, 2006) find their more “simplified complex representations” (Alsultany 2012) in recent films and television shows like *Homeland*, *24*, and *Covert Affairs*, as well as in CNN and ABC specials such as “Islam: Questions and Answers.”²⁶⁹ Pulling back to a historical wide shot, one captures these recent mediated representations in the same frame as the imperial gazes of the “Western eye” whether in colonial administration, the colonial harem, in exploration, in anthropological study, in world’s fair spectacle, the slave trade, penal colonies, other modes of surveillance, or painting, poetry, literature, and filmmaking.²⁷⁰ Orientalism as a production and elaboration rages on, with more and more images such that one can reach a level of good/bad Muslim-fatigue, an ambivalence to stereotypes and framings in which one is already written (Bhabha 1994, Mamdani 2004). In her analysis of Black female spectatorship, bell hooks expresses the pain of such fatigue:

²⁶⁹ This was a 2010 Diane Sawyer Reporting for 20/20. <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/islam-questions-answers/story?id=11747416> *Unwelcome: The Muslims Next Door*, a CNN special investigated by Soledad O’Brian in 2011 presented an isolated image of the anti-Muslim racism that fuels a wider and self-funded Islamophobia Industry. See Ali (August 2011), Kumar (2012), Lean , O’Brian (2011), Sheehi (2011), Shryock (2010).

²⁷⁰ See Alloula (1986), Hartman (1997), Mirzoeff (2011), Pratt (1992), Rana (2011), Rony (1996), Said (1979).

As one black woman put, “I could always get pleasure from movies as long as I did not look too deep.” For black female spectators who have “looked to deep” the encounter with the screen hurt. That some of us chose to stop looking was a gesture of resistance, turning away was one way to protest, to reject negation...It was better then, that we were absent, for when we were there it was humiliating, strange, sad (Hooks 1992:121-2).

Yet hooks also counters this turning away with an “on guard” turning back that is oppositional and productive. As producers, “We create alternative texts that are not solely reactions. As critical spectators, black women participate in a broad range of looking relations, contest, resist, revision, interrogate, and invent on multiple levels” (1992:128).

These looking relations are more than an ocular way of seeing, they are a critical view that is part of a way of being that is always doubly conscious, “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness...” (Du Bois 1989:3). This double consciousness enables a criticality towards what one sees, in the dissonant images of “contempt and pity,” as well as in the ideal images of one’s scholars, classmates, and historical Muslim figures. One feels his twoness in terms of who he is and who he aspires to be, not necessarily from a place of racial inferiority, but from a place of spiritual and ethical striving.

While we see and observe as thinkers, we are transformed through seeing, as we are “habituated” by the images around us. Much has been written on how violence in the media influences the shaping of young subjectivities and behaviors and the possible indexical realities of television dramas and films. Upon his return home after a year at Zaytuna College, Faiz’s parents commented that he “looked like Shaykh Hamza.” Faiz did not suddenly lose his Pakistani American features, but he began to carry himself in a way that was self-aware, a profound transformation in comportment and intellectual curiosity. That his image conjured Hamza Yusuf’s for Faiz’s parents speaks to Yusuf’s

public image and symbolic notoriety amongst South Asian Muslims in particular. Faiz was affected by the intimate proximity with the scholars, as well as the intense academic year of study; he seemed at home both in his own slim frame and in America, an aspiration towards American cultural citizenship that his parents' hold for him and themselves. Faiz's parents see him in relation to a mediated American Muslim figure whose image has become familiar.

Following Deleuze's notion of cinema as an iteration, rather than an index of reality, Kara Keeling encourages

thinking about questions of "race," "gender," "sexuality," and "representation" that challenge demands for "positive," "negative," or "accurate" representations—demands that assume the coherence of an indexical relationship between image and "reality" that has never cohered for blacks and other groups who consistently have claimed to be misrepresented (Keeling 2007:4-5).

While one can not disavow the significance of seeing someone "who looks like me" on the big screen, I wonder about what kind of closures we impose on subjective possibilities when we keep looking at the quality of the characterization rather than the *qualitative impact* of that very looking. Following Keeling and Deleuze, I am more interested in thinking about such images as "part of reality, rather than as a reflection or representation of it." They urge us to think through the "dominance of cinematic processes in making sense of the world for those whose sensory-motor schemata has been habituated by film." Keeling critically draws attention to

not only the extent to which our knowledges of the world increasingly are mediated by images but also the ways in which our sensory apparatus is accustomed to receiving and forming images according to the parameters and expectations put in place by cinema (Keeling 2007:5).

While Walter Benjamin lamented the affective losses in perceiving works of mechanical reproduction, he also recognized film's power and effect on an audience,

especially an audience of mass proportions. As a photograph “reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject,” so to “with the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended”; “the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses” (Benjamin 1968:236). Quoting Duhamel, Benjamin notes cinema’s effect: “I can no longer think what I want to think. My thought’s have been replaced by moving images” (238). By drawing attention to the dominance of our fields of vision and the empirical hierarchy in which sight is privileged in our globalized mediascape Appadurai (1996), Keeling, Benjamin, and Deleuze propose that we revisit our embodied relationship with the things we see and the way we see.

Images [would] lead and rule this folk
that you have freed,
and strange wishes [will be] their gods,
leading them back to the slavery
of godlessness and earthly pleasures.

You have betrayed God to the gods,
the idea to images,
this chosen folk to others,
the extraordinary to the commonplace.

- *Moses und Aron* (1928)²⁷¹

Religious iconography plays on our visually vulnerable selves, such that images towards a divine cultivate God-conscious subjectivities. In the cases of Islam and Judaism, iconography is discouraged or prohibited. Such prohibitions marked an important departure from the pagan faiths in which statues were central to the mediation and directionality of belief. The story of Moses/Musa, Aaron/Haroon, and the golden calf

²⁷¹ Schoenberg’s opera *Moses und Aaron* gets at this relationship to the image as dangerous and seductive. Quoted in Zizek (2001).

demonstrates this caution well and relates the easy slippage towards *shirk* that images can precipitate.²⁷²

In our contemporary landscapes in which images are working on us always, proscriptions on representation seem antiquated and arbitrary; they are always defeated by the primacy of mediated representations in our everyday lives. To avoid our mediated scapes, one would need to be hermetically sealed from electricity, cellular towers, and print media, only subject to shadows projected on the walls of Plato's cave. Yet these very judgments on visual representation anticipated the impact of images and the ages of mechanical and digital reproduction - how such images may harm, transform, and commodify, how they would shape forms of relationality and processes of becoming. Images were to be left for the imagination, whereas words left space for infinite possibilities, and the Prophet was produced as a proximate model through accounts of his being - descriptions, quotes, observations, and the particular embodiments that were transmitted over time and across space. Religious iconography of the Prophets were discouraged or banned in order to protect Muslims from over-identifying with or directing their focus upon an image at the expense of their seeking closeness to and serving God.²⁷³

The use of iconographic imagery in Christianity, Catholicism in particular, employs similar understandings of the work of images by shaping ethical subjectivities through visual material. The use of icons are harnessed for pious ends, much in the way that individuals become iconic role models/idols elsewhere. In recognizing the ubiquity

²⁷² *Shirk* - identifying something other than God with God, ex. idol worship. Shirk is the worst possible sin in Islam (Izutsu 2002).

²⁷³ Some exceptions exist of course, especially in considering the rich traditions of painting of the Persian and Mughal empires, as well as performative visual forms like the passion-plays of Shia' Islam, which still avoid representations of the Prophets as they focus on historical events and figures in the period after the Prophet Muhammad's death. See also Elias (2012).

and power of images, contemporary Muslim scholars employ mechanical and digital reproduction to spread their teachings and express a sense of their embodied learning. While videos and photographs don't always capture the "auras" of such individuals (Benjamin 1968), like photographs of art objects, they index particular beings who are ideally "viewed" or experienced in person. Through such productions, they become incorporated into structures of spiritual and financial capital and exchange.

While one can benefit and learn from a video or photograph, one is habituated to desire a nearness to or a becoming of these reproduced figures. The mediated scholar or *walī* (representative), initially a medium for becoming a better servant to God, must remain vigilant in reminding his or her students that he or she is not the object of veneration, he or she is only a model—a representation—that mediates a believer's relationship with God. In talking to students at Zaytuna College, community members and scholars often remind the students that they will not and should not aspire to be the next Shaykh Hamza or Imam Zaid. While the students know this, their initial introductions to the scholars as televised, streamed, or digitally circulated, as well as a general culture of celebrity in the United States, has habituated them to interacting with them and viewing them in particular ways. The students themselves become models for future students as they are featured on Zaytuna's website and Facebook page.

Such relationships and affective forces are difficult to contain, and the scholars become uncomfortable with their iconic statuses and recognize the potential harm such celebrity can do to their souls (*nufus*, plural of *nafs*). Such mediation simultaneously makes sacred knowledge more accessible online, while also drawing attention to the fields of inequality in material circumstances and realities when it comes to taking steps to furthering one's study. Seeing or taking knowledge from a particular scholar in person is often conditional on one's geographic location, gender, income, and access to basic

stages of knowledge. Mediated forms like books, DVDs, and websites facilitate a wider dissemination of and access to such materials, but in considering the emphasis on face-to-face and heart-to-heart encounters, they always index the pedagogic ideal of proximity and physical presence.

In a much quoted Ḥadīth discussed earlier, it is recommended to travel as far as China for knowledge. Becoming a Muslim entailed a habituation that came from proximity to and relations with texts, teachers, other Muslims, and other people of knowledge. It was recommended that Muslims seek out teachers and take what they could from these teachers to whom they had access. The face-to-face, heart-to-heart encounter was crucial in knowledge transmission, and one should travel as far as one needed to sit with a teacher. This was not an automatic process, however. Students had to engage actively in their learning, putting in devotional time in the form of studies, service, and prayer. The habituated learning that would come from such experiences and processes of learning, as well as from the time spent with one's teacher and companions would enable an embodiment of the subjects of one's studies. Haroon Sellars shared one of his early observations of the Zaytuna School and how teachers and students were spiritual and ethical models who transmitted learning in face-to-face and heart-to-heart encounters.

An early lesson for Sellars was an example set by one of Hamza Yusuf's first American students, Usama Canon. Sellars and two of his friends from Virginia were visiting the Bay Area while Yusuf was teaching *The Purification of the Heart*²⁷⁴ at the MCA in Santa Clara. The young men were staying in the apartment of another group of

²⁷⁴ A course based on Yusuf's translation and (later) commentary of Imam al-Mawḥūd's *Matharat al-Qulub*. The text was first published in 2004 by Starlatch Press in Chicago, Illinois. A revised edition was published in 2012 by Sandala based in Mountain View, California. The classes were also recorded and continue to be sold as a CD box set.

multiracial young Muslim men (mostly in their early twenties) and were sitting down to a meal. Usama had converted to Islam a few years earlier and was one of Haroon's hosts at the apartment.

We're supposed to get to meet Shaykh Hamza for the first time, like more privately in his setting, you know. But at that apartment that we stayed at, I just remember Usama stuck out so clearly for me, because he just had this whole outgoing, happy-go-lucky, you know, character, and I thought he was like Moroccan or something, because [of] the way he spoke Arabic and the character in which he carried himself, you know? And then you realize, "Whoa, he's a convert?" And you are just like "Whoa, how does he know Arabic like that?" It just seemed so natural for him.

But I just remember him setting down a big tray of food, some rice and some lamb, throwing it down on the floor, and all the brothers all crowding around and eating it, and I remember he was next to me, and I remember he just tore off a piece of the food, and he just put it in my mouth. Like he fed me the food with his own hand, and I never had anybody do anything like that since my mom, you know? (*He laughs.*)

And that simple little act, you know, of love, like, after that I felt like I was ready to go home. I knew he was a student of, one of Shaykh Hamza's students, so...I was like, I felt like I met the benefit of Shaykh Hamza through meeting Brother Usama. You see what I mean. Just in that simple act, I was like "Ok, I get it, I got it. I can go home now."

So meeting later on, meeting Shaykh Hamza and being hosted at his home with my friends, that was just like icing on the cake, you know, but I got it just in seeing Usama, and some of the other brothers that were around him (he lists a number of individuals). They were of differing age... Man, they are all like superstars to me, and they all seemed to have that current.

You could tell that they were all so touched by that Prophetic current, that they were all students of Shaykh Hamza and the people that he had brought from Mauritania, some of his teachers, Shaykh Abdur Rahman and Shaykh Qatri, who he had [brought]. And you could really see that their lives were touched in a way, and that's what was different about it, again...was that they all seemed to have this, even though, again, you had different teachers, but they all seemed to have this current of loving the Prophet, *ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*, and talking about that, and getting their *dhikr* on, you know...They all just, they were totally

different people, but they all had this thing about loving the Prophet, *ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*.

Haroon points out a number of important aspects of his experiences as a student of Islam and the Zaytuna school’s impact. While he had been introduced to Hamza Yusuf through his videos, Haroon and his friends still felt compelled to fly to California to meet him and attend one of his classes in person. Yet prior to his private meeting with Yusuf, he felt that he had already taken some of the knowledge he had travelled for. Before Usama who comes from a diverse mixed-race background became the public figure he now is, he exemplified to Haroon what it meant to be a person of knowledge through the humble and loving act of feeding Haroon, a tall African American man, with his hands. Haroon importantly points out that Usama was an “outgoing, happy-go-lucky” character, which was markedly distinct from Yusuf’s more measured comportment, but that despite these dispositional differences, Haroon still received the benefit of Hamza Yusuf through his encounter with Usama, as well as through his encounters with the other men in the community. These men were of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (white, mixed-race, Asian, and African American converts, as well as Arab and South Asian “born”-Muslims) and were distinct in their personalities, yet they all carried this “Prophetic current,” that had traveled across place and time, arriving in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1990s through the figures of Hamza Yusuf and his teachers Shaykh Abdur Rahman Taahir, Shaykh Qatri, and others.

A few years later in the American Midwest, prior to her tenure in the Bay Area, Aminah was witnessing similar Prophetic currents (Muhammadaic Breezes?) in Tarek, a North African American student of sacred knowledge who had traveled to Yemen to pursue studies at Dār Al-Mustafa in Tarim. That witnessing lead to her pursuit of studies in the San Francisco Bay Area at Zaytuna College, where her access to knowledge would

be quite distinct from what she would have encountered as a young Muslim woman at Dār Al-Zahraa in Tarim, Yemen. In Berkeley, her bedroom was full of pictures of the Ḥabā'ib, who as scholars and descendants of the Prophet Muhammad were ethical models for her.

What really attracted me to their way was that I felt like if you felt connected to them and their character, and you loved them, then you were automatically a part of their family. And I really felt that and experienced that, so I collected these pictures... When I felt like I was connected to one of these scholars, I printed out the picture and put it up.

She recounted to me how she understood what Ḥabīb 'Umar may think about her putting up of pictures:

I heard Ḥabīb 'Umar one time speaking about people who put up pictures of unrighteous people, and how that has a bad effect on the household and the family. So he was just warning his students to kind of make sure that everything they had in their home is a good reflection of what good is inside of them. So after he said that I kinda took it upon myself to, you know, make that an “okay” to put up pictures of him (*She laughs*).

So after that, I just you know, it's like, “ok this is great.” So if he's saying “Don't put up pictures of not righteous people,” what he's saying is “Put up pictures of righteous people!” So I went, and that's what I did. But that's kind of my own...the “Aminah-translation” of what he said.

So, Alḥamdulillāh. I'm happy that I get a chance to do this. Because, you know I didn't feel like I necessarily had the opportunity to do this when I was at home, because it wasn't necessarily my own space. But I'm happy that I have such a nice roommate that's okay with...(*waves her arm around at the photos on both sides of the room*).

The relationship between “imitate” (Latin *imitari*) and “image” (Latin *imago*) is significant when one recognizes the eye as a sensorial medium for engaging with, performing within, and knowing the world. Ḥabīb 'Umar articulates the potential harm that seeing unrighteous people in one's everyday surroundings could do to one's household. He assumes a “purer” original self or dispositional state (*fiṭra*) that can be

contaminated by the image of unrighteousness. Yusuf and Shakir likewise draw attention to guarding one's senses, including that of vision, in their da'wa text *Agenda to Change Our Condition* (2007) . What is the affective force of such "negative" images? How do they wear upon a person or become potentially embodied? The images we see are not wholly determining, and they are often contradictory. But in the assemblage of images that do come to habituate our sensibilities and ways of being, which are most affecting and which are most seductive? When young Muslims are so "plugged in" to an American mainstream whose cinematic qualities shape their sensory-motor schemata and shapes their experiences of everyday life, how do Muslims scholars and their teachings compete?

Aminah supplemented the work that these photographs performed on her being with a consistent reading of the biography of Imam Abdallah ibn Alawi al-Haddad, *Sufi Sage of Arabia* (Dr. Mostafa al-Badawi, 2005), who is the seventeenth-century ancestor of Ḥabīb 'Umar and others who provide visible guidance from her walls. Made conscious of the work that images do, Aminah is careful about where she puts her eyes, and thus her heart. She seeks out both new and old mediated forms, as well as old and young people, those who will have a "good" affect and effect on her way of being and sense of self.

In this way Aminah participates in the discursive tradition of Islam and situates herself in multiple genealogies of knowledge-based practices. I quote again the words of Hamza Yusuf citing the scholar Ahmad Zarruq:

One of the teachers, Muhammad bin Wasiyya,' they used to say about him, his students, they said that 'Whenever we found, *itha fatarna, thahabana ilayhi linandhur 'alayhī , fanafa'na usbu'an*. Like "If we felt lazy or weak, we used to go look at him, and it would sustain us for the week." To get the *himma* (high-mindedness, high-aiming ambition, intention, resolution) from that person. Ibn al Munkadher the great teacher of Imam Malik, RA, one of the great Tabi'in, Imam Malik said 'We used to go visit him,' and he said, '*Wa kunna nunkeru qulubuna,*

after visiting him, we would *nah'takeru anfusuna ayyama*, that we would hold ourselves in contempt for several days thereafter, just by seeing his state.'²⁷⁵

Maybe one day Aminah will tell her students stories of how she used to visit Haroon in the back cubicles when she needed “to see him,” or how she looked to her classmates and teachers for their himma, sustenance, and strength.

In the following account, Ruqayya tells me about a conversation that took place amongst her classmates. Jordan is an older African American student who converted to Islam a week before his first year at Zaytuna. Originally from the South, he already has an undergraduate degree and works full-time while attending the College. Ruqayya is a nineteen-year-old Black American whose parents and grandparents converted to Islam. Her father had been in the Nation of Islam, and she was raised in a Warith Deen community on the East Coast.

So Jordan was saying that he often looks at us, at his classmates, and I guess the other students at Zaytuna as well to be able to understand better, I guess to make sure that you know, the things that he is doing, he's doing them correctly. And I found that really amazing, because for me, Jordan is somebody who...he just has everything so together and he seems to have such an amazing personality, that I feel like it's amazing that he's looking at me to make sure, you know, that he's going about things in the right way, because I look at him to make sure that I'm doing things and I look at him, and I just know always that I'm falling short because he does things to such completion...Just, his dedication alone, being at Zaytuna, is just amazing.

I mean he works, what do they call them, they call them like “graveyard hours,” or something, and then he always has all his work done. And he does everything to like, you know, he wants to make sure everything is just the best that it can be. Like he doesn't give himself any room to be like, “oh you know I was working, I was doing this, and I was busy, so you know this is kind of sloppy, whatever, and that's okay cuz because you know, I'm a really busy person.” He doesn't give himself any room for that. And I think that that level of dedication is just amazing. And I guess just his character in general.

²⁷⁵ videorecording at end of year picnic Spring 2011.

He seems to be a very sincere type of person who, you know, who is just constantly trying to better himself, like constantly, without rest, and so I feel like just that level of work, I guess on oneself, is also something that you know I'm lacking, like I could be doing so much more. Um, and so once again that he looks to us, I mean, I guess the other students are worthy of him looking at them like that, but I am definitely not, and just to be a part of that, you know that he looks at me, to make sure that he's up to par with everything, it's so backwards.

Ruqayya describes her classmate Jordan with humble earnestness, with an admiration that renders her quite emotional; she is an intensity of feeling. She was so moved by his humbleness and sincerity in seeking out correct adab in his classmates' example, while she felt quite unworthy of his "seeking to better himself" gaze. His confession of examining his classmates' behavior for instruction, demonstrates how students also model for each other the rulings of fiqh, ethical ways of being, and the forms of adab – comportment and behavior that are being inculcated at the College. They are mirrors for each other; Ruqayya sees herself and her own shortcomings through her observance of Jordan, while Jordan too seeks to correct his practices and ways of being through his observance of his fellow students. That Ruqayya is intensely looking is a testament to her desire to be "better," despite her talking about her lack. She struggles to implement what she sees in her everyday life, which is the ultimate goal of her looking. (In a way the students at Zaytuna are ideal ethnographers, they are cultivating the intense listening and looking that is an essential part of our work. We often shared our observations. They were curious about what I noticed as an "outsider," and they welcomed opportunities to ponder what was happening in their lives and in the school.)

These observations often crossed gender. While many of the students and teachers lamented the lack of female role models and professors at the school, they also found models in the men around them. The male students also looked to the female students as models for behavior and comportment. There were also moments of critique, in which "the brothers did this" or "the sisters do that..." although they were not often shared

openly. Most of Jordan's classmates are female, and they provide him one aspect of his ethical religious education, while he, as a recent convert, provides the sisters who were mostly born into Islam with another aspect of ethical religious education. Ruqayya discusses what she sees as the difference between converts who have found something new to become a part of versus those who are born into it who must make these moments of discovery and realization from within.

I'm so jealous of converts, I don't know...I feel like they have those moments where its just like "yeah, this is it." Growing up with Islam it's like kind of, you get used to it, and it kind of...you really have to work at making it, work at making it something that you continue to draw close to. There's a really fine line in between of just being like "oh this is the way I've always been," so it's going to be keeping it like this. And like "this is where I want to be, this is what I want, this is the best."²⁷⁶

Ruqayya articulates the aspirational and striving aspect of her way of being and how it requires a consciousness and "work." Being Muslim for her is about not being satisfied with her state, but always seeking towards where she wants to be, towards an intimacy with her own submission or her own "engaged surrender" (Rouse 2004).

These accounts draw attention to what former students and teachers would tell me and what I witnessed in terms of how much of the learning happens beyond the classroom, in the interactions with others and over the course of time. The information of books is important, but it is not the only means, nor an end goal. The information itself will not get one to the next level of insight, or *baṣīra*, and will not make one the "best." In addition to the "seeing" that is cultivated through intimate encounters and proximity with those who embody knowledge, the processes by which the students are challenged by the examples, inconsistencies, and challenges of their teachers, their classmates, and

²⁷⁶ Such "jealous" feelings can likewise be felt in the reverse direction, where converts lament not being born Muslim or not having Muslim family and community members.

themselves become critical to their spiritual, ethical, and cognitive learning and their attendant processes of embodiment.

Muhammad, a graduate from the seminary program shared his insights on this process, which he would only come to understand years after his experiences as a Zaytuna student.

People think Shaykh Hamza is the way he is because of his knowledge. That's not true, he's that way because God has tested him in certain ways and pulled him through certain experiences.

Imam Zaid, people think that "Well, Imam Zaid is the way he is because of his knowledge." It's not true. It's because of what he's been through and how he managed, and how he dealt with it, that God selected him for certain things.

So what happens is that people go to these colleges thinking that or these seminaries thinking that "I'm going to become this person or that person." That might be true, and you might even [become] better than that in the sense of your benefit for people. However, what you don't take into consideration is that God is the educator, not these people. So your sitting in class is just the means. You are just sitting there, like they're talking, and you are listening, but that's not where the education is happening. Education is happening, as like what's going to happen to you as a person. And how you are going to be tried and how you are going to have to deal with it. So that when they are not there, it is applied. Applied. Trial.

Muhammad alludes here to the gift of knowledge and the aura of celebrity and *firāsa* that open this chapter. The qualities of the scholars that draw students to Zaytuna College and its scholars were transmitted in analog and digital mediations that appealed to, relied upon, and augmented habituated forms of media consumption. Digital *da'wa* produces particular forms of desire in its viewers: to emulate or become the figures presented, to have their knowledge and certainty, and to be near them. Muhammad's understanding comes from his own experience, having been a student, then feeling left on

his own (distant) upon graduating, and then coming to understand the “Musa and Khidr” of it all.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ The story of Musa and Khidr (Qur’an 18:65-82) is often discussed in student-teacher situations as a way to express how one must trust one’s teacher even if what he or she may be doing seems wrong. The truth and wisdom often reveals itself over time, and the student must exercise patience and trust, see Chapter 3.

Conclusion: Producing Knowledge - for What, for Whom?

“The need to produce minoritarian knowledge is a mode of utopian performativity, a certain striving that is both ideality and a necessity.” (Muñoz 2005:120)

In the above epigraph, José Esteban Muñoz refers to the politics of both his critical contributions to theory and his pedagogic practice in the academy – the majoritarian institutions whose “mechanisms ensure that the production of such knowledge ‘misfires’ insofar as it is misheard, misunderstood, and devalued.” He asserts that “politics are only possible when we acknowledge that dynamic” (ibid). Roderick Ferguson argues that through the institutionalization of the interdisciplines like Ethnic Studies and Women and Gender Studies, universities became ‘training grounds’ for state and capital’s “absorption and representation” of minority difference (2012:27). Considering the adaptive and absorptive capabilities of hegemonic power, Ferguson asks how we may proceed to be in institutions but not of them, imagining critical forms of community in which “minoritized subjects become the agents rather than the silent objects of knowledge formations and institutional practices” (232). This late twentieth century absorption and representation echoes in some ways the emergence of “world religions” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that accommodated other belief systems towards a way of cataloguing and mapping difference and claims of universality (Masuzawa 2005).

I was reminded of this by one of my teachers in the Bay Area, who would consistently question the “thingness” of “Islam” - the ability for Islam to modify anything, whether an “Islamic” school, an “Islamic” politics, an “Islamic” civilization, or an “Islamic” culture and its people. That which comes under the umbrella of Islamic, as opposed to Christian, secular, Western, or local, for example, is that which is recognized

as emerging from the revelation of a text, the Qur'an to Muhammad, the Messenger of God. The words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad likewise serve as an additional origin to things Islamic and to people Muslim. The "discursive tradition," which we call "Islam" (submission), is an inheritance, something that follows a line or multiple lines and beckons to be reproduced across time and space. Sara Ahmed discusses inheritance "as both bodily and historical; we inherit what we receive as the condition of our arrival into the world, as an arrival that leaves and makes an impression" (Ahmed 2006b:125). These conditions in which we arrive and live are, according to Karl Marx, "inherited from the past," "then they are passed down not only in blood or in genes, but also through the work or labor of generations. The 'passing' of history is a social as well as a material way of organizing the world that shapes the materials out of which life is made as well as the very 'matter' of bodies" (ibid.).

The discursive tradition is inherited, as well as the conditions in which it is inherited. In her text Ahmed refers to how whiteness is an inheritance, orienting us to the world – our entrance into it and reproduction of it, whether we follow the line of whiteness or stray from it. Orientalism mapped the world according to such lines of whiteness, such that the Orient and Islam became our destinations and objects "within reach" of that whiteness. Notions and conditions of the secular and the religious likewise frame what is within reach and imaginable. Talal Asad (1993, 2003) outlines such genealogies, our inheritances of understanding, and what it may mean to secularize or Islamicize.

It is the "work and labor of generations" that I would like to consider now. As I discuss in Chapter One, schools of Islamic Law and other Islamic sciences cohere into a recognizable textual tradition through the transmission of sacred knowledge across generations and geographies. Beyond the textual transmissions are other forms of

embodied transmissions, the social and material ways in which the world and its peoples are organized and experienced. I discuss some of those transmissions in which individuals mediate knowledge in Chapters Two, Five, and Seven. Scholars, students, and students become ethical models for each other, and in Chapter Four, Malcolm X is venerated as a ethical-political model for Muslims in the United States. This ethnography likewise demonstrates some of the spatial realities of such inheritances, their contingency and mutability and perhaps what exists in the background, offering other possible paths to follow.

In Chapters One, Four, and Five, I allude to this background, or perhaps an other ground, of that which is most visible as the “Islamic tradition;” this is mostly the work of gendered and racialized others within the Muslim body. While Muslim women and increasingly queer Muslims are made visible through western scholarship and media, their scholarship and life experiences are liminal within the discursive tradition. I contest the possibilities of a politics of visibility in Chapter Five in an effort to suggest other forms of egalitarian and ethical relationality that do not fall into the traps of western liberal frameworks, while I also begin to question how particular forms of Islamic knowledge are seen as “outside the fold” in Chapter One.²⁷⁸ In Chapter Four I consider how Black American Muslim histories intersect with those of Arab, Asian, African, White, Indigenous, and Latino histories in the San Francisco Bay Area towards a “kinship of faith,” constituted through the convergence of multiple intellectual and practice-based genealogies and the Prophetic bloodline. The Zaytuna scholars and students reorient the American Umma around the subjugated histories of Black American

²⁷⁸ This area of women’s scholarship and practice within the discursive tradition is an area I’d like to develop further in the book manuscript. I’d like to address in particular the intellectual and ethical-political disconnects between Islamic Studies departments in the United States and Canada and initiatives like Zaytuna College.

resistance, thereby rearticulating the ethical telos of everyday embodied practices and relations. The Umma runs the risk, however, of “absorbing” and neutralizing such histories like that of Malcolm X in the same ways that the American government did when they issued his postal stamp in 1999.²⁷⁹

Zaytuna College is actively engaged in the institutionalization of Islamic knowledge in the form of a liberal arts college, as a grounding for imagining agentive “critical forms of community.” Analyzing Zaytuna College and related sites across the Bay Area with an attention to race and gender has enabled me to see it as not only an expression of the discursive tradition of Islam, but also as a critical imagining of community that uses Islamic epistemologies to frame and enact multiracial futures as a social justice project and practice. This articulation towards a multiracial future, at the intersections of race, geography, and religion, is a critical intervention by Muslim scholars and their students in American Muslim communities, which are beset with intra-Muslim racisms, and anti-Black Muslim racism in particular.

Practices of containment and silencing through authoritative, patriarchal, and moralizing structures coexist with everyday practices of making difference visible and imagining forms of relationality anew. Zaytuna College emerges as a critical point on this geopolitical, historical, and spiritual map and bears the weight of American Muslim communities and the multiple crises of authority and belonging that existed before 9-11, but that have perhaps intensified in its wake.

In a radio interview in England, Hamza Yusuf states that “People without a vision perish.”²⁸⁰ He speaks in regards to the future of American Muslims, or Muslims in the

²⁷⁹ There is likewise the risk of occluding the histories of indigenous peoples, especially in regards to the much used phrase “indigenous Islam” that sometimes carries xenophobic valences when situated oppositionally towards “immigrant Islam.”

²⁸⁰ Ethnic Jihad [Part 1 / 2] | By Hamza Yusuf. 2012. Film.

West, and uses a reference from the Bible to do so. In the King James Bible, the verse reads: “Where there is no vision, the people perish (“cast off restraint” in other translations): but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Proverbs 29:18). The vision here refers to the Prophetic vision, which transmits sacred law that will preserve the people. Vision is connected to law, and law (Sharī‘a and fiqh) gives the terms of restraint, of life. Fiqh is also knowledge and understanding, and vision is needed to ensure the future of its transmission.

To be the object of a vision, to be visible, however, is a trap (Foucault 1995:200). I have discussed how the cinematic conditioning of our visions, both individual and collective, affect how and what we see. The mediated nature of everyday life works in tandem with a surveillance regime that polices individual communications while also surreptitiously impacting discourses of private space. Using the metaphor of the panopticon, contemporary Muslim life is discursively structured towards inducing “in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (ibid.201). Muslims feel like “the subjects of perpetual inspection” that subjectivizes them towards a “being seen. As such, the design is a visual template in which authority and subject reside in the enduring formation of one another” (Morgan 2012:27). To refuse to be made visible, whether through an individual veiling or refusal to be videotaped or teach male students or address large crowds, articulates an alternative form of subjectivization and relationality to others and to sacred knowledge that some women scholars in particular seek to preserve and transmit.

But the panopticon’s power likewise resides in prohibiting the seen to see, both what is to one’s side and the one who sees:

Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up... He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (Foucault 1995:202-203).

The self-governing aspect of this apparatus and its applicability to other social institutions like schools demonstrates the efficiency of power to enroll subjects in their own disciplining. It likewise serves as a metaphor for God, who always sees and beseeches Muslims to always comport themselves in such a way that assumes God's seeing them. Along with *imān* (faith), *islām* (submission), and the signs of *As-Sā'at* (the Hour), *iḥsān* (excellence or perfection) according to the Hadith of Gabriel, is a cornerstone of the *dīn* (religion, for lack of a better word):

He (the inquirer) again said: Inform me about al-iḥsān. He (the Holy Prophet) said: That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for though you don't see Him, He, verily, sees you. ²⁸¹

While in the above hadith, *islām* focuses on the testification, prayer, zakat, fasting, and hajj - what are largely considered the five pillars of Islam, *iḥsān* focuses on character and techniques of the self. *Islām* speaks to the social and communal dimensions of one's practice, while *iḥsān* speaks to the cultivation of an individualized ethical self, inner practices versus outer practices, an inner state versus one's outer state. Living one's everyday life as if God is watching still relies upon the social aspects of one's ethical development. While one is seen by God, one is also able to see others and oneself reflected in others.

²⁸¹ *Sahih Muslim* Book 1, Hadith 1. This hadith is one of the most agreed upon hadith within the corpus. It is interesting to note here, that Islam is part of the *Dīn* rather than the *Dīn*, itself. I have heard many Muslims use the word "*Dīn*" instead of "Islam" or "religion" when referring to their spiritual engagement. Its difficulty in translation speaks to the limits of secular/religious binaries and the ways in which the overuse of "Islam" becomes a discursive focus of Muslims rather than God.

The limit of the panopticon metaphor is precisely this ability to look sideways, forward, and backward. Religion scholar David Morgan states that “to study seeing is to study embodiment as the mediation of the visible and invisible” (2012:xvii). Seeing for him enfoldes “the senses, feeling, and flesh into a visual medium to embody the sacred in a variety of ways” (ibid.). I find this articulation of the significance and complexity of the visual field useful in describing the work of this dissertation. By thinking the sacred in relation to what it means to belong to a “social body by virtue of what one looks like and how one sees the world,” this framing draws attention to the meaning and impact of the visual. Such an understanding pushes us beyond an understanding of the autonomous human subject as a “discrete biological unit,” but rather “a medium, an interface” in relation to larger bodies (6).

As in the account of Ruqayya and Jordan and the transmissions of Hamza Yusuf in Chapter Seven, the act of seeing and being seen is pedagogic and edifying. In conversations with Haroon about our respective filmmaking practices he spoke about how he alleviated his personal concerns of invasion and causing discomfort in scholars and students with the knowledge that God sees everything. In a way, the camera is a reminder to aspire to *iḥsān* at all times, not just when the camera is on. What is not recorded digitally or on film will be written in the book that accompanies believers to their final judgement.

Thinking through the body and its relationship to “seeking knowledge,” resonates with how Rod Ferguson calls upon bodily acts and acts of scholarship to “imagine new types of people and communities.” Zaytuna College, though an institutional form, offers such possibilities, perhaps. As a project within American Muslim communities, it reimagines and remaps the Umma, the community of believers as multiracial and ethically oriented towards social justice across urban suburban divides. As a minoritarian

community within the United States, Bay Area Muslims and Zaytuna scholars and students situate themselves at an intersection of marked bodies – criminal, illegal, and terrifying. These marked bodies draw on these multiple subjugated histories and experiences, taking on the task proposed by M. Jacqui Alexander “of configuring new ways of being and knowing and to plot the different metaphysics that are needed to move away from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity” (2005:8). The contingencies of such future possibilities and limits reside in a grounded orientation towards the discursive tradition of Islam and the material realities of everyday life, a multidirectional critique and theoretical inspiration.

In their Islamic history class, the students learn that while Islam traveled across the Atlantic during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it did not survive the ravages of slavery because the knowledge was not transmitted. They also learn about how Islam was spread and preserved through its preaching and the institutionalization of Islamic knowledge and the traditions of the isnād (chain of transmission), ṭarīqas (sufi paths), madhhabs (schools of law), and the awqaf (endowments) that funded schools, colleges, and universities.²⁸² This knowledge of the past and the discursive tradition through which it has been sustained, however transformed, adapted, transmuted, reformed, and interpreted, is once again at a turning point. Zaytuna College, its founders, and students are working to ensure that this time, in North America, Islam survives.

²⁸² The students read in their respective Islamic history classes the following books: *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* by Thomas Walker Arnold. 2008 [1896] and *The Venture of Islam*, Volumes 1-3 by Marshall Hodgson, 1974-1977).

Glossary

Note: While this glossary attempts to translate a number of Arabic terms into English, there are a number of words and phrases that have multiple meanings and usages. While I tried my best to be accurate in my terminology according to scholarly and common usage, I feel there is an impossible space—a *barzakh* if you will—that translation often falls into. I recommend that one refer to the many lexicons and dictionaries of the Arabic language that are specific to both Qur’anic Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. Unfortunately, there is no dictionary of “American Muslim Arabic,” although Abdul Khabeer (2009), makes an attempt at creating a lexicon of “Black Arabic.”

<i>‘abāya</i>	a loose-fitting cloak or robe-like dress
<i>adab</i>	etiquette, culture, manners, decency, morality, ethics, and literature; also a “recognition and acknowledgement of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically according to their various grades and degrees of rank, and of one’s proper place in relation to that reality and to one’s physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials” Al-Attas (1985).
<i>adhān</i>	call to prayer
<i>‘ādil</i>	justice
<i>aḥkām</i>	characteristics
<i>ahl Al-Bayt</i>	the People of the House, the Prophet’s Family
<i>al-‘ajam</i>	non-Arabs, Persians or those for whom Arabic was not their native language.
<i>Alḥamdulillāh</i>	Praise be to Allah
<i>Allahumma ṣallī ‘alā Sayyidinā Muḥammad wa ‘alā ālihi wa sallam</i>	May Allah send blessings upon our Master Muhammad and his family and grant them peace (said to give <i>ṣalawāt</i> to the Prophet and his family, see below)
<i>‘amal</i>	good works
<i>amr bil ma’rūf</i>	enjoining what is good

<i>anṣār</i>	Helpers
<i>‘aqīda</i>	Theology or creedal beliefs
<i>‘asr</i>	afternoon prayer
<i>āya (āyāt)</i>	verse/s (of the Qur’an)
<i>baraka</i>	blessings
<i>barzakh</i>	an intermediary, liminal realm between the earth and the heavens
<i>baṣīra</i>	mental perception; the perceptive faculty of the mind
<i>bid‘a</i>	innovation
<i>da‘īya</i>	individuals who perform da‘wa (see below)
<i>Dār al-Islām</i>	Home/Abode of Islam, typically refers to countries where Muslims can practice their faith freely
<i>Dār al-Kufr</i>	Home/Abode of Unbelievers/Infidels, typically refers to countries where Muslims cannot practice their faith freely and should therefore not live
<i>da‘wa</i>	calling, summoning, invitation; socioreligious activism, proselytization, and/or doctrinal renewal
<i>dhikr</i>	the remembrance of God, often done through the repetitive recitation of short phrases or words that glorify God
<i>ẓuhr</i>	midday prayer
<i>dīn</i>	religion; the way to be followed according to sacred law
<i>du‘ā’</i>	supplication
<i>fajr</i>	dawn or dawn prayer, also referred to as <i>sobḥ</i>
<i>farḍ ‘ayn</i>	individually obligatory
<i>farḍ kifāya</i>	collectively obligatory

<i>fatwā /fatāwa</i>	a legal opinion or learned interpretation on a particular issue within a specific set of circumstances
<i>fiqh</i>	understanding, jurisprudence
<i>firāsa</i>	insight; intuitive perception; or the perception, or discernment, of the internal, inward, or intrinsic, state, condition, character, or circumstances, by the eye.
<i>fiṭra</i>	the original state of innocence and inclination towards oneness
<i>ghurūb</i>	sunset
<i>Ḥabīb/Ḥabā'ib</i>	Beloved, refers to specific knowledgeable descendents of the Prophet Muhammad in Tarim, Yemen, and their diaspora
<i>Ḥadīth</i>	Sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>ḥaḍra</i>	presencing, a ceremonial practice within particular Sūfi traditions
<i>Ḥajj</i>	pilgrimage
<i>ḥāfiẓ/a</i>	one who has by way of memorization preserved the Qur'an
<i>hayba</i>	awe, fear, respect
<i>ḥalāl</i>	lawful
<i>ḥalaqa</i>	study circle
<i>ḥarām</i>	forbidden
<i>ḥijab</i>	head-covering worn by Muslim women, also referred to as <i>khimār</i>
<i>hijra</i>	migration
<i>himma</i>	high-mindedness, high-aiming ambition, intention, resolution
<i>ḥudūd</i>	rules defining limits to the behavior of the faithful through penalties
<i>ḥuzn</i>	sadness, melancholia, or mourning

<i>'ibādat</i>	worship
<i>iḥsān</i>	excellence or perfection
<i>ijāza/ijāzāt</i>	permission/s, license/s, certification/s or degree/s
<i>ikhḷāq</i>	character
<i>ikhtyār</i>	choice (as in ideal time to pray)
<i>'ilm al-falak</i>	observational or folk astronomy
<i>'ilm al-ḥay'a</i>	mathematical astronomy
<i>'ilm al-miqāt</i>	observation-based, naked-eye, or folk astronomy,
<i>'ilm al-nujūm</i>	observation-based, naked-eye, or folk astronomy (nujūm = stars)
<i>'ilm al-tawqīt</i>	timekeeping
<i>imān</i>	faith
<i>inshā'Allah</i>	by the will of God
<i>iqāma</i>	a secondary call for people to stand for prayer
<i>'ishā'</i>	<i>night prayer</i>
<i>isnād</i>	chains of transmission
<i>al-istiwā'</i>	the zenith/meridian of the sun's "rotation," the point at which it is highest in the sky
<i>jamā'al jamā'āt</i>	congregation
<i>jāmi'a</i>	university
<i>Janna</i>	Heaven
<i>Jumu'a</i>	Friday
<i>karāmāt</i>	gifts or abilities bestowed upon particular believers

<i>khalwa</i>	seclusion, retreat
<i>khaṭīb</i>	one who performs a sermon
<i>khimār</i>	head-covering worn by Muslim women (in a Qur'anic verse it is drawn across the chest)
<i>khurūj</i>	traveling for the sake of God
<i>khushu‘</i>	humility
<i>khuṭba</i>	sermon given at Friday congregational prayer
<i>kuliyya</i>	college
<i>kuttāb</i>	Qur'an memorization school
<i>lā ilāha illā Allāh, Muḥammadun rasūl Allāh</i>	There is no god, but God, and Muhammad is His messenger. This is said in the testimony of faith.
<i>madhhab/madhāhib</i>	school/s of law; religion
<i>madrasa</i>	school or college
<i>maghrib</i>	evening prayer
<i>maktab</i>	elementary school
<i>majlis</i>	gathering or session
<i>makrūh</i>	discouraged
<i>manṭiq</i>	logic
<i>Mashā'Allah</i>	God has willed it; typically said to express an appreciation or recognition of God's work in something good, joyous, or beautiful that has happened
<i>masjid</i>	mosque
<i>medina</i>	city

<i>mu‘āmalāt</i>	rules governing proper behavior between the faithful
<i>mubāḥ</i>	indifferent
<i>mujaddid/mujaddidīn</i>	renewer/s of the faith
<i>muṣalā</i>	the place in which prayers are done
<i>mustaḥabb</i>	recommended
<i>nafs</i>	soul, self
<i>nashīd</i>	a devotional song, hymn or anthem usually written in praise of the Prophet Muhammad.
<i>niqāb</i>	face veil
<i>niyya</i>	intention
<i>qaṣīda</i>	a lyrical poem or ode
<i>qaṭ‘ī</i>	decisive
<i>Raḍī Allāhu ‘anhu/ā</i>	May God be pleased with him/her
<i>rak‘a</i>	unit of prayer
<i>riba</i>	interest
<i>riḥla</i>	trip, journey
<i>As-Sā‘a</i>	the Hour, Judgement Day
<i>ṣadaqa</i>	charity
<i>Ṣaḥāba or Aṣḥāb</i>	the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>ṣāḥib</i>	companion, an associate, a comrade, a fellow, or a friend; a fellow traveler
<i>Salaf</i>	predecessors, ancestors (typically refers to the first three generations of Muslims, in descending order of influence)

<i>ṣalāt</i>	prayer
<i>ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam</i>	May Allah honor him and grant him peace; said after uttering or hearing the Prophet Muhammad’s name
<i>ṣalla Allāhu ‘alayhi wa ālihi wa sallam</i>	May Allah honor him and his family and grant them peace; said after uttering or hearing the Prophet Muhammad’s name or in salutations at the beginning of a statement or lecture.
<i>ṣalawāt</i>	sending salutations to the Prophet Muhammad (see examples above)
<i>ṣamad</i>	steadfastness
<i>ṣawm</i>	fasting
<i>sayyid/sayyida</i>	male/female descendent of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>shahāda</i>	testimony of faith (see above)
<i>shahīd</i>	martyr
<i>Sharī‘a/sharī‘a</i>	sacred law, a way or path
<i>Shaykh/a/shuyūkh</i>	Learned individual/s, also used as an honorific
<i>Shayṭān</i>	Satan
<i>Shirk</i>	identifying something other than God with God; idolatry
<i>Sīra</i>	Prophetic Biography
<i>Subḥān Allāh</i>	Glory be to God or Glorious is God
<i>subḥānahu wa ta‘āla</i>	Glorified and Exalted be He; typically said after an utterance of “God/Allah”
<i>Sunna</i>	way of the Prophet Muhammad, often used interchangeably with <i>Ḥadīth</i>
<i>ta‘allum</i>	learning

<i>tābi‘ūn/tabī‘īn</i>	The Followers; the generation of Muslims who were born after the death of the Prophet
<i>ta’dīb</i>	the inculcation of adab
<i>tafsīr</i>	Qur’anic interpretation
<i>ṭahāra</i>	purification
<i>taḥqīq</i>	investigation
<i>ta’līm</i>	teaching, information, instruction, training
<i>tajwīd</i>	Qur’anic Recitation
<i>ṭarīqa</i>	sufi path
<i>tasbīḥ</i>	beads used for making <i>ṣalawāt</i> , also called <i>misbah</i> , dhikr beads
<i>taṣawwuf</i>	the practice of Sufism, gnosticism, or purification of the heart
<i>taqwā</i>	God-consciousness, piety
<i>tarbiyya</i>	education, upbringing, raising
<i>tarqīya</i>	elevation, furtherance, encouragement
<i>tawḥīd</i>	oneness
<i>ẓannī</i>	non-definitive, thereby requiring human consideration
‘ulamā	scholars
umma	community of believers
‘umra	pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, not during the month of Hajj
Uṣūl al-fiqh	Islamic Law/Jurisprudence Studies
<i>wājib</i>	required
<i>waqf/awqāf</i>	endowment/s

<i>walī/awliyā'</i>	a representative, one who had a standing with God, Muslim “saint”
<i>wuḍū'</i>	rites of purification
<i>yaqīn</i>	certainty
<i>zabiḥa</i>	way of slaughtering animals in accordance with Islamic law, thereby making it ḥalāl, lawful; sometimes used as an adjective.
<i>zakāt</i>	almsgiving
<i>al-zawāl</i>	the post-meridian of the sun, follows <i>al-istiwā'</i>
<i>zāwiya</i>	college for Sufi and legal studies

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Vita

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