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The Mosque as a Political, Economic, and Social Institution 622 – Present

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**The Mosque as a Political, Economic, and Social Institution
622 – Present**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
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Honors Capstone Project in Middle Eastern Studies

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Abstract

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 the Communist “threat” that plagued the West throughout the latter half of the 20th century all but disappeared and was replaced with the “threat” of Islam. Prior to 9/11 Islam was a largely misunderstood religion and, despite its emergence as a media sensation in the past decade or so, very little headway has been made to better understand it.

Often times this misunderstanding has led to latent, and at times manifest, anti-Islamic sentiment and in many cases this anti-Islamic sentiment has been directed at the mosque as the physical embodiment of Islam. Nowhere can this relationship between the two be seen more clearly than in the case of the media frenzy that erupted in summer 2010 over the proposed construction of an Islamic center four blocks from Ground Zero. The debate centered on whether the proposed project would be a mosque or a community center, but inevitably evolved to question the motives of the projects backers and to portray the project as a symbol of Islam’s domination of the West.

This project seeks to approach these issues from a scholarly point of view, a view which has been largely neglected throughout the course of debate. Before an analysis of this issue can be made, however, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the non-religious, particularly economic, political and social, functions of the mosque during throughout the long, diverse history of Islam. As such, this project provides a historical analysis of the mosque during the time of the Prophet of Islam, the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates, the Ottoman Empire and throughout the 20th century. This historical overview is followed by an analysis of the Ground Zero Mosque, as compared to historical mosque function and other present-day, religiously-based community centers to answer the question: “is it a mosque or a community center?” This section will also seek to dispel some inappropriately applied arguments against construction of the project, and discuss the implications that this debate has had on Muslims in America.

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For Dr. Bashiriyeh,

“The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind.”

-Khalil Gibran

Thank you.

Dear Future Honors Student,

My life Capstone experience was an emotional one that I seem to have documented in Facebook statuses.

Sometimes I wanted to quit:

“I swear, if I get called an Orientalist one more time I'm throwing my Capstone in the trash and walking away.”

Sometimes I didn't have the motivation to write:

“Dear capstone. You are forty pages long and I need you to be sixty. Want to know what I'd rather do than expand you? Set you on fire. Set you on fire and dance on your ashes.”

And sometimes I had to sacrifice my social life and sleep:

“Capstone-ing at the library until the wee hours of the morning.”

Yes, the Capstone project was not easy. It took a great deal of time and effort. But it was well worth it when I was able to post statuses like this:

“I GOT THE CRITICAL LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP!!”

And this:

“I GOT INTO THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS FOR GRAD SCHOOL!!”

My advice to you? Write early, write often and write about something you're passionate about. You'll probably get frustrated and want to quit at some point, but completing the project has major benefits. Stick with it and vent when necessary.

Good luck!

Introduction

The United States has often been described as the great melting pot; a society in which many and varied peoples and cultures are combined into one, heterogeneous common culture. While such cultural assimilation may have been sought during the mid- to late- eighteenth hundreds, the melting pot metaphor does not provide an accurate depiction of American society today. Though there does appear to be a common culture to some extent, by and large people tend to maintain their individual cultural and religious practices. Thus, it may be better to describe collective American culture as a tapestry in which the individual threads combine but also remain distinct.

Although such metaphors have historically been most applicable to American society, with relatively recent advances in transportation and communications they have now become more applicable to the world as a whole. Not only have geographies become pluralistic, but also formerly regulated ideas and practices, for example culture and religion. For better or worse, the world is dynamically changing because peoples and cultures that have historically been concentrated in one particular region of the world can now be found virtually everywhere. A prime example of this can be seen by analyzing the population data concerning the Lebanese Diaspora. Today of an estimated fourteen million Lebanese living in the Diaspora, nearly seven million reside in

Brazil.¹ Meanwhile, while only an estimated three million Lebanese live in Lebanon.² Such patterns of immigration have real cultural implications for the countries and societies that interact with them.

But what, you may ask, do such migratory patterns have to do with the mosque? The answer? Everything. Although Islam, much like Christianity and Judaism, has no distinct borders historically it has been perceived as a purely Middle Eastern phenomenon. In the last century or so, this phenomenon has changed and regions where the Muslim population was previously small, have seen a dramatic increase in the number of adherents to the Islamic faith. For example, as a result of immigration and birth, the Muslim population in the US, Europe and the world over has increased dramatically during the last several decades. Because studies concerning the Muslim population of the United States and are “seldom based on any credible scientific methodology,”³ there are no accurate figures reporting the exact number of Muslims living in the United States. Keeping this fact in mind, existing estimates range from as few as 1.3 million⁴ to more than five million⁵. Meanwhile, it is estimated that some 49

¹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Middle East and North Africa: Lebanon," Travel and Living Abroad, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified September 30, 2010 <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/middle-east-north-africa/lebanon>.

² Central Intelligence Agency, "Middle East: Lebanon," The World Fact Book, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified April 6, 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>

³ Tom W. Smith, "Review: The Muslim Population of the United States: The Methodology of Estimates," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 414, accessed April 23, 2011, JSTOR.

⁴ Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey Summary Report*, 5, accessed April 23, 2011, http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf.

million Muslims currently live in Europe.⁶ Though these numbers represent mere fractions of the total populations⁷ of Europe and the U.S., the various terror attacks perpetrated in the name of Islam over the last two decades has created an air of suspicion in the collective Western subconscious concerning the perceived “basic nature” of Islam and the motives of its adherents.

This suspicion has led to latent, and at times manifest, anti-Islamic sentiment. Although this anti-Islamic sentiment has taken many forms it has often been directed at the mosque as a physical manifestation of Islam. In Switzerland in 2009, for example, the government banned the future construction of new minarets. Meanwhile in the United States, in fall 2010 alone, anti-Islamic sentiment manifested in the vandalism of several mosques including: “construction equipment set afire at a mosque site in Murfreesboro, Tennessee; a plastic pig with graffiti thrown into a mosque in Madera, California and teenagers shooting outside a mosque in upstate New York during Ramadan prayers.”⁸

Despite a seemingly endless stream of media coverage concerning Islam, the so-called “Islamization of America,” and the threat of a new, “Islamic

⁵ Susan Headden, "Understanding Islam," *US News and World Report*, April 7, 2008, page #s, accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.usnews.com/news/religion/articles/2008/04/07/understanding-islam>.

⁶ Houssain Kettani, "Muslim Population in Europe" (paper presented at the 2009 International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities), Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico, accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.pupr.edu/hkettani/papers/ICSSH2009Europe.pdf>.

⁷ Assuming that these estimates are correct, Muslims make up less than 7% of the population of Europe and slightly less than 2% of the population of the United States.

⁸ Laurie Goodstein, "American Muslims Ask, Will We Ever Belong?" *The New York Times*, September 5, 2010, accessed April 23, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/06/us/06muslims.html>.

caliphate,”⁹ very little is ever said about the mosque or the role that it plays both in Islam and for the Muslim community at-large. When the mosque does receive media coverage it is discussed as a veritable monolith serving one, sometimes two, functions. First, the mosque is discussed as a place for Muslim worship and second it is discussed as breeding ground for Islamic extremism, militancy and terrorism. Such interpretations are deeply problematic from an academic standpoint because they fail to address the fluid, dynamic nature of mosque function through the centuries.

Thus, in the pages that follow I will seek to provide a general overview of the functions of the mosque throughout Islam’s history. Given the controversies and confusion surrounding the mosque, as well as the motives of its patrons, it is prudent to more clearly define the lens through which this study will view the mosque. The mosque is obviously a religious institution, and the mosque as a physical establishment serves to meet the religious needs of adherents. However, the mosque serves a variety of other less obvious purposes and it is on these purposes that this study will focus. In particular, the mosque will be viewed as a political, economic and social institution, interacting with and reacting to society at-large.

For the purposes of this study, it is not inherently necessary to reconcile the differences between the various sects of Islam. Islam is not a monolith and sectarian divisions run much deeper than Sunni v. Shia. Today, there are over 70

⁹ *Glenn Beck*, Fox News Channel, February 1, 2011.

different sects.¹⁰ While the customs and practices, whether religious, economic, social or otherwise, vary from sect to sect, it is also important to recognize that each sect varies from mosque to mosque, country to country and region to region. Thus, every mosque functions differently than the next. This study will attempt to reconcile these differences and present a general explanation concerning mosque function.

It is not enough, however, to study the various functions of the mosque in the 20th century in order to understand the functions of the mosque today. Throughout the various phases and epochs of Islamic history the mosque's functions have fluctuated and adapted to the political, economic and social realities of the time. To understand the diverse roles of the mosque today, in traditionally Islamic and non-Islamic societies, it is necessary to understand how mosque functions evolved, changed and were sometimes reincorporated after long periods of dormancy.

This historical study will then be applied to explain, discuss and analyze the controversy surrounding the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque," now officially named the Park51 Community Center. For six months in 2010 this proposed project, slated to be constructed two city blocks from the site of the September 11, 2001 terror attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, was at the forefront of American political and media debate. Probably the most popular themes of these debates were whether the project was a mosque or a

¹⁰ Diane Morgan, *Essential Islam* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), 221.

community center, whether the men and women behind the project were “peaceful Muslims” or had connections to terrorist networks and whether the project itself would be a symbol of peace, tolerance and interfaith cooperation or of Islam’s domination of the West.

Such a discussion of this controversy is crucial because, although Park51 is only one establishment, it represents America’s latent anti-Islamic sentiment as a whole. Park51 has become a scapegoat for the fear and confusion that has become associated with Islam in the collective American subconscious. By discussing these fears—how they originate and evolve—we may begin to, where appropriate, dispel them.

The Mosque under the Prophet and the Rightly-guided Caliphs

Twelve years elapsed between the Prophet Muhammad's first revelation in 610 CE and the construction of the Islamic community's first mosque. During this early phase of Islam in Mecca the need for a mosque was significantly overshadowed by the societal consequences of establishing one. At this time, the Prophet and his small collection of followers faced violence and oppression from the ruling tribe of Mecca, the Quraish. In the eyes of the Quraishi leaders Muhammad's message challenged their tribal affiliations and customs and, in doing so, threatened Mecca's position as a major trading center. The violence and oppression directed towards the believers of Islam and Muhammad were used as tools to prevent the collapse of the existing social order and gradually became commonplace. By 622 CE, conditions in Mecca for the earliest Muslim converts were no longer safe and the Prophet along with his followers were forced to emigrate to Yathrib (Medina), a nearby town, in order to evade persecution.

Up until this emigration, known as the Hijra, the Muslim community utilized open spaces, particularly the Ka'ba, for communal prayer (salat). The Ka'ba was located in the center of Mecca and "housed the 360 idols of tribal patron deities, and was the site of a great annual pilgrimage and fair."¹¹ In addition to communal prayer at the Ka'ba it was also deemed permissible, and not uncommon, for believers to pray in their homes. This second practice

¹¹ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

became increasingly common as persecution of the believers escalated.¹² As a direct result of the persecution and subjugation of Muhammad and his earliest followers, the foundations for a “true” mosque in Mecca were not laid until after its conquest by the Islamic armies in 630CE/8AH.

As was previously mentioned, by 622 CE conditions for the Prophet and his Meccan followers had become too dangerous. Adherents to the Muslim faith had been beaten, starved, subjected to boycotts and in a few cases they were even killed. As a result, the Prophet began to look for a safe haven in neighboring cities whose tribes could offer protection from the Quraish. Eventually, in exchange for his services as arbitrator, the tribes of Medina agreed to grant sanctuary to the Muslims. Upon arrival, some accounts claim that among the first things the Prophet did was to build a mosque on land that the tradition states he purchased from two orphans. Other accounts, however, claim that the Prophet selected the site for his dwelling and the site became the community’s mosque as well. This will be discussed in more detail later.

This new mosque met the religious needs of the Muslim community in Medina, which was comprised of Meccan Immigrants (Muhajirun) and Medinese Helpers (Ansar). Although it was simple in structure it became the center for communal prayer and a place from which the poor of Medina could come to

¹² Mohammed Zafeeruddin, *Mosque in Islam* (n.p.: Qazi Publishers and Distributors, 1996), 5.

receive food and alms.¹³ In addition to being a place of prayer and charity, the Prophet's Mosque (al-masjed al-nabi), served many and varied functions within the early Muslim community:

“Laws were made here. The Muslim army was given training. This was the camp from where armies were dispatched to war fronts. Delegations from foreign tribes and countries were received here. There first school or University of Islamic learning was located here. The Prophet (peace be upon him) held his court here, and heard and decided disputes. And the transgressors were kept in confinement here.”¹⁴

In addition to the functions listed above, the Prophet's Mosque also became the center for distribution of booty acquired during the various caravan raids carried out by the Prophet and his army of believers. Thus, the Prophet's Mosque met not only the religious needs of the new community, but also its administrative, educational, military, and judicial needs as well.¹⁵

In conjunction with these functions, the site of the mosque also served as the Prophet's place of residence. Some Islamic scholars even argue that this was the original intent for the property that Mohammed purchased, and that its function as a mosque was secondary to its function as Muhammad's dwelling and there is some evidence to support this claim, but such claims are difficult to verify given the sheer number of accounts of the Prophet's life. Prior to the advent of Islam the term masjid was used to describe “a shrine or a cult building

¹³ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammed A Prophet for our Time* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2007), 102.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ It is worth mentioning that there was a mosque built prior to the Prophet's Mosque. This mosque in Quba' was built while Muhammed was in route to Medina during the Hijra. However, as it was not the central mosque and it did not function largely like the mosques in future garrison towns, it will not be elaborated on here.

rendered sacred by the ground upon which it was built or the idol that it housed.”¹⁶ By this definition, the Ka’ba was a masjid. The plot of land which tradition states the Prophet’s camel wandered to and that the Prophet then selected as the construction site, fits neither of these specifications though the term masjid was, in any case, adopted to describe the mosque. Regardless of his intentions however, this location became both the site of the Prophet’s dwelling and the mosque for the Umma in Medina and, in the end, Muhammad’s primary objective is largely irrelevant; the site functioned as both mosque and dwelling. Around the edge of the courtyard located at the front of the mosque the Prophet had small huts built for each of his wives and in doing so he showed that “the sexual, the sacred, and the domestic could - and, indeed, must - be integrated.”¹⁷ In other words, the plurality of functions of the mosque was evident from the outset; it was meant to be both religious and social. For Mohammed, the mosque was meant to be the center of not only the community, but the family as well.

The next mosque in Islam did not come into being until the Prophet’s return to, and conquest of, Mecca in 628 CE. It has been said that one of Mohammed’s first actions upon entering the city was to enter the Ka’ba and destroy the 360 idols which were housed inside, thus restoring its purpose of

¹⁶ Francis E. Peters, *Muhammed and the Origins of Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 194.

¹⁷ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammed A Prophet for our Time* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2007), 104.

worshipping the one, true God.¹⁸ With that, the Ka'ba became and remains the most important mosque in Islam, and is the direction towards which Muslims the world over direct their prayers.

It is important to note that the importance of the Ka'ba transcends the conquest of Mecca. It is revealed in the Qur'an that the Ka'ba was built by Adam, destroyed in the great flood, and was later rebuilt by the prophet Abraham with the intention that it would serve as the House of God and function as a place in which He alone would be worshipped.¹⁹ Thus, Mohammed's removal of the tribal deities was seen in the eyes of believers, not exclusively as an affront on the polytheistic nature of Meccan society but also as a return of the Ka'ba to its original purpose and society's return to monotheism. Therefore it can be, and often is, argued that the Ka'ba, not Masjid al-Nabawi, was actually the world's first mosque.

During the four years that followed Muhammad's triumph over Mecca, he sought to further extend and consolidate his authority in Arabia and gradually began to expand his control through a combination of alliances with and conquests of neighboring tribes. Through expansion, the surrounding tribes were exposed to Islam and a new way of life that influenced and changed their existing political and social order, in addition to their private lives and religious beliefs and practices. This new way was often completely foreign to them and so while some chose to accept and submit to the message of Islam, others chose to

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Quran 2:125-127, (Yusef Ali Translation)

maintain their traditional ways of life. The price for refusing to accept Islam and thus remaining in perceived a state of ignorance (jhilliya) was allegiance to Medina by way of paying a tax (jeziyya). This system functioned relatively well until 632 CE when the Prophet died and the Umma (Muslim community) was left without a leader. As often happens when there is oscillation in the seats of power, order was not initially maintained.

Although the issue of succession was decided on relatively quickly, with the Prophet's close companion Abu Bakr assuming the role of community leader (Caliph) from 632-634CE, it was more difficult to legitimize his authority and reunite the tribes under the banner of Islam. Many tribes had rebelled upon hearing of Muhammad's death, abandoning Islam and resuming their pre-Islamic traditions. Many believed that their tribal allegiance had "been based on a political pact with Medina that ceased with the Prophet's death."²⁰ The Umma was threatened with the possibility of dissolution, and in an attempt to combat this, Abu Bakr launched a series of battles known as the Wars of Apostasy (the Ridah Wars), which were by and large successful in "consolidating Muslim rule over the entire Arabian Peninsula, and thus preserved the unity and solidarity of the Islamic state."²¹ This state was then expanded dramatically during the reign of the remaining "Rightly-Guided Caliphs" the Caliphates of Umar (634-644), Uthman (644-656) and Ali (656-661).

²⁰ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

²¹ *ibid.*

During the expansion that took place under these “Rightly Guided” Caliphs, the Arab-Islamic armies “would not occupy conquered cities but [instead] establish garrison towns nearby.”²² It was from these towns that the various conquered territories would be managed. The mosque during this period, emerged as the geographic center of the town around which all other buildings would be erected. Under Abu Bakr, the function of the mosque remained largely the same, with one exception being that the mosque was no longer a place of dwelling. The real change to the mosque came under ‘Umar, who limited the mosque’s functions in the conquered territories by building fortresses, barracks, stables and other military buildings separate from the physical structure of the mosque which eliminated the mosque as the military center for the Islamic armies. Other official buildings were also built, including treasuries and jails, which largely truncated the hitherto administrative, judicial and economic functions of the mosques.

Though conversion in the conquered territories was accepted, it was not usually encouraged. Non-Muslims living in the conquered territories were required to pay taxes. Thus, from an economic perspective higher conversion rates meant decreased revenues for the Caliph in Medina. It was due in large part to this that garrison towns were established and the full-scale takeover of cities like Fustat, Basra, and Kufa were typically avoided.²³ The conquered peoples were usually allowed to maintain their individual customs and continued

²² *ibid.* 43

²³ *ibid.*

to function largely as they had prior to conquest. The mosque, for non-Muslims, was merely a place to which their tax was paid.

As such, during the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, the political, economic and judicial legitimacy of the Caliph in Medina waned, as did the Caliph's direct involvement in the political, economic and judicial happenings in newly conquered territories. This is likely due in large part to the personality of the Prophet himself. The Prophet's legitimacy was not based on his social status as he did not a member of the upper echelons of Meccan society. His legitimacy, then, stemmed from his charismatic personality. According to German sociologist Max Weber, charisma is the recognition of "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities."²⁴ Thus, the legitimacy that the Prophet enjoyed in Medina was not a reflection of his charismatic personality, but of the peoples' acknowledgment of his charismatic attributes.

The Rightly-Guided Caliphs did not share in the Prophet's legitimacy or charisma. Often times their legitimacy went widely unrecognized, and as a result it was harder for them to function successfully in all of the roles that Muhammad had assumed. In a society where the leader's legitimacy is in question and not all of the population subscribes to the religious views of the political establishment,

²⁴ Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Introduction," in *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968), xviii.

the exclusive use of a religious institution like the mosque as the administrative, judicial and economic center is impractical at best. It was not until the rise of the However, despite the administrative changes that took place in the mosque the various garrison towns, following the Wars of Apostasy the Caliphs in Medina were able to consolidate their legitimacy and the Prophet's mosque regained its central position until the rise of the Ummayyads in 661 CE.

The Mosque under the Umayyads and the Abbasids

The multi-faceted nature of the Mosque in Islamic society did not change much for the remainder of the era of the Caliphs. Under both the Umayyads and the Abbasids, the functions of the mosque continued to function similar to the ways it had under the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs. During this era, which began with the rise of the Umayyads in 661 CE and was brought to an end with the Mongol invasion of Baghdad, the Abbasid capital, in 1258 CE, the mosque continued to play an important role in the political and social happenings in conquered lands of the Islamic Empire.

Despite the Prophet and Rightly-Guided Caliphs' hesitancy to convert conquered people to Islam for fear of a loss of tax revenue, the peoples of the conquered lands during Islamic expansion still appear to have converted, although perhaps voluntarily, because mosque construction exploded. Estimates made by a contemporary observer claimed that "there were 7,000 mosques in Basra (Iraq) alone" and "as many as 30,000 in the city of Baghdad."²⁵ Though these estimates are likely highly exaggerated, they speak to the fact that mosques were no longer exclusive to the garrison towns. By 750 CE Islam had become a deeply-rooted part of life in all corners of the Islamic Empire, which stretched from modern day Spain and north Africa in the west, to Persia and Central Asia in the east.

²⁵ Mohamed Makki Sibai, *Mosque Libraries* (New York, NY: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1987), 8.

It is during this time that we see the emergence of the term *jami* to describe one aspect of the mosque. This term, according to Mohammed Makki Sibai, is either derived from the Arabic verb *jama*, which means 'to gather,' or from the Arabic word *juma* which means 'Friday.'²⁶ Regardless of whether the term *jami* originally referred to the physical place in which people gather or the place where the obligatory Friday prayer was performed, the mosque became both a communal prayer space, and a veritable hub of social interaction. In general the mosque served the social, political and educational needs of the community, as described below, in addition to meeting their religious ones.

In terms of its social functioning, under the Umayyads and the Abbasids, the mosque served a myriad of purposes. They became spaces where special occasions would be celebrated, where the Caliphs would receive foreign dignitaries, where tales of morality would be told by various speakers, and where poetry would be recited. The mosque was also a place that people would visit in times of great need. Occasionally mosques would serve as places for refuge and "when drought, plague, and pestilence struck, people went to the mosque to pray for help."²⁷ Although the function of the mosque as the primary residence of the Caliph was ended immediately following the death of the Prophet, during the era of expansion the mosque became "a shelter for the poor, the stranger and the traveler."²⁸ Fortunately, trade had also sprung up in

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *ibid.* p.17

²⁸ *ibid.* p.18

and around the mosques, which afforded these individuals with access to amenities like water and food. In some instances, patrons were even afforded access to medical care.²⁹

During this period, the mosque also retained a political role, following in the tradition of the Prophet himself. While mosques continued to be built with separate administrative buildings nearby, as mosques began to spring up outside of the garrison towns they were built adjacent, if not connected, to the *dar al-imara* (governor's house).³⁰ In some cases, the mosque even served as the treasury and was often used as the site of the physical, monetary transactions themselves.³¹ Similarly the mosque remained the judicial center of the Muslim community with appointed judges (Qadi) continuing to represent the Caliph in the main mosque in each territory, just as they had under the Rashidun. Unlike the judges during the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, starting during the Abbasid period under Caliph Mehdi, the office of chief *Qadi* was instituted and it was on his shoulders that all judicial functions fell.³²

The educational role of the mosque greatly expanded during the reign of the Umayyads and the Abbasids. While under the Prophet the mosque became the center for religious learning, under these two Caliphates education expanded beyond the realm of Islamic teachings. In addition to the study of religious

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "Masjed."

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Amir Hassan Siddiqi, *Caliphate and Sultanate in Medieval Persia*, 2nd ed. (Karachi, Pakistan: Jamiyat-ul-Falah, 1963), 28.

dogma and the Arabic language, students at the *madrasas* (schools) would also study subjects known today as history, geography, economics, political science, philosophy, chemistry, physics, arithmetic, algebra and geometry, medicine, engineering and astronomy. Students, both male and female, would travel extraordinary distances to attend these schools but it was not the reputation of the school that they sought, instead they “sought eminent scholars, prized their inspirations, and prided themselves on obtaining certificates from them.”³³ It was during this period as well that the first libraries were attached to mosques, first in al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) and then gradually in all of the territories.³⁴

It is important to note that not all mosques were multifaceted in every sense. Yes, each shared in common the basic function, that being a prayer space, but outside of that, mosques retained individuality. For example, not all mosques served as centers of non-religious learning. The curriculum at each mosque was based on the particular knowledge of individual lecturer. Before the invention and practice of using printed books, education of students at any given *madrassa* was conducted through dictation.³⁵ Thus, a teacher was only able to instruct subjects in which he was particularly well-versed.

In a similar vein, not all mosques played a central role in regional politics. This function was typically reserved for the mosque attached to or located near the *dar al-imara*. By-and-large however, the majority of mosques “provided for

³³ Mohamed Makki Sibai, *Mosque Libraries* (New York, NY: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1987), 31.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.* p.28

the needs and requirements of its patrons” and, although not all mosques were *madrasas*, or schools, in general “the distinction between *madrasa* and ordinary mosque was very slight” as both served as centers for the study of Islam.³⁶

It is worth noting that this “Golden Age” of the Caliphate coincided with the historical reality of the Crusades, which took place from 1095 to 1453 and during the struggle to re-conquer Spain from 1000 to 1492.³⁷ It has been argued recently that it is this period that the Muslim armies began to take previously existing religious establishments and convert them into Mosques. Nowhere is this better reflected in the present discourse surrounding the establishment of the great mosque in Cordoba, a subject that will be discussed at length in later pages.³⁸ However to pinpoint this occurrence as an affront on the Spanish peoples, a direct attack on Christianity, or a show of Islamic dominance would be to ignore the historical realities surrounding the Islamic expansion. The practice of adapting of older sanctuaries and churches can be seen as early as 705 in Damascus where al-Walid b. ‘Abd al-Malik converted some ten churches into mosques.³⁹

Although this practice did occur quite frequently in regards to churches, Christian worship places were not the only older sanctuaries to be converted by Muslim invaders. Synagogues as well as Zoroastrian temples in Iran also saw conversion under the new, Islamic administrations. It is equally important to

³⁶ *ibid.* p.16

³⁷ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

³⁸ *ibid.* p.298

³⁹ *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "Masjed."

note that though the Islamic invaders often confiscated pre-existing religious establishments, not all of these confiscated localities became mosques. Some became administrative headquarters, while others became private dwellings.⁴⁰ Furthermore, this practice was not exclusive to Islam. When Christian Crusaders conquered Jerusalem in 1099, the Dome of the Rock was converted to a Church and the al-Aqsa mosque was converted to a residence for the king.⁴¹ At the same time however, many churches were and mosques were left untouched and continued to serve the needs of their respective religious communities.

For better or for worse, the gradual spread of Islam in the Middle East, northern Africa, southern Europe and parts of eastern Asia, the Islamic Empire under the Umayyads and the Abbasids left an indelible mark on the various native populations. They brought with them “a system of state, society, law, thought and art” with “religion as its unifying, eventually dominating factor”⁴² and it was often the mosque that served as the central hub for this unification.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

⁴² *ibid.* p.59

The Mosque under the Ottoman Empire

After the Mongol invasion in 1258, the lands of the Islamic Empire fell under foreign rule for some 42 years. During this time Islam, though not subjugated, went largely without the forceful leadership that it had enjoyed under the Prophet, the Rashidun, the Umayyad and the Abbasids and the *umma* lay splintered under the rule of the Mamluks in present-day Egypt, Syria and parts of north Africa and the Seljuks in present-day Turkey, Iraq and Iran. It was not until 1280CE that the Ottoman Empire began to emerge as a force capable of reunifying the lands that the Abbasids had conquered and controlled. This Empire emerged from the shadows of the Byzantine Empire, which at its height, between 1512 and 1566 under Selim I and Suleyman the Magnificent, encompassed present-day Turkey, the Balkans, much of northern Africa, parts of Arabia as well as parts of the Levant.⁴³⁴⁴ Although many of these lands were Muslim already and the Ottoman state was run in accordance to Islam and Islamic institutions, in general the mosque during this period no longer enjoyed the levels of political, economic, and educational importance and sovereignty it had under the Abbasids. However, as the source of the Ottoman Sultan's legitimacy the mosque and the 'ulama were "joined together at the very top" of government and economics. Thus, the Ottoman Empire became one marked by parallel institutions.

⁴³ "Ottoman Empire," BBC Religions, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified September 4, 2009, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/ottomanempire_1.shtml.

⁴⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Ottoman Empire," accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/434996/Ottoman-Empire> .

From the outset, the Ottoman sultans “maintained and nurtured an important separation between religion as an institution and religion as a system of meanings and relations that connected a community of faith.”⁴⁵ Thus, administrative tasks that had formerly fallen on the shoulders of the *qadis* or that were carried out in the mosques connected to the *dar al-imara* by the governor were, under the Ottomans, delegated to institutions outside of the religious realm. However, the mosque remained at the physical center of Ottoman principalities but shared its position of physical prominence with the city or town’s main *suq* (market) and, in the case of large cities, the citadel. The citadel assumed over-sight of administrative tasks previously cared for by the mosques. For example, the jails and garrisons that had previously been physically located in the mosques became located within the walls of the citadel.

By and large, Islam and the mosque during the Ottoman Empire became a bureaucratized tool of the state. Those at the top of the *‘ulama* hierarchy in the larger cities were trained in the palace schools, worked in the administration, and sought to achieve higher rank in the bureaucratic system. As tools in the hands of the sultan, the *‘ulama* were unable to oppose policies that were harmful or disadvantageous to Muslims and, with their increased bureaucratization, or incorporation into the Ottoman political machine they gained “enormous social power as teachers, preachers, controllers of

⁴⁵ Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 19, no. 1/2 (December 2005): 11, accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20059691>.

endowments, judges, and provincial officials.”⁴⁶ This power, however, came in the form of a double-edged sword because it limited their authority as religious clerics and representatives of the interests of the Muslim community at large. The inability of the *'ulama* to operate independently of the central Ottoman state is reflected quite clearly in the administration mosques during the Ottoman Empire. The mosque became a venue for the Ottomans to access the emotional climate of its Muslim constituency. The Friday sermon was designed to include, and *imams* (Friday prayer leaders) were obligated to incite, a pledge of fealty to the sultan and any refusal to make this pledge was tantamount to opposing the legitimacy of the state. Friday prayer also became a venue for propagation of Ottoman policy and legitimacy. With the *'ulama* under state control and few mosques permitted by the sultan and his administration to be used for Friday prayer, propagation of the state was not difficult to implement.

Although in large part the sultan used the *'ulama* and the Islamic establishment as a means to propagate his legitimacy, the upper echelons of the *'ulama* were by no means laymen or puppets of the state. This can be seen in the position and embodiment of the *mufti*. Although many of the *'ulama* incorporated into the state system were largely unqualified, uneducated, and

⁴⁶ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 326.

had little influence this was not the case with the *muftis*.⁴⁷ While the *sheiks* (preachers), *khatibs* (Friday prayer leaders), *imams* (daily prayer leaders), and *seids* (those claiming relation to the Prophet) largely remained subordinate to the state,⁴⁸ the position of mufti was highly esteemed and played a vital role in the Ottoman judiciary and as a result in Ottoman society. *Muftis* served as advisors to the judges in the cities and as they were highly trained in religious laws their expertise was often taken into account in, or even used to settle, disputes regarding pending legal cases. Although the *mufti* usually ranked behind the judge, the *Mufti* of the sultan actually outranked all government officials excluding the sultan himself and occasionally the grand vizier. However the *Mufti*, as the executor of the *sharia*, held great power in that he could deem the actions of the sultan to be un-Islamic and call for his removal from power. In general however, the average *mufti* enjoyed a level of authority second only to the judges. However, these judges were also typically members of the '*ulama*' which meant that the judicial system of the Ottoman Empire, including interpretation and implementation of laws, was controlled almost exclusively by the '*ulama*'.

It is important to note that not all Islamic institutions were afforded the same level of eminence that the *muftis* enjoyed. Other nodes of power, like that of education in the *madrassas*, saw their influence altered with the creation of

⁴⁷ Albert H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1913), 206.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

parallel Ottoman institutions. Under the Prophet, the Rashidun, the Ummayyads and the Abbasids administration of the *madrasas* remained largely independent of the state. Madrasas were attached to the mosques and the type of education a student could receive there depended largely on the school of jurisprudence to which a mosque's clergy subscribed. Under the Ottomans however, a new system of schooling existed parallel to the Islamic system. These "palace schools" were not restricted by Islamic dogma and could therefore teach Islam and theology in addition to the sciences and philosophy. These schools were considered a "life-long system" that provided for not only students' intellectual expansion but for their physical preparedness.⁴⁹ Most of the students trained in these palace schools were either future soldiers, bureaucrats or other government officials.

This is not to say that *madrasas* disappeared, rather that the palace schools allowed for the teaching of subjects that were often construed as "un-Islamic." But yet again, this did not mean that the *madrasas* adhered to literalist interpretations of the Qur'an. In fact "there was a preference that the books which were read, particularly on religious subjects, in the madrasas and the teachers who taught them should be exclusively from the Hanafi school,"⁵⁰ which is relatively liberal and supports the implementation of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in addition to the Qur'an, *hadiths* and *sunna* as sources

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.71

⁵⁰ *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, s.v. "Social, cultural and intellectual life," by Ahmet Yaser Ocak.

of Islamic jurisprudence. However, because of the inclination of the non-clerical political elite towards the Hanifi School, this policy was not strictly enforced. By and large curriculums were determined by the inclination of the teachers. Still, under the Ottomans the scope of perspectives offered in the curriculum of the *madrasas* was narrowed and focused more specifically on theology and Islamic *sharia* while the palace schools focused more directly on philosophy and the modern sciences.⁵¹ It was these schools, not the *madrasas*, that were the preferred educational institution for the Ottoman court and it is this preference that marks the shift away from the mosque by the ruling elite.⁵²

In general, the mosque maintained its status as a social institution throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule. It was in the area of political power where the mosque and the *'ulama* lost much of their authority. However, one area in which the *'ulama* were able to maintain their individuality and their autonomy was the oversight and control of the *waqfs* (religious endowments). In fact, it is said that one-third of all Ottoman land was designated for *waqfs*.⁵³ Though much of this was granted to the *'ulama* from the various sultans, the revenues from these lands did not find their way back to the central treasury. Profits and revenues coming from the *waqfs* went strictly to the *'ulama*, making them one of the only independent groups with a financial base to rival the

⁵¹ Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 121.

⁵² *ibid.* p.120

⁵³ Albert H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1913), 201.

Imperial Treasury. In general, the mosque maintained its status as a social institution throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule.

It is important to note that while these developments reflect the nature of changing *'ulama*-state relations during the peak years of the Ottoman Empire, the authority of the *'ulama* extended only as far as the *umma*. The Ottomans implemented the millet system under which they “considered the non-Muslim subjects autonomous but dependent peoples whose internal social, religious and communal life was regulated by their own religious organizations, but whose leaders were appointed by, and responsible to, a Muslim state.”⁵⁴ This policy was in line with the treatment of the non-Muslims under previous Islamic governments and did not serve to undermine the power of the *'ulama*. Instead, it upheld the status quo. This tolerance however did not quell Ottoman attempts to convert non-believers to a religion which reflected Ottoman benevolence, an “interest in the grandeur of Islam as a militant, expanding system,” and a desire to increase “the wealth, numbers, and power of the state.”⁵⁵ Thus, under the Ottomans, the Muslim population increased dramatically.

It is easy to see that the function of the mosque and Islam changed dramatically under the Ottoman Empire. In the formative years of Islam, the mosque by way of the caliph was the most important institution in all of

⁵⁴ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 323.

⁵⁵ Albert H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1913), 63.

Islamdom. This was not the case under the Ottoman sultans. During this final phase of Islamic empire, the mosque became an institution separate from and largely subordinate to the ruling elite. However, the ruling elite also depended on the *'ulama* for legitimacy. Thus it was the *'ulama*, not the mosque, who became the key players in political life while the mosque remained a largely social institution.

The Orientalist Legacy and its Implications for Discussions of Islam

It is prudent, now, to take a brief intermission from the historical overview, so as to discuss the various discourses surrounding Islam and the mosque as its physical manifestation. Such discourses have played a major role in shaping the body of work that has emerged concentrating on Islam in the 20th century and beyond. It is only with these arguments and counter-arguments in mind that we may proceed to analyze the mosque and its functions, so as to discern fact from fiction.

In his famous work, *Orientalism*, acclaimed scholar Edward Said argued that ever since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, an uneven power relationship has existed between the West and the Orient. This relationship has been one "of power, of domination, and of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" of the West over the Orient.⁵⁶ Thus, the relationship existing between the Orient and the West has not been reciprocal. By virtue of the nature of this relationship, the West has attempted to project itself on to the Orient, rejecting its cultures and customs as backwards, violent and unproductive. In response to this practice of projection, Said argued that "neither the term Orient nor the concept of the west has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the "Other."⁵⁷ Thus, for Said, Orientalism is a social construct based on the aforementioned uneven power relationship rather than historical

⁵⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 5.

⁵⁷ Edward Said, introduction to *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), xvii.

reality. Thus, the West is western only in terms of its not being Oriental, and similarly the Orient is only oriental as a result of its not being western. This tradition can easily be seen in relation to Islam and the mosque. Christianity and the church, despite historically rising in the East, are the established norms in the West. As a result, Islam and the mosque are identified in relation to these norms and become the “other.” Though this is the very nature of discourse, in that discourse frames our understanding of the world and relegates all components of existence into easily identifiable groups that are discerned from one another by nature of their dissimilarities, such stark contrasts and comparisons lead to stereotypes. Said argued that it is necessary to abandon this method of identification to move out of the realm of domination and marginalization and into the realm of mutual understanding.

Despite the seminal works of scholars like Edward Said, the Orientalist narrative continues to shape Western conceptions of the Orient, and more recently Western concerns about the threat of radical Islam. As a result, in order to properly study the social, economic and political functions of the mosque in the 20th century, an attempt must be made to deconstruct the East-West dichotomy, which has continued to exist and flourish despite the decline of European colonialism since the end of WWII. Much of the literature of the 20th century concerning Islam reflects “a western style for dominating, resurrecting, and having authority over the Orient.”⁵⁸ Even more alarming and detrimental to

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

truly understanding the nature of Islam is that this tradition has been allowed to continue in our 21st century discourse. On a daily basis Westerners are presented with images of so-called Jihadists performing *salat* with AK-47s at their sides. Meanwhile preachers in Florida attempt to garner support for “Burn a Qur’an Day.” The media portrays Islam as a monolithic, anti-Western and intolerant religion whose sole purpose is to eradicate all things un-Islamic. This portrayal is obviously troublesome, but the scholarly publications that seek to reinforce and perpetuate these Orientalist stereotypes are far more problematic, indeed.

Perhaps the most seminal and simultaneously problematic scholarly piece of the 20th century is Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations thesis. First published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in 1993, this thesis makes several claims about the nature of the post- Cold War “world order,” and the nature of Islam. First Huntington claimed that in the post- Cold War era the “great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.”⁵⁹ He divided the world into seven, possibly eight, civilizations, stating:

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22, accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20045621>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Secondly, Huntington asserted that this conflict is inevitable and that although the “fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future,” the so-called Islamic civilization will be the perpetrator because, as Huntington argued, “Islam has bloody borders.”⁶¹

Huntington’s thesis is troubling for a variety of reasons. His argument tends to generalize the eight existing, yet vaguely-defined, civilizations, which are problematic constructs to begin with, into only two; “the West” and “the rest.” Furthermore, Huntington argued that this inevitable “cultural conflict” will occur primarily between the West and the Confucian and Islamic civilizations because “the crescent-shaped Islamic bloc, from the bulge of Africa to central Asia, has bloody borders” and that, similarly, “a Confucian-Islamic connection has emerged to challenge Western interests, values and power.”⁶² This rhetoric clearly reflects the power relationship to which Said refers in *Orientalism*. By juxtaposing the West with Islam, a label that Huntington problematically used to describe the entirety of the Middle East, Huntington affirmed Western values while ‘othering’ Islam and reinforcing Orientalist stereotypes. This thesis has been criticized at length by scholars like Edward Said who argued that Huntington’s contribution is sophomoric and reflects not familiarity with “scholarship or theory” but with “journalism and popular demagoguery.”⁶³

⁶¹ *ibid.* p.34

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 5.

Though Huntington and Said were perhaps the most influential and well-known scholars of Orientalism, they are not alone in their feelings or findings. Countless other scholars have commented on and studied the relationship existing between traditionally Islamic lands and peoples and the traditionally non-Islamic “West.” It is through the lenses of this dichotomy that the mosque, as a monolith, has been seen in the 20th and 21st centuries.

For the purposes of this study, a Said-ian approach will be used to discuss the nature of the mosque in the 20th century. Much of the literature written about Islam in the past forty years has reflected a desire to understand its “basic nature”; to dispel misconceptions, or give credence to the threat that Islam poses for the rest of the world. Meanwhile, the mosque is discussed in very little detail. Popular media on the other hand provides a, by and large, negative portrayal of the mosque. Terrorists and terrorism are usually connected in some way to a mosque, while mosques and their leaders are often accused of links to terrorist cells.

No accurate statistics outlining what percentage of mosques has links to terrorism or support, whether financially or otherwise, terrorist organizations. Any existing figures would be inaccurate given the obvious secretive nature of terrorist cells. What can be confirmed is that with 1.6 billion Muslims the world over, the number of mosques serving the needs of terrorist organizations represents a minuscule fraction of the whole.⁶⁴ Much has been written and said

⁶⁴ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*;

about the mosque's role in armed resistance but little has been published concerning its more basic and individual functions.

Though the remainder of this study will seek to refrain from Orientalist interpretations of the "facts," it cannot be denied that Islamic fundamentalist movements have emerged in a number of countries the world over. Though the size, scope and intensity of these movements vary considerably, they have more or less advocated for the decreased secularization, narrowing of the gap between religious and nonreligious, of society and politics and a return to more "Islamic" political and social systems. Such calls appear to be aimed at Middle Eastern autocrats as much as Western-style democracy and society, which have both become increasingly secular in the past century or so. It is crucial that we keep this fact in mind when discussing Orientalist literature as the threats these authors perceive are not entirely based in fiction.

Though the overview of the functions of the mosque in the 20th century and beyond that follows will only very briefly discuss the mosque as being part and parcel of Islamic terrorism, the broad-spectrum diversity of Islamic movements will be kept in mind, so as to remain balanced and avoid inappropriate generalizations. Thus, the 20th century mosque will be viewed from as neutral a perspective as is possible with little analysis concerning what Islam might be or may become.

Islam and the Mosque in the 20th Century

The nature of the mosque between 622CE and the end of World War I in 1918 could be described, in a word, as dynamic. Meanwhile, the functions of the mosque during any given period (the Prophet, the Rashidun Caliphs, the Umayyads, etc.) were relatively consistent. Though there was some change to its political, economic and military functions as time progressed, change was slow and although the mosque lost its position as the venue for these activities the *'ulama* remained involved enough that these functions, though removed from the mosque, were not separated from the Islamic tradition. Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after WWI, the Muslim world found itself in a position it had not encountered since the Mongol invasion in 1258. The Ottoman lands were divided between the French and the British as a result of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Under the Ummayyads and the Abbasids the *umma* and the state were one in the same. Under the Ottomans the *umma* and the state enjoyed a marriage of mutual convenience. In the 20th Century, with very few exceptions, the religious establishment and the Islamic community found themselves not only separated from each other but separated from, and often in opposition to, the state.

Not only did Muslims find themselves without an Empire for the first time since the rise of the Ottomans, but they also found themselves governed by colonial, European forces who brought with them new, foreign forms of governance that left the masses and the former Ottoman Elite feeling obsolete.

There were of course those in the newly established political and social order that benefited from colonial rule, typically the landed class, and thus sought to preserve it. However, by the 1950's several movements had emerged calling for the liberation of the former Ottoman lands from Colonialist powers.

Many of these movements were nationalist in nature, and though they reflected the Islamic backgrounds of their leaders, their call was for democratization, modernization and (quasi) secularization. This movement was embodied by the desire for a pan-Arab state and was mainly propagated by Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, whose ideology called for the establishment of a pan-Arab state based on socialist, but not anti-religious policies. Another more secular, but still nationalist movement emerged in Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who sought to westernize all aspects of Turkish society, including religion.

While pan-Arabism flourished during the 1950's and 1960's, it did so at the expense of the clerical establishment. By the 1970's so-called Islamic Fundamentalists who had become disillusioned with the status quo began to "challenge secular ideologies and Muslim governments by appeals to religious ideology, symbols, and rhetoric"⁶⁵ and call vehemently for the establishment of a pan-Islamic state or, at the very least, the abandonment of "Western" style policies and practices. Proponents of pan-Islamism argued that "Muslim public

⁶⁵ John L. Esposito and James P. Piscatori, "Democratization and Islam," *Middle East Journal* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 428, accessed April 4, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4328314>.

figures and movements that, despite being sincere in their concern for the welfare of their people, have willingly allowed themselves to be captivated by the enchantment of Western ideas of nationalism, socialism, liberalism, economic development, democracy, and so on.”⁶⁶ Thus, where pan-Arabism called for the separation of religion and the state pan-Islamism argued that the existence of such a state contradicted the very nature of Islam. Pan-Islamists have argued that evidence for the overall failure of pan-Arabism and Arab Socialism lies in the fact that under such regimes “poverty has soared, social inequalities have become even more pronounced, corruption and moral degradation are the order of the day, Muslim solidarity has been severely eroded, and the Muslim world has been repeatedly attacked by the infidels.”⁶⁷ It was as a result of these failures of pan-Arabism and Arab Socialism, that pan-Islamism emerged from the shadows and sought to rectify the social ills of the Islamic world through the political implementation of Islamic principles. Regardless of the calls for puritan, Sharia based governments in the Muslim world and a reunification of the *umma*, I would argue that the mosque and the religious establishment throughout the mid- to late-twentieth century, though increasingly politicized, have not been major players in most political arenas (with the Islamic Republic of Iran existing as an obvious exception). In the pages

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Sivan, "Islamic Radicalism: Sunni and Shi'ite," in *Religious Radicalism & Politics in the Middle East* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 40.

⁶⁷ G. P. Makris, *Islam in the Middle East: A Living Tradition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 200.

that follow I will discuss the ways that this politicization has manifested in various Muslim countries, including Egypt, Turkey, Algeria, Lebanon and Iran.

Perhaps the best example of this politicization of Islam and the mosque can be seen in Egypt. In the wake of the Free Officers Movement and the subsequent coup against King Farouk in 1952, the Revolutionary Command Committee pushed the Islamists underground where they have remained for the better part of the last sixty years. Thus, Islam and the mosque were removed, by-and-large, from the political sphere. While many, like al-Azhar, were barred from political participation, they were simultaneously politicized and brought under state control, serving a purpose most adequately likened to that of the mosque adjacent to the *dar al-imara* during the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates. As a result Islamic groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, quite literally, took to the streets. While barred from political participation, the Brotherhood focused on “building mosques, schools, clinics, youth programs, and other types of social infrastructure,” and as a result created a vast social welfare network.⁶⁸ This social welfare network has provided the clerical establishment with a base for mobilization and the fostering of popular support. They have in turn used this wide-spread support to remain a political powerbroker despite their being banned from the political arena. As a result of their social welfare programs, though officially banned from fielding candidates

⁶⁸ Ziad Munson, "Islamic Mobilization Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood," *The Sociological Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 496, accessed April 4, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121130>.

in elections, during the 2005 parliamentary elections 88 members of the Brotherhood managed to win parliamentary seats after running as independents.

The case of the Islamic movement in Turkey has been very similar to that in Egypt. After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk emerged as the charismatic leader of the newly formed state of Turkey. His political ideology was simple; he sought a western-style democracy and a form of secularism where religion was entirely subordinate to the state, similar to the French model of laicism. The Islamic movement that began to emerge in the 1950s but gained strength during 1970s and 1980s “was not an attempt to return to the past, nor a rejection of modernity, the West, or non-Muslims.”⁶⁹ Instead, the Islamic movement in Turkey reflected a belief that Islam and democracy are not inherently incompatible. Until very recently, the Islamic movement however was repressed, a fact made evident by the various military coups and coups by warning that have taken place in the name of secularism since 1960. Much like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Islamic politics in Turkey were “strengthened over time by its vigorous grass-roots organization, its responsiveness to local concerns and its effectiveness in tackling the nuts and bolts of local government services such as sanitation and the provision of parks

⁶⁹ Jennifer C. Noyon, *Islam, Politics and Pluralism: Theory and Practice in Turkey, Jordan, Tunisia and Algeria* (London, England: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003), 60.

and youth centers.”⁷⁰ The Welfare Party, established in 1983, was able to achieve political success because it “offered constituents a simple, yet comprehensive ideology that explained what was wrong with society and what needed to be done, helped the poor to get healthcare, jobs and necessities, and developed a sympathetic personal relationship with the voters.”⁷¹ As a result, many were likely attracted to the Welfare Party because of its policies, not its particular ideologies.

A similar situation has also emerged in Lebanon. In the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 a Shi’ite resistance movement, Hezbollah, emerged to confront Israeli forces. Though held responsible for, or thought to be involved in a litany of terrorist attacks including but not limited to the 1983 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut and subsequent bombing of the U.S marine barracks, the 1985 hijacking of TWA flight 847 and the 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Hezbollah has been able to transform from a militia into a political party with a clearly defined political agenda. They were able to make this transition as a result of their dedication to social welfare programs.

A similar example of this re-politicization of Islam can be seen in Algeria. Since gaining its independence from France in 1962, Algeria’s political system has

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.72

⁷¹ Susanna Dokupil, "The Separation of Mosque and State: Islam and Democracy in Modern Turkey," *West Virginia Law Review* 105 (2002-2003): 107, accessed April 23, 2011, http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/wvb105&div=9&g_sent=1&collection=journals.

been dominated by the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), the socialist party that spearheaded the nationalist, independence movement against the French occupation. After the initial success of the battle for Algerian independence the popularity of the FLN waned and, out of the latent Islamist movement that began in the 1920s, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) emerged in the late 1980s to challenge the FLN for control of the country's political system. The FIS has been incredibly popular and its popularity has been due in large part to their network of mosques, which purportedly includes some 9,000 mosques that provide patrons with social services and access to medical care.⁷² The mosque has been so instrumental to the success of the FIS in Algeria that at times the FLN regime replaced Imams and closed mosques, in addition to placing whole neighborhoods in Algiers under "virtual siege by heavily armed security forces."⁷³

Islamic opposition to the Pahlavi monarchy used Iranian mosques in much the same way as the FIS in Algeria, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. While in exile in France, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was able to build a base of mass support for the 1979 Islamic Revolution through the vast network of mosques and Islamic seminaries in Iran. Cassette tapes of his lectures would be smuggled into Iran and distributed among the mosques. It was through these cassettes that Khomeini was able to garner mass support for his movement and

⁷² Jennifer C. Noyon, *Islam, Politics and Pluralism: Theory and Practice in Turkey, Jordan, Tunisia and Algeria* (London, England: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003), 122.

⁷³ Mahmud A. Faksh, *The Future of Islam in the Middle East: Fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria and Saudi Arabia* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 75.

organize massive strikes and demonstrations that eventually led to the end of the monarchy and the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979.

The emergence of mosques constructed using the funds of political parties is both new and novel in the history of Islam. Prior to the end of the colonial period, the religious establishment almost exclusively conducted mosque construction. Funds collected from *zakat* or revenues from the *awqafs* were used to pay for mosque construction as well as the social services that such mosques provided. In this way, the function of the mosque remained purely religious and the charitable giving of the mosque resulted in increased piety or, at the very least, loyalty to the local *ulama*. In the 20th century, with the emergence of political parties as mosque builders, this has changed dramatically. The goals of such parties may not be religious or even philanthropic in nature, but strategic and political. From this perspective, a mosque provides them with a built-in base for mobilization. As Islam is an integral part of daily life in Muslim communities, mosques provide a venue that cannot be easily closed down, even when activities that take place inside conflict with state ideology. Furthermore, the social welfare that these mosques provide may become associated not with Islamic charitable giving, but with the political organization providing the financial backing.

Of course, to say that the practice of mosque construction by political parties has become dominant in the entirety of the Muslim world would be a sweeping generalization. Obviously, states like present-day Iran, where

Islam is more officially part of the state structure, mosques are less commonly used as a platform for political opposition. Nevertheless it may be concluded that though no state currently exhibits this trend of political and social mobilization through the construction of mosques and their provision of social services, during the last sixty years or so almost all states with significant Muslim populations have experienced this phenomenon at one time or another. As a result, this trend must be kept in mind when discussing the contemporary nature of the mosque in Islam.

Chronology of the “Mosque at Ground Zero” and the Surrounding Debate

The so-called “Ground Zero Mosque,” by most accounts, became a media sensation in late-May, 2010. However, the publication of plans to construct a 13 story “mosque” close to the site of the September 11, 2001 terrorists attacks on the World Trade Centers in the heart of New York City were only the most recent and dramatic media coverage concerning a mosque at ground zero. A mere two blocks and a two minute drive from the proposed site of the new mosque, now dubbed Park51, is located a mosque that until recently continued to serve members of the Muslim community even after the events of 9/11. This then begs questions like how much of a difference can two blocks or thirteen stories make? I will discuss my answers to these questions in this paper’s conclusion, but before a conclusion or any analysis of the nature of Park51 can be made it is first necessary to present a brief chronology of important events and arguments surrounding the controversy.

One of the first major news agencies to report on the then-called Cordoba Project was *The New York Times*. In an article published on December 8, 2009 *The Times* describes preliminary plans for an “Islamic Center” at what was formerly a Burlington Coat Factory located at 45 Park Place. For months, the article claims, Muslims living in the area had been using the building as a “prayer space.” Despite its close proximity to Ground Zero, there appeared to be little opposition to the proposed plan for the center. New York City Mayor, Michael R. Bloomberg said via spokesman with seemingly little interest that “If its legal, the

building owners have a right to do what they want,” while a family member of a 9/11 victim touted the proposed center as a “noble effort.” Although this article raised the “possibility of a backlash from those opposed to a Muslim presence at Ground Zero,” there was little initial response to either the article or the proposed project itself outside of the blogosphere, where several right-wing bloggers commented on the project.

Despite this right-wing opposition, the proposed “Islamic Center” at Park Place received very little, if any, attention in the media until May, 2010 when the *Associated Press* reported that the organizations financing the project “publicly unveiled the preliminary plan for the project, known as the Cordoba House, at a meeting of the finance committee of the local community board.” At this meeting, the finance committee supported the project but acknowledged that it could neither “approve nor disapprove” of the project’s construction. On the same day the *New York Post* also published an article titled “Panel Approves ‘WTC’ mosque” that reported, albeit briefly, the same story.

It was in the wake of these articles, and similar articles published on the same day, that the media frenzy erupted. Pamela Geller, the author, blogger and co-founder of the organization Stop the Islamization of America (SIOA), became one of the loudest voices of opposition. In a post published on May 6, 2010, the same day that the *Associated Press* reported on the proposed Cordoba House and the community board’s backing of the project Geller said, “the only Muslim center that should be built in the shadow of the World Trade Center is one

devoted to expunging the Koran and all Islamic teachings of the prescribed violent jihad and all hateful texts and incitements of violence.”

Though Geller became the face of the mosque opposition, she was not alone in her condemnation of the project. For the six months that Ground Zero Mosque remained politically and socially relevant, virtually every media personality and politician offered up an opinion. Former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Newt Gingrich weighed in on the debate saying, “There should be no mosque near Ground Zero in New York so long as there are no churches or synagogues in Saudi Arabia. The time for double standards that allow Islamists to behave aggressively toward us while they demand our weakness and submission is over.”⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the 2008 Republican vice-Presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, said in a Tweet “Ground Zero Mosque supporters: doesn't it stab you in the heart, as it does ours throughout the heartland? Peaceful Muslims, pls refudiate.” To be fair, most commentators recognized that the Cordoba House had the “right” to be built but questioned whether choosing a location so close to Ground Zero was inappropriate or insensitive. Nevertheless, the line separating Islam from Islamism was blurred repeatedly.

During the course of the debates that came to surround the proposed Cordoba house, which later changed its name to Park51, several arguments and

⁷⁴ Newt Gingrich, "Gingrich: No Cordoba at Ground Zero ," *Renewing American Leadership*, accessed April 4, 2011, last modified July 21, 2010, <http://www.torennewamerica.com/gingrich-ground-zero-mosque>.

issues emerged. First and foremost among these was whether or not the “Mosque at Ground Zero” was, in actuality, a mosque. From the outset the project’s organizer, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, maintained that Park51 is not a mosque but a community Islamic community center “modeled after the Jewish Community Center on Manhattan’s Upper West Side and the 92nd Street Y.”⁷⁵ The center’s 13 stories will include, among other amenities, a swimming pool, gym, and basketball court, an auditorium, a restaurant, a library, childcare services and a 9/11 memorial in addition to two-floors devoted to space for prayer.⁷⁶ Still, despite the Imam’s assertions, those opposing the proposed project continue to call into question their veracity.

Another major question that has come to the forefront of the “Ground Zero Mosque” debate, asks if the construction of a mosque or Islamic center reflects an Islamic tradition of mosque construction as a symbol of dominance or conquest. Many have argued that the original title, Cordoba House, is a clear reflection of this tradition. If this is the case, Park51 this may be construed to symbolize Islam’s conquest of the United States on September 11, 2001. Generally speaking, these have been the two most significant arguments concerning the nature of Park51 and, as such, will be discussed at length in the remainder of this study. The first issue to be analyzed will be the “basic nature” of Park51. As it has already been proven the mosque in Islam has, throughout

⁷⁵ Seema Saifee, "Park51 and Patriotism," Park51, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified 2011, <http://park51.org/2011/01/park51-and-patriotism/>.

⁷⁶ "Facilities," Park51, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified 2011, <http://park51.org/facilities/>.

the centuries, been a dynamic rather than static entity and it is through comparison to these many and varied phases and functions that the lingering question of “is it a mosque or a community center” will be answered. Following this analysis, this paper will then seek to evaluate the claim that mosques have historically been constructed or established at sites of Islamic conquests. Though this issue was mentioned briefly in the historical overview, in what follows the issue of mosque construction and establishment as a symbol of conquest will be more deeply analyzed using historical comparison to determine whether this symbolism can be verified and related to the controversy surrounding the establishment of Park51.

So, what is Park51, Really?

Given the controversy and media frenzy surrounding Park51, a scholarly examination of its “basic nature” is crucial. The need for such an examination is not to argue whether or not the project should be permitted to be built. The New York State Constitution clearly states in Article 1 Section 3 that “the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever be allowed in this state to all humankind.”⁷⁷ which means that Park51 may be built so long it can be funded. Instead, this analysis seeks simply to answer the question, “is Park51 a community center or a mosque?” To do so, this chapter will first discuss the ways in which Park51 is representing itself and will then move on to discuss how these representations compare and contrast with past and present mosque functions and those of various other religiously-affiliated establishments. However, it is not enough to end a discussion of Park51 with a definitive answer to this question as the impact and implications of this answer are equally important as the answer itself.

For the most part, Park51 has had three public representatives; Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf, his wife Daisy Khan and developer Sharif Al-Gamal. In an article published in the *International Herald Tribune* in December 2009, Al-Gamal

⁷⁷ Freedom of religion is also ensured by the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. However, the Bill of Rights was originally intended to outline the relationship between the federal government and the people. As the Park51 controversy is a state issue, it is more appropriate in this case to cite the New York State Constitution.

described the project as looking to “provide a place of peace, a place of services and solutions for the community, which is always looking for interfaith dialogue.” In another article published on May 26, 2010 in the *New York Daily News*, Al-Gamal states that Park51 “is a community center, just like a YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) or JCC (Jewish Community Center); the only difference here is it’s Muslim-led.” Meanwhile, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf has maintained all along that that Park51 is a community center. “[Park51] will have prayer space for sure,” he says, “but the primary thrust of [it] is to build community.”⁷⁸

Park51’s official website further elaborates on the project’s goals as well as its “basic nature.” According to the website’s vision statement “Park51 is a center dedicated to providing cultural, social and recreational programs and services to the Lower Manhattan community, and to helping weave the Muslim-American identity into the pluralistic fabric of the United States.”⁷⁹ The project, upon completion, will contain “outstanding recreation spaces and fitness facilities (swimming pool, gym, basketball court), an auditorium, a restaurant and culinary school, cultural amenities including exhibitions, education programs, a library reading room and art studios, childcare services, and a September 11th memorial and quiet contemplation space open to all.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Samuel Goldsmith, "A House of 'Healing' Muslims Plan 9/11 Memorial at Ground Zero-area Mosque," *New York Daily News*, May 26, 2010.

⁷⁹ "Vision," Park51, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified 2011, <http://park51.org/vision/>

⁸⁰ "Facilities," Park51, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified 2011, <http://park51.org/facilities/>.

Meanwhile, in its frequently asked questions section, it stresses that “Park51 is not a mosque. It is a cultural and community center. You may pray at the adjacent PrayerSpace, which is a non-for-profit completely independent of Park51. The Community Center and the PrayerSpace share the same landlord, Soho Properties, Inc, whose partners serve on the board of Park51.”⁸¹

Assuming that Park51 is able to accomplish the goals that it has set forth for itself, it will be possible to easily liken it to the Manhattan JCC and the various Manhattan YMCAs. Both the YMCA and JCC have recreational and fitness centers in addition to offering child-care and various educational programs. In this respect, Park51 will have succeeded in its mission. Where Park51 begins to diverge from the YMCA is in the arena of religion. In recent years, the YMCA has attempted to separate itself from its Christian roots. It refers to itself more often as “The Y” as opposed to the YMCA and, though the national website briefly mentions “a mission to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind and body,”⁸² no further mention of Christianity is made. In the mission statement on the YMCA of Greater New York’s website, the word Christian is decidedly absent; its mission statement reads “The YMCA of Greater New York is a community service organization which promotes positive values through programs that build spirit, mind and body, welcoming all people,

⁸¹ “FAQ,” Park51, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified 2011, <http://park51.org/faq/>.

⁸² “About Us,” The YMCA, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified 2010, <http://www.ymca.net/about-us/>.

with a focus on youth.”⁸³ Please note, that the term “Christian principles” has been replaced with “positive values,” reflecting a move towards secularization of the organization.

While Park51 is decidedly different in its religious affiliation than the YMCA today, its religiously based nature can be easily paralleled with that of the JCC. Before this parallel nature can be elaborated on, however, it is necessary to discuss the so-called prayer space that will be located in, and shares an address with, Park51. As Park51 and PrayerSpace are two separate organizations it appears that, at a glance, Park51 is not a mosque. However, this does not mean that there is not a mosque located at 51 Park Place. The line between prayer space and mosque, in this case, is very thin, indeed.

According to PrayerSpace’s website, “upon completion it will have the capacity to accommodate approximately 2,000 people,” and “will offer a range of services and religious programming, including Qur’an classes, Qur’anic recitation, Islamic sciences, Arabic, and others.”⁸⁴ In general, and for most of history, these have been the primary functions of the mosque. The functions of PrayerSpace specifically resemble those of mosques throughout Islamic history as Islamic education has been a prominent mosque function since advent of Islam in 622CE.

⁸³"About the YMCA of Greater New York," New York City's YMCA, accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.ymcanyc.org/ymca-of-greater-new-york/association-home/about-the-ymca-of-greater-new-york/>.

⁸⁴ "About," PrayerSpace, accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.prayerspacenyc.org/>.

It is easy, however, to call the two stories inside 51 Park Place a prayer space instead of a mosque. The images of major mosques like the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and the Umayyad mosque in Damascus have been ingrained into the collective American subconscious and are the standard to which all mosques are, albeit unknowingly, held. By this logic, a mosque must be a grand, domed structure with minarets. In reality however, and particularly in the United States and Europe, virtually any space may be utilized as a mosque. A mosque is, literally translated from the Arabic masjid, is merely a place of prostration. Though minarets and domed roofs are common in mosques in the so-called Muslim world, they are not strictly necessary and many mosques in the United States, Park51 included, do not have them. Internally, mosques have few mandatory features. While most contain a minbar⁸⁵ and a mihrab,⁸⁶ but neither is strictly necessary. Really, the only explicitly mandated requirement is that prayer be directed towards the Ka'ba. That prayer and Islamic education will be conducted within this prayer space is enough to qualify it as a mosque.

This does not, however, mean that the entirety of Park51, in and of itself, is a mosque. Instead, Park51 is a community center with a mosque inside. It is this fact that differentiates it from the nearby JCC. In JCC Manhattan's mission

⁸⁵ The raised structure or pulpit from which solemn announcements to the Muslim community were made and from which sermons were preached

⁸⁶ A niche usually carved into the middle of the wall facing the direction of Mecca.

statement, the religious nature of the community center is made explicitly clear.

It reads:

The mission of The Jewish Community Center in Manhattan is to build an inclusive Jewish community that celebrates the strength of diversity. We are a home for individuals and families of all backgrounds to grow and to learn, and to care about and deepen their connections to one another. Rooted in Jewish values, our cultural, social, educational, and recreational programs offer multiple pathways into the richness of community life for members of all ages.⁸⁷

Although the JCC offers Hebrew language courses, Jewish religion and culture courses and holiday celebrations, the JCC is not, nor does it contain, a temple.

For now, Park51, is not a mosque while the PrayerSpace within it, is. Only time will tell whether this is the norm or the exception. One may only assume that as the Muslim population in the United States continues to increase, so too will the need and desire for Islamic community centers. If the majority of such projects contain a mosque overseen by the community center, then it may stand to reason that the prayer space in Park51's being a separate organization is a purely political move aimed at minimizing media hype and that it is a mosque that serves a litany of social services to the community, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. On the other hand, if future projects leave room for a prayer space, but leave its maintenance to outside organizations it would stand to reason that they are Islamic community centers with mosques inside. It would not be entirely unusual for a mosque to serve as a community center, given the myriad

⁸⁷ "About," The JCC in Manhattan, accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.jccmanhattan.org/about>.

functions the mosque has served since 622CE. Some of the earliest Muslim communities in the United States stated that, in establishing mosques, their “goal was to have [it] become the social center of the community.”⁸⁸ Thus, the mosque in the United States has always been a veritable social center of sorts, and the addition of recreational facilities would only expand on this function.

This begs the question, “how can the two be differentiated?” I argue that that this differentiation can be made by examining the leadership of both institutions. If the leadership of the community center and the prayer space is the same, then it would be difficult to argue that the two are separate, especially if the Imam serves on the board of directors. Until recently, this was the case with Park51. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf served on the Park51 Board of Directors and served as the Imam for the prayer space. Recently, he has stepped down as the Imam in what can only be seen as an attempt to quiet public discontent. However Sherif Al-Gamal, who also serves on the Park51 Board of Directors, is the landlord of the Park Place property and leases space to both PrayerSpace and Park51⁸⁹. This appears to indicate that the “it’s not a mosque” rhetoric is clearly politically motivated and that, if public opinion allowed and 9/11 never happened, Park51 may have been called a mosque. As it stands however, Park51 remains a community center with a mosque inside.

⁸⁸ Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A history of Islam in America : from the new world to the new world order* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 185.

⁸⁹ “FAQ,” Park51, accessed April 23, 2011, last modified 2011, <http://park51.org/faq/>.

However, it is not enough to end a discussion of Park51 with a definitive answer to this question as the impact and implications of this answer are equally important as the answer itself. It is clear that the mosque throughout history has served as a social institution so it should come as no surprise that The original title, The Cordoba House, had obvious links to Islamic history (which will be discussed at length in the following section) whereas the new title is removed from religion and entrenched in the physical geography of the city. While at a basic level this switch is aimed at “at minimizing media hype,” the motives and implications of this seemingly unimportant name change run much deeper. While to some in the Pamela Geller camp, this change reflects an attempt by the Imam to hide the project from public scrutiny, in reality it represents a major compromise and sacrifice on the part of the Muslim community in New York at the expense of American Muslims as a whole. They have a clear legal right to build their project and name it as they see fit. In changing the title of the project they damaged the strength of the Muslim community in America’s strength and ability to oppose anti-Islamic sentiments.

The Cordoba Issue

Perhaps one of the most poignant controversies surrounding the Park51 controversy is its proximity to Ground Zero, the site where 2,752 people, some of them Muslim, lost their lives as a direct result of Islamic extremism.⁹⁰ Many have claimed that the construction of an Islamic center, mosque or otherwise, so close to Ground Zero is insensitive. Others have likened this insensitivity to placing a Japanese commemorative plaque in Pearl Harbor, or building a Christian convent in Auschwitz. While this particular study has argued that although Park51 is not in and of itself a mosque but does contain a mosque, it is necessary to examine these arguments and theories.

The analogies mentioned above likely arose as a result of Park51's original title, The Cordoba House, which draws on the Islamic conquest of Spain and the great mosque at Cordoba. Though the establishment of the Great Mosque in Cordoba was briefly discussed in an earlier chapter, it would be prudent to discuss it again in more depth and detail in order to better understanding the arguments that the invocation of the name Cordoba has given rise to.

The conquest of Visigoth Spain began in 711CE but it was not until 756CE that an Emirate independent of the Umayyad Caliphate was established with

⁹⁰ "New York reduces 9/11 death toll by 40," *CNN*, October 29, 2003, accessed April 23, 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2003-10-29/us/wtc.deaths_1_death-toll-world-trade-center-names?_s=PM:US.

Cordoba serving as its capital city.⁹¹ This Muslim political presence in Spain continued until 1492 when Emir Muhammad XII surrendered the last remaining Muslim-governed territories to Queen Isabella I.⁹² It is important to note is that, though weak, the Islamic Caliphate in Spain was able to maintain political sovereignty and legitimacy even after the fall of the Mongol invasion and subsequent fall of the Abbasids in 1258CE.

Although the Umayyads fled Syria following the rise of the Abbasids in 750, it was not until 785 that construction was begun on the Great Mosque of Cordoba. The controversy arises with subsequent interpretations of the Great Mosque's foundation as "a symbol of dynastic conquest,⁹³" rather than a means to an end, i.e. a mosque for Friday prayer. Perhaps this is a result the process involved; the Great Mosque was built on the site of a church, Saint Vincent's, which 'Abd al-Rahman I had previously purchased and demolished.⁹⁴

As was previously mentioned, mosque construction in conquered territories was not an uncommon practice during the Muslim expansion (though I do not necessarily believe that the construction was an intentional symbol of that conquest, least of all in Cordoba). The Islamic state did not encourage or force the local Spanish population to convert to Islam mainly because it led to a

⁹¹ W. Montgomery Watt, *A History of Islamic Spain* (Edinburgh, England: Edinburgh University Press, 1965), 5.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Nuha N. Khoury, "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 83, accessed April 23, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1523253>.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

loss in revenue as non-Muslims were subjected to higher rates of taxation.⁹⁵ Thus, the population of Islamic Spain remained heterogeneous. It was this heterogeneity, in fact, that led to a number of uprisings and revolts. However, the Emir's brutal suppression of these of these uprisings did not reflect a tradition of Muslim versus infidel, but a desire to maintain political power.⁹⁶

To claim that this practice of building religious spaces in conquered territories is unique to Islam would be to ignore glaring historical realities that point toward the contrary. Throughout the entirety of the Crusades, conversion was as much of a goal as the conquest of Jerusalem.⁹⁷ Mosques and churches alike were built and converted depending on who emerged the victor in a particular territory, not necessarily as a symbol of victory but as a consequence of need.

By and large, over the centuries Cordoba became a hub of culture and learning in, what was then, pre-Enlightenment era Europe. Art and poetry flourished, merging pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions with those of the Greeks and Persians.⁹⁸ Cordoba also became a major intellectual center, housing one of the largest and most well-stocked libraries in the Islamic world.⁹⁹ Keeping these facts in mind and comparing them to the mission statement of provided by the

⁹⁵ W. Montgomery Watt, *A History of Islamic Spain* (Edinburgh, England: Edinburgh University Press, 1965), 20.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.32

⁹⁷ Alan Cutler, "The First Crusade and the Ideal of 'Conversion,'" *The Muslim World* 58, no. 1 (February 1968): accessed April 23, 2011, doi:10.1111/j.1478-1913.1968.tb02703.x.

⁹⁸ W. Montgomery Watt, *A History of Islamic Spain* (Edinburgh, England: Edinburgh University Press, 1965), 77.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.80

Park51 Executive Board, it would appear that the title of “the Cordoba House” would have been incredibly appropriate for the project. Park51 seeks intercultural cooperation and education and Cordoba, as the capital of Muslim Spain, achieved the same.

Conclusion

The mosque, as can be easily determined from the preceding pages, is not a monolith. From its earliest institutional inception, this was made clear. The Prophet's mosque met the needs of the early religious community in addition to their political, economic and social ones. It is important to note, however, that as time progressed these functions have adapted and fluctuated in response to historical political, economic and social realities. Thus, the mosque has been a dynamic institution capable of adapting to the circumstances of the society in which it has operated.

In periods where a strong, centralized government was able to provide for the political and economic needs of the people, as was witnessed under Ummayyad and Abbasid Caliphs, the mosque was largely relegated to social and religious affairs. Conversely, in periods where the existing government was unable to fulfill its duties, like Egypt in the 20th century, the mosque emerged as a politicized entity seeking to gain political clout by serving the economic and social interests of the people.

Given its dynamic nature, it is not surprising that the mosque in traditionally non-Islamic societies would adapt to the perceived needs for the Muslim community. More specifically, in the United States where Muslims face discrimination and violence, it is not surprising that the mosque would be partnered with a community center. Though I am not Muslim, I can imagine that names like "Young Men's Christian Association" and "Jewish Community Center"

might deter me from buying a membership pass to workout, swim or seek childcare. These titles, which apparently do so without malicious intent, exclude those outside the specified group. Park51, as an Islamic community center containing a mosque, is merely a natural response to the continued, whether de jure or de facto, of the Islamic communities marginalized, excluded and segregated status in American society.

I realize that this study of the mosque has failed to argue whether Park51 should or should not be constructed. This does not represent a lapse in research, but rather a conscious decision to avoid arguments based in morals and ethics. In the end this is what the “should Park51 be built” question comes down to a question of “is it right to build Park51?” No amount of research could definitively answer this question as it is a task for philosophers and social scientists to tackle (of course we can seek to answer such questions! It does not mean the answer is binding or indisputable but this is precisely what we should be doing). Nonetheless, given the multitude of opinions and, in particular the rationality behind them I will, in closing, offer my opinion concerning the proposed Park51 community center.

First and foremost, Islam is not hell-bent on the destruction of America, American values or the so-called American way of life. Like any other minority group, Muslims in the United States want to retain their individual religious customs and practices in the face of a society that demands homogeneity.

Keeping this in mind, the proposed construction of Park51 four blocks from Ground Zero is not symbolic of Islam's domination of the West. It is symbolic of New York City's Muslim Community's need for space and inexpensive real-estate. Simply stated it would be wildly inappropriate to hold New York City's Muslims responsible for the actions of 19 foreign hijackers representing an impossibly small minority of religious extremists.

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Summary

Since September 11, 2001 the American people have been consistently bombarded with media reports concerning Arabs, Islam, Muslims and the mosque. These terms are often accompanied by loaded concepts like Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism. This has led to a widespread belief among those with little exposure to the cultures, practices and histories of Arabs and Muslims that the words Arab, Muslim and terrorist can be used in place of one another. Though such misinterpretations are particularly disturbing in our increasingly globalized world, this tendency towards Islamophobia is not a new development. The historical relationship between the so-called Islamic world and the “West” has been based largely on misrepresentation and misinformation. Thus, present-day conflation of words like Arab, Muslim and terrorist are not surprising but merely a continuation of historical practice.

This conflation of terms can be easily noted in relation to the mosque. The mosque is often represented as the tangible manifestation of Islam. Very rarely is the mosque mentioned in today’s media without suggesting its suspected links to terrorism. This is a serious problem, as the mosque is not a static institution. While it primarily functions as a religious institution, throughout Islamic history its functions have waned and waxed to meet the social, political and economic needs of the Muslim community. While it is possible to generalize the broad-spectrum functions of the mosque during

certain eras of Islamic history (i.e. the life of the Prophet, the Ottoman Empire, the 20th Century, etc.) it is important that the mosque does not, nor did it ever, exist in a vacuum.

Given the current fixation with Islam and the general lack of accurate information concerning the mosque, I decided to focus my Capstone project on the dynamic nature of the mosque as an institution. The project examines the many and varied functions that the mosque has served since the advent of Islam in the 7th century. It would be impossible, given the scope of the Capstone project to discuss the functions every mosque of each sect of Islam. As a result, this project generalizes the functions of the mosque in six distinct periods; during the time of the Prophet of Islam, his immediate successors, the Umayyads, the Abbasids, the Ottomans as well as the 20th Century.

Keeping this historical overview in mind, the project then focuses in on the “Ground Zero Mosque” debate that captured media attention in summer 2010. This debate focused on the construction of an Islamic community center, four blocks from Ground Zero, and whether such a structure ought to be considered offensive to the victims of 9/11. Also debated was whether the proposed center was a community center or a mosque. Using the historical overview, this project seeks to provide an answer to this debate. It is important to note, however, that I was not concerned with presenting ethical arguments when formulating this portion of the project. The intended goal was to provide

accurate information about the “Ground Zero Mosque” to determine whether or not we should call it a mosque, not whether or not it should be built at all.

Throughout the course of this project, I did my best to use historically reliable sources when available and, when they were not to carefully analyze conflicting accounts of events and practices to arrive at the most probable truth. The body of literature concerning the mosque, by and large, reflects Orientalist interpretations of the “facts.” This means that the facts do not represent the mosque as it “is,” but the mosque as viewed from the Western, usually Christian perspective. Thus, the mosque is usually defined by nature of its being un-Western, non-Christian and generally backwards. This trend made researching particularly challenging but in the end, after extensively reading books, scholarly journals, news articles and educational internet pages, I was able to access enough scholarly material to offer an account that is as objective and factual as possible.