

P.O.V. ON POVERTY:
**The Expanding Dimensions of Muslim and Interfaith
Discourse in NYC**

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POV ON POVERTY:

The Expanding Dimensions of Muslim and Interfaith Discourse in NYC

Introduction

This paper is an exploratory assessment of New York City Muslim discourse on wealth, poverty and justice. I will begin with a brief accounting of the current state of social and economic inequalities, a crisis that impacts us all and has left friends and family struggling to maintain lives and lifestyles. After a short non scientific review of written and online Muslim readings on wealth and poverty, I will then consider examples of the current social justice conversation between local communities of faith, and how this discourse may reflect and be reflected in the open ended model of critique and resistance that has helped to inform and mobilize segments of the public around injustice and exploitation, a conversation connecting Tahrir Square, Gezi Park, Occupy Wall Street, the Kiev EuroMaidan and the world beyond.

What role does religious discourse play in these movements? How can a study of the discourse help us better understand how faith traditions and values are sustained among leaders and communities? Do individual spiritual needs take priority over the common good? And do divergent views closely reflect social class and income differences within the Muslim community itself?

Economic Crisis, Equality Crisis

We are living during a period in which the unequal distribution of wealth has never been greater. The World Bank reports that close to 2.5 billion of our fellow human beings--more than one-third of the world's population-- live on less than US \$2 a day and an overwhelming 80 percent of the world's population struggles to survive on less than US \$10 dollars a day. (1)

According to Credit Suisse's 2012 Global Wealth Report, "the bottom half of the global population possesses barely 1 percent of total wealth ... In sharp contrast, the richest 10 percent own 86 percent of the world's wealth, with the top 1 percent alone accounting for 46 percent of global assets." (2) And in January 2013, Oxfam released "Working for a Few", a report indicating that, the richest 1 percent of the population has a net worth of approximately \$110 trillion, which is 65 times the wealth of the bottom half. (3)

Millions of people suffer and perish every year from causes that could be easily prevented using only a fraction of the wealth held by the richest 1 percent. In fact, the income of the world's richest 100 persons could eliminate extreme poverty four times over. (4)

The wealth gap between the top 10 percent and the bottom 90 percent is also reaching record levels within developed nations. While in 2012, the United States had the seventh highest average wealth holdings per adult in the world, fifty million Americans qualified as poor and another 100 million qualified as low income. (12) Moreover, In 2008, the US was the third-most-unequal nation in terms of pay in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) industrialized nations and "among nations with at least a quarter-million adults, only Russia, Ukraine, and Lebanon are more unequal" than the United States. (5)

In *The Price of Inequality* (2012), economist Joseph E. Stiglitz indicates that the "six heirs to the Walmart empire command wealth of \$69.7 billion dollars, which is equivalent to the entire wealth of the bottom 30 percent of U.S. society." (6)

In response, US President Barack Obama has admitted that the US economy has become "profoundly unequal," which is a "fundamental threat" to the American society. During a speech

this year Mr. Obama noted that, “Whereas in the past the average CEO made about 20 to 30 times the income of the average worker, today’s CEO now makes 273 times more... The combined trends of increasing inequality and decreasing mobility pose a fundamental threat to the American dream” (7)

Meanwhile, food stamps for millions of American people have been cut across the country. Politicians compete to cut taxes on capital. Inheritance is now coming to rival entrepreneurship as a source of riches, with a new patrimonial elite arising according to Thomas Piketty in his well known new book Capital in the 21st Century (2014).

A Reuters investigative report published in 2012 reveals that "inequality has risen not just in plutocratic hubs such as Wall Street and Silicon Valley, but also in virtually every corner of the world's richest nation: Inequality has increased in 49 of 50 states since 1989," with Mississippi being the only exception, even as it still "ranks worst in the nation on both counts." (8)

Five of the top 20 most unequal Congressional districts in the nation are in New York City. (9)

Moreover in 2005 Manhattan was home to the very highest incomes U.S. census tract, with a household income of \$188,697, as well as the lowest, where household income was \$9,320. The disparity is driven in part by wage growth in high income brackets. (10)

Among Muslim Americans around the nation there is significant inequality, The 2007 Pew Report entitled American Muslims: Mainstream & Middle Class (11) favorably compared Muslim Americans with Muslim minorities in Europe, which struggle and suffer from much

lower rates of pay than the norm. However this focus distracted attention somewhat from the significant gap in wealth among US Muslims: 35% earn \$35,000 and less while 16% earn over 100,000. This compares to other South Asian faith groups; fewer Hindus (9 percent) earn 35K or less and a full 43% earns 100k or more; American Jews with 14% under 35K and 46% over 100K; and to the troubling poverty of historically Black churches, where 49% earn 35K or less while only 8 % earn 100K and up. (12)

While there is somewhat limited data regarding income levels among the approximately 700,000 New York City Muslims, recent data concerning largely Muslim ethnicities is available and suggest a rising crisis. While a 2014 report conducted by the Center for Economic Opportunity states that 45.6% of New York City's population is living near poverty levels – it also tells us that the city's Asian population has surpassed Hispanics as the city's poorest group. Moreover, while some South Asians do have very high incomes, another recent report released by South Asia Youth Action in late 2013 stated that almost 55% of the city's South Asian youths under 20 live in poverty.(13)

According to a 2006 survey conducted before the economic crisis, at 22.5% the poverty level for Arab-American New Yorkers is not as high, but even then over 50% of female headed Arab households lived in poverty. (14) The Pew Report, also predating the effects of the economic crisis, did note that some ethnic groups seem to be struggling; among Arab Americans, only 29% are employed full-time.

A combination of low wages, rising rents, and a lack of benefits is largely to blame. The median rent in New York City rose a staggering 75 percent from 2000 to 2012. (15) Since approximately two thirds of New York City Muslims are immigrants, many have been particularly vulnerable, with limited access to unemployment and other benefits.

However, African Americans in New York have also struggled in the latest economic crisis. According to the Institute on Assets and Social Policy, half the collective wealth of African-American families was stripped away during the Great Recession due to the dominant role of home equity in their wealth portfolios and the prevalence of predatory high-risk loans in communities of color. Since well over one quarter of New York City Muslims are African Americans, the social and economic impact on African American Muslims deserves far greater scrutiny. (16)

NYC Muslim Discourse: Struggle and Reflection

Reflecting a wide variety of wealth and cultural influence, there are over 200 mosques in New York City ranging from basement prayer spaces to showcases managed by Kuwaiti diplomats and doctors. Though the majority of Muslims do not attend prayers regularly, there is sufficient attendance to sustain growth and even the emergence of the first few mosque-based youth and social services. Civil society is growing and extends to Islamic Schools, ethnic associations, charitable and social services for women and youth, student clubs and professional associations, etc. There are many other ad hoc and informal networks of communications sometimes crossing sectarian and faith community boundaries. The main grouping of Sunni imams is the Majlis Ash-Shura of Metropolitan New York.

In the years after 9/11 three local English language newspapers failed to make a profit and now only ethnic newspapers survive in New York City, maintaining subgroup solidarity and ties to countries of origin. There are also a handful of radio shows. However with so many younger Muslims active online on facebook, twitter and in numerous blogs there is abundant

social commentary linking local and global concerns. The community discourse on poverty and justice flows through multiple channels.

To varying extent local concerns are amplified and guided by the messaging from national Muslim American groups. Along with a strong emphasis on civil liberties protection, Muslim American advocacy organizations (such as Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) also consistently emphasize civic engagement but do not often focus directly on, or prioritize, issues related to wealth and poverty.

Such organizations are understandably extremely busy responding to hate crimes and the political impact of Islamophobia in the US. However this relative lack of attention to social justice may also reflect the range of social and economic interests among immigrant supporters and donors. Such caution may be linked to the political and social conservatism of their constituents, since the community emerged from a period of insularity only after the attacks of 9/11, with leadership still working to reassure congregations that voting in US elections is not un-Islamic. And there is still some disagreement on this matter.

And yet, even quite different and diverse groups of Muslims arising during the last decade, such as the “Muslims for Progressive Values,” have not prioritized income inequality in their website or media messaging, or among their activities. Instead these “progressives” have designed a platform largely focused on lifestyle and identity concerns equally of interest to liberals and libertarians; especially women led prayer, and gay and lesbian rights. (17)

Nevertheless, the issue of social and economic disparity is implicit in the subject of racism, a subject that no national group can ignore, given the demographics of the community

around the country. Regardless of ethnic background, many Muslims accept both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King as role models, viewing their struggles for justice as highly relevant to their own aspirations.

At the same time, other national groups that provide charitable and educational services (such as ISNA, ICNA and MAS) have been supported largely by immigrant communities to follow a more “religious,” “service –oriented” approach, with more dialogue than advocacy and more charitable giving than policy prescription. While this approach is slowly changing, as each group opens an office for faith based advocacy in Washington DC, these organizations have had a significant impact in guiding Sadaqa and Zakat giving, developing Islamic social services, and informed by and informing such activities, promoting Islamic ideals of social justice in conferences and publications.

Mindful of the many privileges of life in the USA, immigrant donors tend to consider that even factoring in the bribes of middlemen their investment in good works will have more impact overseas. Like many donors, Muslim Americans tend to give reactively when there is an earthquake or Tsunami or other disaster that impacts their countries of origin or otherwise captures their imaginations. Islamic Relief, a large UK-based charity, and perhaps the largest Muslim charity active in the USA, employs particularly effective marketing. But, despite a crisis in confidence among some donors, following the post 9/11 legal crackdown on Islamic giving, new charities arise all the time to address emerging crises, most recently in Syria, Mali, Burma and the Central African Republic.

Though first generation immigrant Muslim leaders and communities are keenly aware of the gap between rich and poor nations, and the legacy of colonial and neocolonial exploitation,

younger Muslim leaders and “indigenous” African American leaders are now pushing back and insisting that more giving should take place locally, among poor Americans. The lack of connection to poor African communities has been a particularly sore point. As Imam Zaid Shaker, one highly respected Muslim leader active on the national level challenged his audience in 2005: “One reason why you have this [tension] going on in the poor communities, in general, and the African American community in particular, is because those immigrants have not, do not, *perhaps can-not* acknowledge the debt that they owe to the members of that very community that they are exploiting. Were it not for the struggle of Malcolm X, and the struggle of Dr. Martin Luther King, and the struggle of their people – the people that they led – the Immigration Act of 1964 that was amended to allow them to come here... might not have happened;... that amendment might not have seen the light of day. There’s a debt that’s owed! Any immigrant that’s living in any of these suburban neighborhoods, you’re only there because you’re standing on the shoulders of those African American, Native American, and Latino freedom fighters who preceded you here! And if you can’t acknowledge that you need to pack up and leave...” (18)

Moreover, it is not only African Americans that emphasize such points. In July 2012 Aslam Abdullah, Editor in Chief of the Muslim Observer, a newspaper serving the US and Canada, observed how Muslims habitually send funds to the needy overseas, ignoring the poor invisible in plain view around them. As he put it, “There is no systematic effort to identify such individual and families in one’s locality and neighborhood either in American or elsewhere. There is no program so that they could come out of the circle of poverty and dependence...” (19)

Similarly the well-known Tariq Ramadan, inspirational speaker once again equally active in the USA and in Europe, has urged Americans to reflect that, “Zakat (Ramadan giving) is the spirituality of the rich and the right of the poor. This is not alms but purification, and zakat

should take place here in your own country, not sent overseas like sadaqa. The way we currently implement zakat (sending it overseas) is wrong. As Americans you need to know your society. Help the poor to find autonomy....we should conduct a jihad against poverty. The poor have second class schools and the answer is not to send your children to Islamic schools, they are not the answer since 90 percent of kids (and of our children) will be in the worse off schools. Reforming the system according to social justice, you have to speak about power. Muslims here just want to be liked—but no, you must speak up for your rights.” (20)

In the words of many such preachers, Islamic humanism and liberation theology are not mutually exclusive. The equality of the prayer line may not translate into collectivist management of the mosque, but nevertheless the deeply-felt, shared relationship with the Creator also conveys rights and relationships as brothers and sisters in faith and humanity. As Shia revolutionary philosopher Ali Shariati has observed, “Generations fought and died to bring about a renaissance, to mobilize humanity to conquer science and liberty in order to be freed from what it had to suffer in the name of religion... Won over by liberalism, humanity chose democracy instead of theocracy as the key to liberty. It was caught in a hard-line capitalism in which democracy turned out to be as disappointing as theocracy. Liberalism is revealed as a regime in which liberty exists only for the titans that fight to outdo each other in plunder.” (21)

Though the discourse is certainly multi-vocal, Muslim American social justice talk often expresses discomfort with Western materialism, along with alienation from both democratic and capitalistic secular social structures that seem to erode spirituality and the traditional social order. With an at least implied spiritual dimension, this Muslim American discourse cannot be neatly contained within liberal or conservative secular ideologies.

In the UK similar questions have arisen regarding the “fiqh of charitable giving” for example in the ongoing programs organized by “Faith and Khidmah” Campaign in London. It is not surprising that there are such conversations about giving to charity more locally, as in the UK Muslims experience the highest rates of unemployment (14% men 15% female overall) and Muslim households experience the most over-crowding (32%) and the highest rates of disability as well as over-representation in the criminal justice system. At the same time, polls indicate that Muslims give charity at a higher rate than any other religious group in the UK. (22)

Muslim American Conversation: Online and on the Shelf

Whether impacted by the ongoing financial crisis beginning in 2008, or irritated by widening disparities in wealth, there are a number of public speakers that emphasize the rights of the poor. And yet there are also many Muslim Americans that do not, reflecting other perspectives and privileged social positions. For example, Nouman Ali Khan, rising star preacher and founder of the Bayyinah Institute (<http://barakah.bayyinah.com>), seldom speaks in detail about charitable giving, apparently focusing on his market, young American children of immigrants who want an imam that will understand their need to negotiate the gap between Islamic cultural identity and popular culture, to be reassured on the way to success, and to speak without an accent. Mr. Khan’s very numerous Youtube sermons often express a very American interest in self-betterment, rather than addressing the betterment of those less fortunate. While this messaging is only steps away from a gospel of prosperity, the charismatic young preacher may well evolve to speak more compassionately of the poor, as the popular Chaplain Khalid Latif has done to some extent at the Islamic Center of NYU.

Young preachers like Ali and Latif seem to understand and fully accept the utility of self marketing as well as the use of social media. A preacher responding to his market effectively can impact the market of ideas. As Baruch College Chaplain Imam Samer Al Raey recently told me, without referring specifically to any particular preacher, “Young people now just believe in celebrity and instant gratification. The speakers they make popular attract crowds to the big conventions and so these young preachers without much depth of scholarship become very powerful. “

As Timur Kuran writes in *Islam and Mammon*, “A society’s dominant interpretation of Islam can vary over time and space depending on the dynamics of public discourse. .. the old ideological equilibrium of the Islamic world has now given way to many competing visions.” (23) Diverse perspectives regarding social justice issues do not simply reflect difference in social class, political orientation, Salafi quietism or other contemporary trends. They also reflect “received wisdom”, the rich literature that interprets Quran and Hadith teachings.

And while some scholars will emphasize a formative reading of teachings—the requirement to make the world a better place- others will choose an “avertive” view of the world as a provisional and unreal place where we prepare for the reality of the Hereafter. (24) In this second reading, poverty is seen largely as a test and a school for virtue intended for the “betterment” the spiritual individual. The criterion is less material than moral. Piety is a better measure of Baraka than wealth. Quranic verses (Surah Talaq 3, Surah al Taghalan 15, Sura Anfal 28) mainly emphasize the benefits of patience and forbearance.

In pastoral counseling and healing, this approach may have great value. For example, in *An Islamic Guide to Wealth and Prosperity*, which I picked up at the bookstore of the Al Khoei

Center in Queens, New York, Ayatollah Haeri lists numerous rituals and supplications designed to obtain relief from poverty and an “increase in sustenance.” (25) Poverty is framed as a test from God, and possibly as a punishment, to be borne with dignity. Muslims are advised to eat fallen crumbs, keep a goat at home, keep good relations with parents and relatives, and maintain cleanliness—all useful strategies for at least “keeping up appearances” in the face of financial need. Besides minimizing the social impact of poverty, these practical measures points to resources most people have to develop and invest in.

Other admonishments may address the signs of depression and re-energize the person suffering under the stress and stigma of poverty. The causes of poverty as stated to include: not washing before meals; disrespect to small pieces of bread; sitting on a threshold; keeping bowls dirty; allowing cobwebs to accumulate; urinating while naked. While instead of causes we may see correspondences (signs of depression or laziness) addressing such careless and sloppy behaviors may be a form of cognitive therapy. Indeed, adopting the “habits of successful people” is a very popular approach in today’s self help literature.

And as in American self help books, the poor are counseled to seek self sufficiency and become “needless” instead of heedless. In his collection of prayers and stories, Ayatollah Haeri shares a story told by Imam Jafar Sadiq concerning a companion of the Prophet who had fallen on hard times; “His wife said, Go to the Messenger of Allah and ask for assistance. He hastened to the messenger who told him “I would give one who asks something of me but if he shows himself to be needless Allah Almighty will make him truly needless.” (26)

The man hurried back to his wife who told him to return to the Prophet and this went on three times, back and forth. Finally, he borrowed an axe and went to the mountains, collected

some firewood which he sold for five kilos of flour until he could buy the axe. Then he kept chopping until he could purchase two camels and a slave (!) and was able to become wealthy as a trader. He finally told the Prophet what happened who replied, "Whoever shows self respect and self sufficiency, God will bless him further." No further discussion about the slave, however.

The Ayatollah also tells a story about the nation of Tharthar that was so wealthy the people used bread to wipe the rear ends of their children after they defecated. They piled the dirty bread up so high it was like a mountain. But one day, of course, there came a famine and the streams that drove the mill dried up. They were forced to consume that dirty mountain. Notions of purity, impurity and abasement are linked to urge proper consumption and use of resources. (27)

In another collection of sayings about poverty Imam Qushayri includes a narration from Mu`adh al-Nasfi who said, "Allah Most High will not destroy a people, even though they continue in their [evil] practices, as long as they do not humiliate and abase the poor." He also relates "that Abu Darda' said, 'I would rather fall from the top of a castle and be shattered to bits than to sit with wealth. For I heard the Messenger of Allah say, 'Beware of sitting with the dead!' And when it was asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, who are the dead?' he said, 'The rich.'" (28)

And yet these Sufi teachings also have an inner meaning that draw together conceptual opposites to liberate the mind from calculation and judgment and to suggest a path to freedom through non attachment to possessions. In another teaching, he quotes; "If a dervish possesses poverty, he is not poor. When poverty does not belong to him, he is truly poor." One can transcend the categories of the world to find what is truly real; "Neither poverty nor wealth will be weighed Tomorrow, only patience and gratitude."

Similar self help advice spreads widely over blogs and other social media. For example since February 2013 Debt Free Muslims (A project of the Qalam Institute) has offered financial counseling in an Islamic framework, including sermons on how to use your bill paying as “an opportunity to practice gratitude.” (29) Teaching modules are organized into video skits, a new form of teaching story. The targeted audience is clearly upwardly mobile. Wealth is not seen as inherently problematic. However, for wealth to be considered truly halal, there are many requirements regarding purpose, intention, moderation and motivation.

In traditional or modern forms, pious stories and interpretations may sometimes be promoted by the unscrupulous to maintain an unequal status quo. Islamic teachings do not insist on absolute equality. However they do emphasize the rights of the poor as well as the benefits of patience. As the Prophet stated, “He who sleeps sated and his neighbor is hungry is not a believer in me.”

NYC Interfaith Discourse

As we have noted, the overwhelming diversity of Muslim American community discourse, especially in urban and online communities, produces on one hand a new, if limited, social inclusivity, along with a leveling effect on authority- and on the other hand a siloing of social justice concerns. The overabundance of social media discourse both empowers and sometimes paralyzes communication among NYC Muslims.

Many (if not all) local Muslims have begun to engage with their non-Muslim neighbors more intentionally. Theoretically putting ideals into action, diverse leaders and activists utilize political engagement and interfaith dialogue to expand the social space for re-negotiation of received norms, and for developing responses to real and perceived injustices. Civic engagement also serves as a pathway to power for certain leaders.

On the other hand, faith based activities tend to be viewed as more symbolic, “soft power” activities with fewer funds and job opportunities. However, in grassroots forms of shared social action especially, interfaith dialogue explores and enlarges perceived common ground between faith communities. In NYC popular interfaith service projects include the preparation of food for the homeless as well as faith based advocacy on such social issues as reform of immigration policies and the prison system.

Before mapping some of the pathways for interfaith dialogue and shared social justice advocacy in NYC I will first briefly describe some of the social and political context, beginning with a consideration of Catholic teachings on social action.

Largely because of his comments on wealth, poverty and income redistribution, Pope Francis has begun to awaken new interest among Catholics and non Catholics alike. Recent polls indicate that 92 percent of Catholics have a favorable view of the Pope. (30) However the libertarian and conservative factions of the community are not small. After Pope Francis tweeted “Inequality is the root of social evil” on April 28, 2014 alarmed pundits pushed back immediately, with Rush Limbaugh calling the statement “socialism.” And as writer Susan Brooks put it, columnist Ross Douthat “astonishingly used Easter and the Resurrection to warn that ‘Karl Marx is back from the dead.’” (31)

Views on poverty vary considerably according to political affiliation. In a May 2014 essay Poverty is Not a State of Mind, New York Times columnist Charles Blow refers to a recent Pew Research Center survey that found that 57% of Republicans believed that the rich worked harder than others, but only 32% admitted they might have had more advantages. Only 27% of Democrats believed that the rich worked harder and 63% believed they had more advantages contributing to their success. A similar reversal played out in political views of the poor; 51% of Republicans believed the poor were poor due to a lack of effort, and only 32% admitted circumstances beyond his or her control played a part. On the other hand, 29% of Democrats blamed a lack of effort, and 63% named “circumstances” as more a factor in impoverishment. (32)

Blow goes on to criticize Republican leaders for demonizing the poor as somehow lazy and irresponsible. He makes a point that the poorest fifth of households contributed to charity at double the percentage of the richest fifth of the population. He takes issue with political messaging that insists traditional values and social safety nets are mutually exclusive.

Not surprisingly, US politicians have learned to exploit intra-communal differences on social teaching. During the 2012 presidential elections, Conservative Catholic Congressman Paul Ryan was promoted as the “great white hope” for the Republican Party, in part to appeal to swing voters in the US Catholic community. However, despite some level of support, many Catholics – including US Conference of Catholic Bishops --objected to what they saw as a notable lack of compassion for the poor and vulnerable in Mr. Ryan’s proposed national budget. And Bishops Blaine and Hubbard wrote to Congress that “a just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons.” (33)

Congressman Ryan, who remains a leading candidate for President at this time, has claimed that his views honor human agency and independence as understood and framed by his faith tradition. However, critics have insisted that he is wrong. As Charles Clarke told the US Catholic newspaper; “My complaint with Paul Ryan isn’t that he’s a bad Catholic. I have no idea whether he’s a good Catholic or not. My problem isn’t even that he doesn’t understand Catholic social thought. He doesn’t, but lots of people go to heaven not knowing what subsidiarity really means. We don’t have to pass a test to get into heaven, I hope. The problem with Paul Ryan is that he doesn’t understand the nature of a modern capitalist economy.” (34)

Even Congressman Ryan’s close colleague, the conservative Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, recognizing that the widening wealth gap hurts everyone, has publicly supported an increase in the NY State minimum wage. (35)

Of course the Catholic hierarchy cannot escape social justice. According to Thomas Patrick Burke, even the term “social justice” was invented by a Jesuit philosopher Luigi Taparelli d’Azealigo in 1840’s Italy. Social Justice became an official teaching of the Church in 1931. (36)

Social justice organizing in the US Catholic community builds on a rich heritage, ranging from the gospels themselves to the organizing work of Dorothy Day. Even the US Conference of Catholic Bishops added to the legacy with their detailed report “Economic Justice for All” over 20 years ago. In November 2013 the bishops were reminded of this important resource when for the third year in a row they left poverty and inequality off the agenda of their annual meeting. Catholic Democrats and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good issued a scathing public statement of reproach. (37)

However, with the coming of Pope Francis one expects that there will be less inattention, or resistance, to prioritizing service to the poor.

Looking at international impact of religious social action, Jose Casanova has described how the Church played a crucial role in the global resurgence of civil society, linked to the “third wave of democratization” in Brazil, Poland, Philippines, South Korea, and South Africa. He notes that 2/3 of over thirty countries that have successfully become democracies are Catholic. In general he sees religion is an effective balance to state power. (38)

Casanova also critiques essentialist views of Islam and points out that like Islam today, Catholicism was (wrongly) viewed as the “paradigmatic anti-modern fundamentalist religion.” Casanova contrasts to this view De Toqueville’s vision of Catholic Americans as natural democrats, and extends this analysis to American Muslims, especially those navigating today’s diverse society; adding: “Few would deny that pluralization and fragmentation of religious authority amounts to a participatory revolution and a democratization of the religious sphere.”

Such fragmentation is amplified by the internet, of course, and a thousand flowers bloom in Muslim civil society, from the masjid and the Muslim lawyers to the “Mipsters” and the “Muppies.”

Casanova does not indicate if Catholic social justice ideals are better realized in more democratic societies. However the increase in inclusive, participatory modes of communication does seem to support the development of leaderless movements as Occupy Wall Street, with its many overlapping conversations around social justice concerns.

New York’s Catholic groups include a score of monasteries serving the poor as well as chapters of international groups specializing in poverty issues, such as the Fourth World

Movement and Sant Egidio with its 50,000 members. While Catholic Relief works overseas, Charities Charities operates numerous programs throughout New York City and State. On a smaller scale there are also Catholic Workers working on a range of community issues. In New York City, Catholic organizing speaks a hundred languages. (39)

Moreover, Catholics have contributed to more ecumenical social justice movements. For example, there are NYC affiliates of the PICO community organizing network founded in 1972 by John Baumann, a Jesuit priest, linked to a congregation-based organizing model development by Saul Alinsky. Such partnerships promote and support a social gospel approach but also very local understandings and relationships. Many organizers have made regular efforts to reach out to Muslim community organizers. Response can be limited, mainly due to lack of resources.

As we will see, many of these groups do share resources across faith boundaries, and develop an appreciation of shared values of service. The interfaith space this creates is in some ways analogous to the creative leaderless space of the Occupy movement. Nonprofits may be limited by the requirements of their donors and the necessity to raise funds, and administrators incrementally incorporated into the managerial class. But faith based activists and religious leaders, volunteers and colleagues move in an unusually inclusive moral space largely defined by its participants.

Some churches and synagogues support congregational committees to organize educational panels and soup kitchens, while others pay staff to focus on specific social service and social justice concerns. Few mosques maintain standing committees on peace and social justice issues, but some regularly respond in an ad hoc fashion to specific issues, and many

interact with other faith communities, especially the Abrahamic, answering the call to create a more compassionate and just society.

Though New York City is home to many interfaith dialogues and shared multifaith ventures, great and small, the largest organization is Interfaith Center of New York (ICNY). Since 1998 ICNY has hosted bi-annual retreats of so far over 600 diverse local religious and community leaders from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Native American, Jain, and Afro-Caribbean religious communities. The retreats are named after Rabbi Marshall Meyer, a religious leader actively engaged in social justice projects and building partnerships with other faith communities. (40)

At least three of the Marshall Meyer retreats have concerned wealth and poverty. The most recent was the 23rd Marshall T Meyer Retreat for Social Justice: Building Economic Resilience in Faith Communities. In the first roundtable entitled, “Faith Based Perspectives on Wealth, Poverty, and Consumerism,” Reverend. Dillon Burgin, of Churches United to Serve and Heal joined Professor Sachi Dastidar of the Probini Foundation, Arvind Kaur, of United Sikhs; Ilene Marcus, of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty; Imam Necmettin Kizilkaya, of the Iqra Mosque and Rev. Compassion Chris Raines, of the NY Buddhist Council.

A second discussion on Faith Based Alternatives to Debt and High Interest Lending included Rev. David Haberer, speaking of a faith-based campaign to cap credit interest rates at 10 percent; Shana Novick of the Hebrew Free Loan Society; and Shaykh Taha Abdul Bassar of the Straightway Ethical Sharia Advisory. Many other groups participated, from nonprofit programs such as SEEDCO, the Loan Rangers, Federation of Faith Based Credit Unions; as well as representatives from local government. (41)

Interfaith conferences anchor a developing interfaith network of multifaith community organizers and social justice and rights defenders. Numerous other coalitions (which I have worked with directly) have addressed prisoner rights, homelessness and living wage advocacy, labor rights and a variety of other humanitarian concerns. For example, Rabbi Michael Feinberg, Director of the Religion Labor Coalition told me that there are more groups focusing on economic justice than ever before’ “It’s a good thing, but complicated, since groups can be at cross purposes competing for resources, funds and clergy involvement. Many groups are driven by and dependent on one charismatic leader. Sometimes the faith aspect is only implicit, sometimes more explicit. It is all too easy to cherry-pick scripture for quotes that fit our priorities, whatever they may be.”

Though he sees much of the organizing as being led by liberal Christian groups, Rabbi Feinberg’s group works on “all sorts” of rights issues, and this flexibility has helped to build solid working relations across a number of communities. Another project he and other organizers mention is the Micah Roundtable, a “coalition of coalitions” bringing together a range of faith based activists to work on living wage campaigns under the facilitation of Rev Peter Heltzel. Kairos/Union Theological Seminary Poverty Initiative is another ongoing interfaith project that supports strong social justice work. (42)

Competing with systemic inequalities, a series of Islamophobic political and media attacks have kept some Muslim New Yorkers in reactive mode over the last five years. In 2009 some politicians and media virulently attacked a community leader who had founded a public school that taught Arabic language and culture. The next year two proposed mosques were protested and denounced. In 2011 the proposal to build “Park51” a mosque and cultural complex downtown, attracted nationwide controversy. And during 2012-3 the Muslim leadership became

factionalized over controversial NYPD surveillance policies. (43) In each case a growing number of allies spoke up to support across faith boundaries.

Muslim and some ethnic leaders also deepened alliances with communities of color and embraced the demands of racial justice. Muslim leaders shared concerns and interests with those criticizing Stop and Frisk, a police tactic that impacted minorities disproportionately. This was one of the issues that galvanized voters and led to a significant change in New York City's governance with the late 2013 election of progressive mayoral candidate Bill deBlasio. For the first time, Muslim New Yorkers may be positioned to impact policy change and to have more influence in the new administration. However up till now the main demands beyond police reform have been for Muslim holidays to be recognized in the public schools.

Occupy Faith, New Dimensions in Organizing

Like other leaders, Rabbi Michael credits Occupy Wall Street for making income inequality more visible and more compelling in public discourse. While Occupy movement has been criticized for having no direct political game plan, (44) it is likely that its energizing social justice discourse was a factor in the changing political dynamics in New York City and the election of the mayor. Its many links to labor and religious communities helped sustain the conversation long after the police bulldozed its encampments. (for New York Quaker reflections on this, see 45)

As Michael Woods observes, "Even though Occupy uses symbols, songs, rituals, and narratives as profoundly and deftly as a political party or religious community, it is neither of these. Occupy does not have an agenda or a plan to save the world, and it is not trying to create one. It is simply issuing a call to democracy, and the movement is imaginative enough to realize

that until private money stops flowing unchecked into politics, it is useless to try to issue this call directly to the politicians themselves.” (46)

Indeed, faith based organizers played an active role during the local Occupy movement. Not only was there a section of the encampment dedicated to drumming and inclusive spiritual activities, but faith groups staged a series of solidarity gestures including: Occupy Sukkot, Occupy Yom Kippur, and Occupy Roshasha. There were Occupy Catholics and there were Occupy Friday prayers led by Imam Aiyub Baki of the Majlis Ash Shura and attended by at least 200 diverse Muslims. (47)

Muslim Chaplain Khalid Latif officiated at a wedding at Occupy Wall Street. As he reflected afterwards, “We were sitting in a spiritual corner of sorts, used for worship and meditation by people of all backgrounds. I sat in between the couple and started my sermon. As I spoke, I looked at each of the faces sitting before me and saw how remarkably different one was from the next... Emery and Micha finding each other made sense, the venue of their wedding ceremony made sense, and a final critical component to their wedding also made sense: the guest list... At a time when popular culture has made weddings more about centerpieces, dresses, and who made your wedding cake, it was nice to be a part of a wedding that focused on kinship. I've officiated at a lot of weddings over the last few years, and each one is special in its own way. What made this one special was how right it felt from all angles. Values such as love, justice, compassion, and mercy are meant to transcend socially constructed differences and a wedding at Wall Street under occupation definitely combined all of these. It just made sense....” (48)

For many people of faith, the experience of the inclusive and personally intimate Occupy “common” seemed in some way analogous to a “congregation” but without hierarchy. As Occupy historian Nathan Schneider has reflected, “My formal training was as a scholar of

religion, and I couldn't help but seeing Occupy as a new religious movement in formation. It struck me, for instance, that I never really understood the experience described in the Book of Acts of the early Christian church "holding all things in common" until Liberty Square." (49)

But Liberty was contested space, and its days were numbered. While Muslim American Jason Ahmadi was the "most frequently arrested" Occupy activist, retired Episcopal Bishop George Packard was also arrested for occupying Trinity Church's empty lot on 6th Avenue and Canal Street after Zuccotti Park encampment was closed by police. Trinity Church itself, as a famously wealthy landowner located directly across from Wall Street itself, embodied the complicated and perhaps ambivalent response of Establishment religious organizations. While it would not provide space for protesters, Charlotte's Place--a ministry of Trinity Wall Street--provided refuge and internet access to occupiers. Though Trinity maintained its regular musical programs during the Occupy movement, a number of Episcopal ministers from around the city did participate in protests. (50)

Instead of Trinity, Judson Memorial Church stepped in to provide shelter and "sanctuary" for occupy protesters once they were displaced by the police, providing them with warm places to sleep for several weeks until they had decided on their next steps. Along with this service, Judson's religious leaders also helped organize "Occupy Faith" marches with a media-friendly "Golden Calf" sculpture to rival Wall' Street Bull and a series of meetings between faith based activists leading to participation in a national campaign called Moral Mondays.

As Judson Memorial's Minister Donna Schaper observed in her essay "Morality Meet Cuomo's Budget" (51) "We need not vilify the rich to aid the poor. No one needs any more moral vilification. Instead the newly formed coalition of "Moral Mondays in New York will address the state budget hearings ...and say that the budget is sinful. Sin is missing the mark of

our true humanity. Sin is being distant from God and creation's intention.... The bible is a moral document about the economy. Blessed are the poor. How does the rich man stay rich? He gives away what is in his barns. If you have a loaf or a fish, share it and it multiplies to feed thousands. Morality is often confused as a finger wagging self-righteousness. Morality instead is a dream, a hope, a deep sense of how things are supposed to be. “

As she seeks to apply her faith to action, Rev Schaper's remarks regarding the New York State Budget are worth quoting; “Governor Cuomo is a Christian. He has read his bible and eaten the bread of the mass, which is a sign that all will be fed and deserve to be fed. Governor Cuomo's budget is pre-Christian. It is not anti-religious so much as pro-rich in an anti-religious way. It gives way too much to those who already have – in estate taxes and bank fees – and way too little to those already burdened. St. Paul argued that the sins of omission were as serious as the sins of commission.

However, Rev Donna Schaper is also working to define what it means to be a faith leader working on social justice issues. As she writes in another sermon, “What's Next: A Rolling Jubilee”: “We need the community's energy to assist parishes so that parishes may assist communities. We need the outer to touch the inner... I came to this realization slowly, with some resistance. I often felt “used” by the rent-a-collar approach of many community and labor organizations. I often felt I had something different to give than what they wanted. They wanted “my” people in their picket lines. They wanted numbers. I increasingly had decreasing numbers, especially of dedicated people, most of whom knew their own time famine, while working three jobs, raising children, and trying to keep their mortgage payments above water. I realized that to be of use I had to get the numbers of people up in “my” pews before I got them “up” in their

picket lines. Plus, what I really had to give was not numbers but spiritual support. Organizers seemed to feel so burnt out, so despairing, so uselessly utilitarian.

To explain this shift in direction, let me illustrate with a project that is coming out of Occupy Faith. We are developing a transitional project, one that goes internal and external dynamically, rather than going from one false polarity (inner to outer) to another (outer to inner). We are calling it a “Rolling Jubilee.”

A jubilee is a biblical practice of cancellation of debt on behalf of just prosperity for all, including the soil. It is rest from making money and gaining power—on behalf of human community.... Did you know that debt cancellation is the biblical norm, not exception? Does your faith feel fraudulent as you live in a political economy that enjoys debt and its abuse? Check out Deuteronomy 15, or 22; and Exodus 20, 21, or 23. Find out what Muslims and other interfaith partners think about debt.... You will discover why you feel so much like a stranger in a strange land. From that alienation you will connect to others, many of whom feel similarly alienated. In your connection, power will emerge.” (51)

Muslim Americans are also reflecting on the many lessons and questions of Occupy. Is it possible to assess the ongoing impact of the Occupy Movement, among New York City Muslims? Impacted by the experience of Occupy Wall Street, local leaders like Khalid Latif have begun to address social justice concerns with renewed attention, for example continuing the trend with three sermons during Ramadan 2013. (52)

In addition, nationally known preachers like Zaid Shakir also took up the theme in his sermons, even calling for a new Muslim anti-poverty movement. Like many other African

American leaders he is all too aware of the financial impact on families of injustice and inequalities. (53)

Post Occupy Muslim Discourse

Though some American Muslim leaders were less comfortable with Occupy's carnival like atmosphere, or with civil disobedience, most Muslim leaders made the connection between Occupy and the Arab Spring, and felt a feeling of co-ownership. And a public discourse on poverty was revived in the Muslim community, with sermons collected by The American Muslim website. (54)

Moreover, on the first anniversary of Occupy, diverse and well-known US Muslim leaders came together in a conference called United Against Poverty, with Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, co-founder of Zaytuna College; Chris Hedges, acclaimed journalist and author; Imam Mohammed Magid, President of Islamic Society of North America (ISNA); Yasmin Mogahed, American Muslim writer and speaker; Imam Zaid Shakir, co-founder of Zaytuna College; Dr. Yasir Qadhi, leading American Muslim writer and scholar; Dr. Fatimah Jackson, renowned scholar and researcher; and Imam Suhaib Webb popular American Muslim scholar from Boston, and many others. Discussions included" proper ways to respond to poverty; Muslim women's shelters in America; the physical versus spiritual definitions of poverty; and the wisdom behind alms giving, a major pillar of Islam. One session was entitled, "We are the 1%' evaluated the Occupy Movement slogan in light of global realities." (55)

Similar conferences have been organized by such groups as the ICNA Council for Social Justice. (56) Such conferences do help define the way a community sees its collective purpose. However, one might still ask: In the end, is religious response all talk and no action? Are these

conversations about economic justice at least being absorbed into other contexts, or to put it another way, is the meme of the 99% still viral?

Conversations about poverty are a regular feature in annual conventions organized by Islamic Circle of North America, attracting over 10,000 attendees. Many inspirational talks are given on a very wide range of topics, helping to define a moral space of action that is not typically political. For example on May 24, 2014 at a “main session” panel discussion entitled, “The Other America: Poverty and Inequality”, Maghrib Institute’s Imam Omar Suleiman and Dr. Altaf Husain each weighed in on the “tests” of wealth and poverty. Each observed that charitable giving should be guided by strategic considerations and with a thoughtful plan to empower the needy. Dr Husain was especially forceful in denouncing current inequalities and he made some modest practical suggestions to involve the communities in soup kitchens and other activities. However both speakers were careful to frame the issue in explicitly spiritual terms and to make the point that the struggle for social justice requires prayer and faith to maintain mental health in the face of frustrations and resistance.

As much as in the panels, however, the popular ICNA Bazaar offered numerous signs of concern for the poor, with hundreds of increasingly well marketed displays for charitable projects along with Islamic books, Islamic finance, Islamic and traditional clothing, perfumes, health products and natural honey. Staffed by young articulate Muslim American volunteers, charitable projects offered the experience of fellowship and “community” as a marketing tool. Both ICNA and Islamic Relief created living room spaces with food and videos to draw attendees into conversation and deeper commitment to their project. Others offered “selfies” next to their logos and tweeted their messages throughout the conferences or connected to the ICNA

Conference APP. With an inclusive energetic embrace, reflecting tech savvy and strong idealism, the spaces at ICNA conventions can even resemble “Occupy’s Liberty Square.

In such settings the discourse on local and especially global poverty can also be seen quite clearly as a marketplace of ideas regarding spirituality and social justice, but for the most part these events cannot function as planning meetings that result in policies. There is too much noise. Specific, practical campaigns are not promoted—and often need is too local. Local conferences may be required to furnish a third space of discourse, but in New York City conferences tend to be smaller—less than 500 attendees—and to attract specific ethnic constituents or fans of specific speakers. The promotion of an “Islamic way of life” can also overshadow the practical impact of social programs. Such programs also require funding.

New York City of course plays host to many international conferences. In May 2014 alone these have ranged from the hundreds of panels at the “Left Forum” – another popular marketplace of ideas, which some Muslims participate in—to a more focused conversation on poverty at the “World Zakat Conference” organized on May 29, 2014 by the Nusantara Foundation and the World Zakat Forum, and attended by delegates from 20 countries. This was an opportunity to explore how Muslims are addressing the challenges of poverty and income inequality worldwide. Some speakers represented large zakat councils with sophisticated structures to support accountability, as in Indonesia and Bosnia. Discussions concerned whether zakat funds could pay for program expenses (arguably a *fi sabilillah* category) and how the “Asnaf” categories of fundable needs can be interpreted. But (a-typically, as a South African delegate stated) these conversations were not disconnected from the issues of poverty and underdevelopment and inequality. (57)

There was general agreement that Islamic tradition directed that “Muzakki” donors of zakat should empower “Mustahiq” recipients to build their assets to the extent that they too become donors. As one speaker from Association for Middle Eastern Public Policy and Administration (AMEPPA), Professor Jennifer Bremer stated, “Zakat was intended to be redistributive” rather than a simple charity for “consumption.” Defining poverty as “lack of control over productive assets” Professor Bremer described an example of how Egyptian villagers in Tahafna al-Ashraf eliminated poverty completely in their area through the collective “zakat of the poor” a combination of microfinance and zakat linked to community-based civil society groups. (58)

Still other speakers discussed the need to counter the widespread perception that zakat is only meant to help Muslims, and erroneous understanding that Imam Omar Suleiman had also discussed at the ICNA conference the week before. According to this humanitarian consensus, Muslims are meant to assist both the “Ummah of the Muslims” and the “Ummah of Humanity.” There was also agreement on the importance of interfaith partnerships.

While there was agreement on such matters, there was some creative tension arising between local and international perspectives, however. One attendee, the Amir of the Majlis Ashura of Metro New York Imam Talib Abdur Rashid, pointed out that in the USA African Americans grow up with diversity and interfaith relations which often include and extend to family relations. However he made the point that poverty in New York may not be fully visible to program participants and that poverty takes many forms. He hoped for funding for a new Islamic center, stating that despite the emergence of a larger civil society and a range of endowments, social services, and advocacy that African Americans still center their spiritual life around the institution of the mosque, and that Islamic giving would continue to flow from there.

According to the its definition in Islam, Zakat giving to the poor and needy is a form of purification and of worship. It is not a tax. And yet its perception as a form of tax may sometimes prevent its full acceptance. Related to this, the common misperceptions that Islamic giving should be aimed at helping Muslims, or best delivered directly and locally, or most useful in addressing emergencies, or not appropriate for advocacy or social justice campaigns, have sometimes limited disbursements and served to channel a significant percentage of monies into religious education and “Dawa” activities instead. I asked Imam Talib if the Majlis Council had issued any clarification about what can be supported by zakat monies and he said they had not, up till now. And while such guides exist in the USA, at least in partial form, there is no common agreement on what is permitted. Zakat education is needed along with zakat activism.

Besides the Islamic giving economy, and the explicitly Islamic discourse on poverty and alleviating poverty, there is also increasing civic engagement on related social issues. In this field Muslim leadership has just begun to gain momentum, without a clear focus on wealth and poverty, recovering from a long period when the man liaisons to government were business leaders. While money still opens the doors to power (and recent Supreme Court decisions suggest this trend will continue and perhaps become even more problematic) the collective power of organized community leaders and activists has made an impact on a number of fronts both nationally and in New York City. As they build closer relations to political power, the major challenge for Muslim leaders may be whether they continue to define their interests and identity in “ethical” terms rather than “Ethnic” identity political terms. Politicians often appeal to and exploit this latter category, and with the main Muslim media being “ethnic media” there is a continued risk that religious values and cultural interests will be confused.

This form of ethnic localism is a challenge to the slowly evolving rapprochement of immigrant and “indigenous” African American community leaders. Along with specific social services the conversation can develop into exclusive interest in “Arab poverty” and “South Asian poverty” and “African American poverty.” And yet at the same time that class and ethnic groups maintain their insularity, many immigrants have begun to define themselves as people of color, whether others see them in this way or not, identifying to some extent with the downtrodden due to a common experience of Islamophobia. This self perception tends to screen out actual disparities in class and access to education. Even so, this imagined community may be conducive to some basic level of solidarity and future collective action. Such trends are worth following.

Concluding An Ongoing Exploration

Certainly the gap between the haves and the have-nots will continue to be a tremendously urgent topic around the world. The Gezi Park protests in Taksim Square a year ago in May 2013 were rooted in local concerns about gentrification and authoritarian government, but shared many characteristics with the social justice movement around the world. (59) However local social and political leaders and the local media influence each other’s “lessons learned.” In Turkey and Egypt protesters’ demands for justice have been rejected as “terroristic” by both Islamist and Anti-Islamist political parties. Religion was largely politicized. However in New York, while police eventually shut down the movement, the complex social dynamic of ongoing, passionate, non-partisan political discourse within the Occupy Movement allowed religious involvement to be less easily defined and dismissed, even if the political right mocked the movement itself. The religious voice has built a conversation crossing social boundaries and expanding questions into universal and deeper solidarity.

Even within Muslim discourse itself, the conversation has tended to be more and more inclusive, even while regimes seek to limit its reach. Even political Islam is no longer narrowly defined or owned by any one interest group. As Hamid Dabashi has suggested, in context of the initial experience of the Arab Spring, “Instead of revolutionary negation partaking in Islamic Absolutism, Islamic metaphysics partakes in the metaphysical uncertainty of its worldliness and thus alterity and difference, which leads any remaining theological proclivity towards a liberating theodicy.” (60) He suggests that “post ideological” discourse is more likely to escape systematization and hence co-optation.

In a May 2014 conference “Creative Alternatives to Capitalism” Maliha Safri and Thomas Purcell suggested that engagement with certain state apparatuses may lead to new forms of partnership without co-optation. (61) Some attendees (along with Bulent Kucuk in his May 23 2014 article *The Possibility of Alternative Politics in Turkey*) believe that a form of “democratic autonomy” may be achieved at local levels, rather than through efforts to co-opt the state.(62)

However, it is by no means certain that the governments of, Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey, not to mention Syria, Russia and the Ukraine, will develop more inclusive, less repressive forms of governance in the near future. Nor is the distraction of “bread and circuses” likely to lose favor anywhere. The culture of the market surrounds us all. Around the world the pervasive power of special interest lobbying and public relations marketing is likely to support unequal power relations for the near future. As we all become constant consumers of social media memes, community leadership and activism become ever more embedded in a culture of competition and profit. The ties between knowledge production and power bind us ever closer and closer in a technocratic dream of “social needs strategically detected, filtered, and partially

satisfied in a top-down manner that turns the citizen into a client whose level of satisfaction is the benchmark criteria, rather than democratic participation and representation.” (63)

Instead of seeing the poor as “consumer” or as “other,” some contemporary religious and spiritual activists struggle to create an “us.” Such religious discourse may bring new dimension to social justice work and deeper solidarity with the poor. This may be especially true in New York where the local dynamic in New York City is shaped by subcultures of interfaith cooperation and common values.

Despite cross-cultural and class tensions, and varied responses to the global economic order, there is an emerging consensus that Islam is not incompatible with democracy or with living in a pluralistic society. This allows a wide range of creative responses to arise. Islamic entrepreneurs may create provocative political blogs critiquing power (like “moneyjihad.com”) and organize Ramadan flash mobs to feed the poor, (64) but leaders have barely begun to articulate specific, progressive political platforms including policy recommendations on rent regulation, minimum wages, and fast food worker rights.

Faith based social action enlarges our understanding of our own poverties. As Tariq Ramadan has observed, higher “living standards are not enough; there are higher requirements, above all the imperative of exploring and reviving the full potential of language, culture, art and religion... In the final analysis, the imperative is one of intellectual resistance—intellectual jihad, in the deepest sense—that lends the notions of liberation and identity a qualitatively different substance and a new density of meaning. The man-made, portable prisons constructed by prohibition, guilt, infantilization and disempowerment must be destroyed...” (65)

Islamic traditions teach that we are all one family. Haunted by freedom struggles elsewhere, Muslim New Yorkers listen for echoes of liberation within their own community. Zakat, worship, faith and ethics may help guide humanity through the law of the jungle. But for Muslims to arrive at freedom, the complex ongoing discourse on poverty and social welfare requires a deeper listening. We must listen to each other, and ourselves, or die.

FOOTNOTES FOR
POV ON POVERTY:
The Expanding Dimensions of Muslim and Interfaith Discourse in NYC

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