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(Photo by Charles Lee, documenting community engagement at a meeting hosted by the [Faith Community Working Group](#), part of the Faith Community Advisory Council in Montgomery County, Maryland, in the wake of the Boston Marathon Bombing.)

In 2008, I was a graduate student at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. I was serving as an editor for the seminary paper and was co-chair of the student senate. I got an email from a rabbinical student in Jerusalem with one very interesting question: “What is going on with interfaith at your school?”

Joshua Stanton had an idea for an inter-seminary, interfaith magazine. He was on fire for interfaith, and was looking for partners and collaborators.

After teaching in religiously diverse classrooms in St. Louis, and learning with Professors Paul Knitter and Chung Hyun Kyung at Union, I had some ideas about interfaith engagement. We began corresponding, and Skyping. We began to imagine something akin to a Law Review, run by graduate students, and documenting and amplifying work in the emerging field of interfaith and inter-religious studies.

After raising some initial funding, including an anonymous gift of \$10,000 from a donor in Washington, D.C., we built a website and reached out to potential staff and board members. I am still humbled and overwhelmed when I recall the conversations we had with those who wanted to be part of this project. Many of those initial board members are still—eight years later—close advisers, mentors, and still active reviewers for the JIRS. A few years later, we developed *State of Formation* to become a sister publication, a place for practitioners and emerging religious and ethical leaders as counterpoint to the academic work of the JIRS.

Over the years, we’ve been blessed—to use my own personal, Christian language—with staff members who come from a variety of academic, spiritual, and ethical backgrounds. Our staff members’ expertise, passions, and willingness to collaborate have led us to successfully publish sixteen issues, including work from writers all over the world. Our writers often express their gratitude at the level of thoughtfulness and engagement we provide throughout the publishing process—we have received offers of gifts and even wedding invitations from writers we’ve never met, after working with them and then sharing their work, widely. This reaffirms for me one of my deeply held beliefs: writing and dialogue are human endeavors. We are made to be in relationship with one another, and when we are able to collaborate and understand, we can share in the transformative nature of education.

Josh is now Rabbi Stanton, and I now have my PhD in inter-religious education—we are no longer two graduate students with a shared dream of what this publication might become. This is my last issue as editor-in-chief, and I look forward to serving as a board member and reader of this publication. I am moved with gratitude and great joy to know that after all of these years, and all of the relationships, communication, writing, editing, collaborating, and dreaming, both the Journal and *State of Formation* are thriving, lively entities that will continue to broaden, document, and amplify the work of those of us in these fields. This work has changed my life, and for that I am grateful.

In this issue, we are pleased to bring the work of a guest editor and collaborator, Whitney Barth, from the Pluralism Project.

Founded and directed by Dr. Diana Eck, the Pluralism Project at Harvard University is a research and educational project that aims to study America's increasingly diverse religious landscape and its implications for public life. For nearly 25 years, Pluralism Project researchers have been documenting the changing contours of cities and towns—the establishment of new mosques and temples, the growth of interfaith efforts, and the development of complex controversies—drawn anew by immigration trends of the last several decades.

Now, a brief outline of this issue's contents will orient you and fellow readers for what to expect here. Ellie Pierce opens with a piece demonstrating the effectiveness of the case method in the Pluralism Project specifically, stating the case method forces us to see the problems and differences of a community rather than just focusing on establishing sameness and mutuality. Mark M. McCormack, Hasina A. Mohyuddin, and Paul R. Docecki illustrate with case studies how influential the support of faith communities can be on interfaith participants in their interfaith endeavors. Aziza Hasan enlightens us on *NewGround's* methods of relationship building between Muslim and Jewish conversation partners to further constructive relationships and informative dialogue. Whitney Barth explores how we might understand place and place-making in the context of interfaith work in a pluralistic world on a global and local level. Brendan W. Randall explains the importance of the norm of religious pluralism in creating civility among our religiously diverse society. Lucia Hulsether illuminates current conversations on the role of pluralism in the world today and how effective pluralism does not demolish acute differences within a community, but instead emphasizes the common ground of the community. Finally, Diana L. Eck gives us some history behind the Pluralism Project's endeavors and responds to the other pieces in this issue. Beyond the articles, we present an interview with the Hebrew College and Andover Newton Theological School presidents regarding their new MA program that provides interreligious training.

Looking forward to the future, alongside all of you; in dialogue and peace,
Stephanie Varnon-Hughes

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“What is at Stake?” Exploring the Problems of Pluralism through the Case Method

By Ellie Pierce

International documents of interreligious dialogue, such as “A Common Word Between Us and You,” regularly emphasize the *promise* of pluralism, with shared values and coming together “on the common essentials of our two religions.” Yet pluralism, in practice, is far less formal and theological. As the Irish Interfaith group COISTINE has observed:

Muslims and Christians live on the same streets; use the same shops, buses and schools. Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Dialogue, therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible.¹

Those tensions, like religious diversity itself, are a fact: in this diverse and dynamic context, do we have the tools to engage with each other creatively and constructively? This is one of the questions that drives our work at the Pluralism Project, and led us to experiment with the case method. Our decision-based cases utilize the *problems* that arise in our multireligious society as our primary texts.

Fundamentally, a case is: “A scenario delineating a problem that requires an interactive response by the learner.” (Heitzmann, 2008, p. 523). At Harvard University, where we are based, it is widely used in professional schools: Harvard Law School taught with cases since 1870, shifting away from a lecture-based approach; the Business School now uses cases in 80% of their classes, and cases are regularly integrated into the curriculum at Harvard’s schools of Medicine, Education, and Government. (Garvin 2003) Yet the case method is rarely used in religious studies and theological education, whether at Harvard or elsewhere.

There is extensive educational research to support the use of the method, as our colleague Brendan Randall argues in his forthcoming dissertation. Cases facilitate active learning (Kunselman & Johnson, 2004) and collaborative learning (Olorunnisola, Ramasubramanian, Russill, & Dumas, 2003); they are effective in teaching critical thinking (Heitzmann, 2003, Kunselman & Johnson, 2004) and decision-making (Johnson, Bagdasarov, et al. 2012); they facilitate multiple perspective taking (McDade, 1995) and emotional and rational engagement (Kleinfeld, 1998).

As an active form of learning, the case method is also consonant with Diana Eck’s definition of pluralism:

¹ <http://www.coistine.ie/what-is-interreligious-dialogue>

Pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity*.
 Pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*

Pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*.
 Pluralism is *based on dialogue*.²

The case method asks us to energetically engage with diverse points of view and seek greater understanding; through discussion, we are able not only to encounter the commitments of others, but to examine and refine our own points of view. Dialogical to its core, it requires us to listen carefully to another perspective – whether reading the text, considering the protagonist’s viewpoint, or participating in a case discussion. It is grounded in the real world, and understands conflict as generative. Our newest case, “A Call to Prayer,” explores one community divided over the broadcast of the call to prayer.

As Dr. Karen Majewski (My-ev-ski) drove up to the small brick city hall building in Hamtramck, Michigan on April 13, 2004, she noticed a number of news trucks parked out front. “ABC, NBC, Fox News, that’s not a good omen, you know.”³ Just a few months prior, Majewski became president of the city council: she still considered herself a reluctant newcomer to politics. At the sight of the news trucks, Majewski recalled: “You want to keep driving and head over the Ambassador Bridge (to Canada).” Yet she knew instantly why the press had gathered in her tiny city: the broadcast of the call to prayer.

When Majewski moved to Michigan for graduate school, she wanted to find an ethnic urban neighborhood like her hometown of Chicago: a front-porch community where she would hear different languages spoken on the street. For a scholar specializing in immigration and ethnicity, Hamtramck was “the only perfect place.” Her years in academia are often reflected in her speech, self-possessed demeanor, and her personal style: she wears her long hair in a stylish bun and carefully selects vintage clothing and subtle touches of ethnic jewelry. Just before Majewski was drafted to run for city council, she completed her Ph.D. and published a book on Polish-American identity. She had no political aspirations beyond her work on the city’s historical commission, yet she welcomed being part of a shift away from “the Polish old guard” to a progressive, new urbanism agenda.

Hamtramck is just over 2.1 square miles, and home to nearly 25,000 people: today, it is the most densely populated and the most internationally diverse city in the state. “It really is an old school urban neighborhood ... with houses on 30 foot lots, right next to each other. We live on top of each other.” Hamtramck shares a zip code, and most of its border, with Detroit. Both cities grew and thrived along with the auto industry; today, both are in emergency management with deep financial woes. Majewski described Hamtramck as “gritty and hardscrabble,” but added that the economic challenges of the city are longstanding: “We’re down but we’re not out. That could be our slogan,” she laughs.

Today, the city’s official slogan is: “A Touch of the World in America.” Hamtramck saw earlier waves of German, French, and Ukrainian immigrants, and a well-established African American population, before the Poles began settling in Hamtramck. For more than five decades, the city has been predominantly Polish, from its churches and bakeries to its festivals: every Mayor has been Polish. Newer waves of

² Adapted from http://www.pluralism.org/pluralism/what_is_pluralism

³ All quotes from Karen Majewski: Karen Majewski, interview by Ellie Pierce, Hamtramck, Michigan, August 11, 2014.

immigrants came from Yemen, Bosnia, and Bangladesh in recent years. By 2004, nearly one third of Hamtramck's population was estimated to be Muslim⁴, with three mosques in the city's 2.1 square miles.

Majewski heard the call to prayer regularly back when she lived just a few blocks over the Hamtramck line in Detroit. "It seemed like a nice thing. I liked hearing the call.... Really, I marvel at my naïveté now." When the city council received the request to broadcast the call to prayer from Al-Islah Islamic Center, a predominantly Bangladeshi mosque, Majewski thought it would be a "simple administrative process" to amend the existing noise ordinance. "I think, to most of us, it was already allowed by the constitution, and the question was 'how do we do this in a way that works for the community?'"

Yet public hearings drew increasing numbers of residents, rising emotions, and the presence of the media. Some expressed concerns about unwanted noise and proselytizing; supporters compared the call to the sounding of church bells. She explained, "You know it's one thing for NBC to come in, and they have a story they want to tell, and they want drama and divisiveness, and conflict." But for people living in a small city, Majewski understood that the broadcast of the call to prayer was more complex than any sound bite.

This is your street, and your house, and your window that's open that's hearing this. And your neighbors, the old Polish lady that you grew up with died and her kids sold the house to a woman in a burqa, you know. I have a lot of sympathy for the human drama, the individual drama, of dealing with those kinds of changes and issues. For the people who opposed the call, I had a lot of sympathy: individually, psychically, dealing with their world changing around them. That's a profoundly sympathetic position.

She added:

And the immigrants coming in who want the community they live in to reflect themselves, and feel at home in that community: they are making their home literally in front of us, building a home and building a community and building an identity... You come to a place where you don't know the language, the terrain is different, the houses are different ... every little aspect of your life is changed. That is such a brave thing to do, and such a hopeful thing to do.

What she thought would be a "practical matter" had suddenly become national news. On that April night which marked the first public hearing on the noise ordinance, Majewski focused on staying calm and giving everyone a chance to speak. She recalled: "I felt profoundly challenged and stressed to do this right. Really, to do it in a way that brought honor to who we are as a city." She steeled herself for what would come next.

What is at stake for Karen Majewski, and for the city of Hamtramck? If you were in her position, what would you do next? What opening comments would you make at the public hearing? Given the media interest in this issue, can you draft a press release that will help to avoid reducing the issue to a sound bite? What does she need to know about the call to prayer? How can she get this information? What is the content and meaning of the *adhan*? What strategies would you suggest for bridging the divide between those who oppose the

⁴ Tim Jones, "Islamic Prayer Call Stirs Tension," Chicago Tribune, April 21, 2004, accessed October 2014, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2004-04-21/news/0404210290_1_immigrant-muslims-halal-meat-arabic.

call and those who support it? She appears to be supportive of the call to prayer being publically sounded: do you agree? Why or why not? Is there anything at risk by changing the noise ordinance to permit the call?

These are just a sampling of the many questions that grow out of the newest Pluralism Project case study, “A Call to Prayer.” Like all of our case studies, it is focused on a real-life dilemma, or a core problem. This excerpt also serves as a short version of the case, which can be used in community teaching contexts with limited preparation and discussion time. The longer “A” case,⁵ designed for colleges and classrooms, begins with the perspective of Karen Majewski, and then expands to describe the initial request to broadcast the prayer by Abdul Motlib, the contentious public hearings, the perspective of Robert Zwolak, who opposed the broadcast as “a matter of noise,” and the views of Rev. Sharon Buttry, who supported the call to prayer as an interfaith effort.

“A Call to Prayer” concludes as the matter goes to a public vote in Hamtramck, prompted by a petition from local residents. Before the “B” case reveals the results of the vote and the ramifications of the decision for the city of Hamtramck, there is ample space for discussion and analysis: What is at stake not just for Dr. Majewski, but also for Mr. Motlib, Mr. Zwolak, and Rev. Buttry? Discussion participants might be invited to role play one of the perspectives; or, they might be asked to write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper expressing their own view. Whether discussion participants support or oppose the call to prayer, they are asked to support their position: there is not one correct answer.

Participants might also be asked to read the excellent chapter on Hamtramck from Isaac Weiner’s book, *Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Space, and American Pluralism*, providing analysis of the issue that is, by design, not included in the case study. The case narrative poses a problem but does not offer analysis, or a solution. Through case discussion, participants are encouraged to inhabit diverse positions, to listen to other points of view, to discuss and disagree in a civil and constructive manner, and, finally, to articulate their own response in light of a more nuanced understanding of a complex problem.

Rather than affirming commonalities, and enshrining an ideal of the promise of pluralism in the abstract, the case method demands us to look directly at problems and ask: “What is at stake?” and “What would I do?” Whether Karen Majewski, or Padma Kuppa, told that, as a Hindu, she is not welcome to participate in her city’s Day of Prayer? Or Mayor Dean Koldenhoven, who learned that his city council has offered \$200,000 to a Muslim community to walk away from a real estate deal? Or Rabbi Sheldon Ezring, asked by a Jewish-born Zen priest if her family can become members at his Syracuse synagogue? (Or, for Shinge Roshi Sherry Chayat, if the Rabbi refuses her request to join?) The case method challenges us to think creatively, constructively, and self-critically about the real problems that confront us as members of a multireligious society, and provide an opportunity to practice pluralism.

⁵ *A Call to Prayer (A)*, <http://pluralism.org/files/cases/CallToPrayer.A.pdf>

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Since 2005, we have been experimenting with the case method at the Pluralism Project, and Diana Eck has taught a case studies course at Harvard since 2007. We continue to benefit from input from collaborative efforts with colleagues at a range of institutions, from the Harvard Business School to Auburn Seminary. In addition to writing cases, we have begun developing discussion guides: we recognize that one of the challenges of the case method is that it requires a new way of teaching, as it represents a significant departure from instructor-led lectures. We hope, in the future, to create workshops to train others to use cases in a range of community and classroom contexts. For more information about the Pluralism Project's Case Study Initiative, please see: <http://www.pluralism.org/casestudy>. To receive the "B" case of "A Call to Prayer" or to learn more, please contact epierce@fas.harvard.edu.

Elinor Pierce (Ellie) began working for the Pluralism Project at Harvard University as a student field researcher in San Francisco; she is now the Pluralism Project's research director and lead case study writer. In addition to her work on cases, she has helped produce documentary films, including *Fremont, U.S.A.*

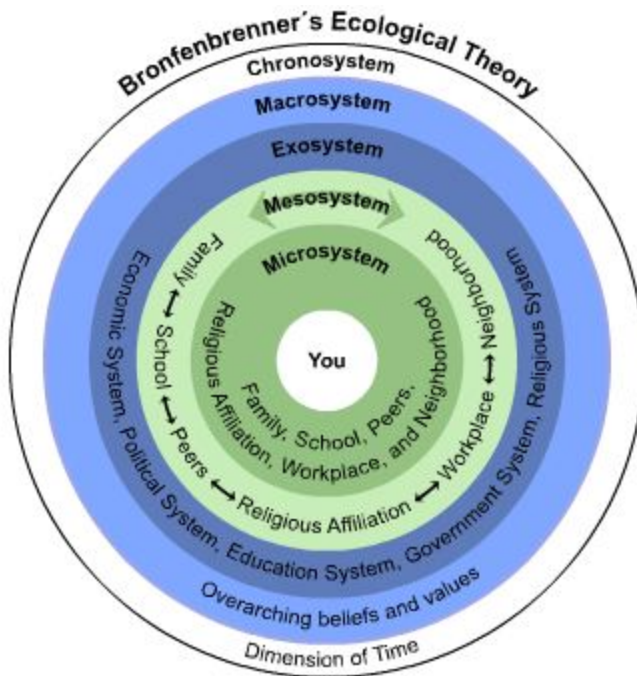
The Influence of Local Ecologies on Interfaith Work

**By Mark M. McCormack, Hasina A. Mohyuddin, and Paul R. Dokecki
Peabody College at Vanderbilt University**

Feminist theologian Jeannine Hill Fletcher (2005) has noted the “identity logic” by which interfaith work is often structured; interfaith participants are efficiently organized into, and engaged with, according to general religious identity markers (e.g. Christian, Muslim, Jewish). Meanwhile, other important facets of these persons’ identities – gender, race and ethnicity, their social and institutional networks of support – are overlooked and insufficiently engaged with in the structuring of that interfaith work. More recently, Yukich and Braunstein (2014) have examined the effects of other institutions external to interfaith organizations on the outcomes of those interfaith organizations. Specifically, they examined local congregations and other faith-based organizations as representing commitments and resourcing for the interfaith participant external to their immediate interfaith contact setting. Of interest in both of these works is the potential for interfaith settings to be influenced by much more than just the religious identities represented by the participants. Indeed, these participants embody a multitude of intersecting (and non-religious) identities and are situated within complex social and institutional ecologies. In this study, we aim to build on the extant literature by using case study data to examine more closely the ways in which local ecologies can influence individuals’ participation in and experiences of interfaith work.

Our analysis of the case study data is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory. With this theory, illustrated in Figure 1 below, Bronfenbrenner proposes a model of multiple systems of psychological and social phenomena that directly or indirectly influence persons’ behaviors in their immediate settings. Of particular interest to our analysis, the *mesosystemic* level represents other behavior settings (or *microsystems*) in which

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model (Day, 2015).



the individual also takes an active part and which may influence their behaviors in their immediate settings. For the individuals participating in the immediate interfaith setting, the mesosystem would be comprised of their family, a peer network, their own faith community, and other behavior settings in which they are also involved. Understanding the nature of the individuals' involvement in these other settings, Bronfenbrenner proposed, is critical for understanding their behaviors and experiences in their immediate setting.

In particular, we explore the differential impact of local faith communities on immigrant and minority group participation in interfaith organizations. Although a majority of participants in the study report strong ties with their own faith communities, not all faith communities were reported to support interfaith work. As participants negotiate their personal identities with their interfaith work, we consider ways in which these differences in mesosystemic factors shape interfaith participation. Before proceeding further, several assumptions and conditions are worth noting. First, our interest in faith communities in this analysis is less in these communities as religious resources and more in these communities as congruent and/or competing social groups that also demand member time and commitment. In this way, we construe faith communities as "non-religious" factors that exist outside the religious individual interfaith participant. Second, the below analysis is based on a limited sample of interfaith participants (and their related faith communities) and does not therefore lend itself to broader generalizations. Indeed, there are many majority and minority faith communities that, for a variety of reasons, stand in contrast to the below findings, and these contrasting cases warrant further investigation beyond what we are able to attempt here.

Methods and Analysis

As part of the larger “Understanding Community Interfaith Initiatives” project, which included a survey sent to interfaith organizations across the US, our research team participated in and examined five case study interfaith organizations in the Southeastern US. Our work with these case study organizations included 33 in-depth interviews (among 28 organization participants, analyzed below), field observations, and a collection of organization communications and documentation. The five organizations selected for our case study research represented a variety of interfaith organizational models and contexts, including: (1) a campus-based student interfaith group; (2) an all-female dialogue and service group; (3) a community service-oriented, congregation-based group; (4) a youth-focused dialogue and service group; and (5) a parent-focused, school-based group. Interview participants from each of these organizations were recruited to represent a diversity of organizational roles and perspectives, as well as to represent a diversity of religious traditions. Interviewee demographics are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Interviewees, demographics

Variable	No.	%
<i>Religious affiliation</i>		
Christian	11	39.3%
Muslim	8	28.6%
Hindu	3	10.7%
Unitarian Universalist	2	7.1%
Pagan	1	3.6%
Seeker	1	3.6%
Atheist	1	3.6%
Christian Scientist	1	3.6%
Total	28	100.0%
<i>Sex</i>		
Female	19	67.9%
Male	9	32.1%
Total	28	100.0%
<i>Organizational role</i>		
Leader	6	21.4%
Regular member	22	78.6%

Total	28	100.0%
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<i>Race/ethnicity</i>		
White/Caucasian	17	60.7%
Arab/Arab American	5	17.9%
Asian/Asian American	4	14.3%
Black/African American	2	7.1%
Total	28	100.0%
<hr/>		

Template analysis (King, 2012) was used to analyze case study data. Initial codes were pre-determined using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, with the intent of identifying mesosystemic supports and barriers to interfaith participation. These initial codes were modified and added to as analysis proceeded and additional codes were identified.

Results

For some interviewees, the support from their faith community was illustrated in the willingness of other faith community members to be involved in the interfaith organization's special events and other activities. One woman, a deacon at an Episcopal church, detailed the impressive involvement of her own congregation in interfaith work, as that work has appeared to have caught on within the congregation itself outside the formal operations of the interfaith organization:

At [my church] ... because of my role there as a deacon I am able to talk a little bit more about [my interfaith organization], our outreach funds go to help IMS with all of our programs basically. And so, as a member, [my church] contributes \$500 a year to [my interfaith organization] ... actually \$750 a year I think ... and is a big sponsor of the annual dinner, um, and that's one of our fundraising events. But I also have people who even now come up to me and say, "I'd like to help," and so I'm working right now to get some more volunteers ... there's several people who are very interested in interfaith matters and have been part of the teams, the Islamophobia, Encountering Islamophobia program and that sort of thing. So, gradually I think the congregation is coming around ... and we've had Sunday school classes, two of them, two different series on interfaith. One was [my interfaith organization's] series, but one the folks put together themselves that a group wanted to hear a Bible study group, wanted to know more about women in Islam, so I pulled together a group of women and had a series of several weeks of conversation about that. So my own congregation I think is pretty engaged.

For other interviewees, their faith community demonstrated support for their interfaith work less through actions and direct involvement in interfaith work themselves, and more through enthusiastic approval and encouragement. A founder of one of the interfaith groups relayed the story of the moment when she made the announcement to her congregation that she was planning to start an interfaith group, a moment that solidified for her the support of her congregation:

And so on Sunday morning we have announcement time. So I just stood up and I said, you know, this is my idea and this is what I'd like to do and I am hoping that this congregation will be supportive. And so people just broke into just applause. So I knew that I had that piece.

Illustrative of a number of interviewees who discussed faith communities that were “proud” of them or that otherwise demonstrated approval of their interfaith involvement, another member of the Women of Faith group, a member of a Unitarian Universalist church, discussed the moment in which another member of her church expressed her approval for her interfaith involvement. Here, the person’s own faith community is helping to give legitimacy to the interfaith work in which the person is involved:

One of the women at church who doesn't come to this group said, and I hadn't really thought about it this way, but she said, “you are doing great social justice work,” and I'm like, “I belong to an organization and this is not social justice,” and she said, “yes it is because you're taking a stand in the community for religious freedom,” and I hadn't really thought about it that way. So ... it made me feel good. It made me feel like I was doing something important when I really hadn't thought about this, it made me think about this group in a different way, it really is something important.

Still for other interviewees, the faith community was discussed as the impetus behind their decision to join their interfaith organization. In some cases the person saw another church member was involved and decided to become involved as well, or in several other cases a faith community leader or member directly approached the person about joining.

Thus the person’s own faith community outside the interfaith organization emerges as an influential factor for the person’s involvement in that organization and, in some ways, for the ultimate success of that organization. Whether providing resources for organization operations and special events (finances, volunteers, or otherwise), expressing approval for the legitimacy of interfaith work, or serving as a conduit for recruiting new interfaith participants, faith communities warrant attention as important microsystems in the ecology of the interfaith organization. Here we find further support for the conclusions of Yukich and Braunstein (2014), namely that other institutions in the interfaith organization’s immediate ecology may serve to enhance the positive outcomes of that organization. A critical finding in this study, however, is that while the above points appear to be true for *some* interfaith participants, they are far from true for all participants. Indeed, some faith communities appear to be far less supportive of interfaith work and,

importantly, this appears to be true especially of faith communities comprised of immigrant and/or ethnic minority populations.

These immigrant/ethnic minority faith communities were often described by interfaith participants as a source of tension – an instance when the interfaith organization microsystem did not align with or was in conflict with the aims or purposes of the faith community microsystem. One interviewee was a long-time member of her local Hindu community, in addition to being a member of her local interfaith organization. She described the local Hindu community as heavily comprised of recent immigrant families, a fact which she points to as an explanation for why she is currently the only member of that community interested and active in interfaith activities:

They started a temple here, but I have some issue, let's put it that way, because they're not as open-minded as I am ... I don't see them being proactive about engaging themselves as community members ... We have not had a place of worship in this community for the longest time, so they're still taking baby steps and we cannot compare them to a church that has been there for 150 years. You see what I mean? They're still trying to get themselves established. So their focus is on raising funds, building the temple, making sure people come and attend ... I'm not saying that's the wrong thing, because their focus is on, "Okay, we need to put all our energy and focus into this." I cannot find fault with that, but I happen to think a little more of the big picture thing.

A Muslim member of one of the interfaith groups, a Christian convert to Islam who was born and raised in America, expressed similar frustrations in getting her smaller Muslim community actively involved in interfaith work:

As an American it's very important for people to understand, and I don't know if it's because I was raised of a different faith, but I see the need for people to understand and know who we are and reach out to them, and I've found so many people that, you know, it's not really that important. "We do what we do, they do what they do, there's really no need to." ... It's a smaller community and people do tend to focus on their smaller community rather than the larger community. I'm not sure why, because I don't think I would be that way if I went to my husband's family's in Jordan, and I think if I were there I don't think that I would be that way, so I'm not really sure if that is just our community or if that's something that is seen across the country.

In contrast to the earlier comments by the Episcopalian woman who was overwhelmed by offers from faith community members to help out with various interfaith initiatives, these individuals describe feelings of frustration in getting other members involved, a responsibility that to them sometimes feels like "a full-time job" and makes them feel that, if they want their particular tradition represented in an interfaith gathering, the burden will fall exclusively to them.

These representatives of minority religions in particular, and perhaps especially members of Muslim faith communities, despite difficulties sometimes in getting others to participate, feel a special obligation to represent their tradition to others as a way of dispelling harmful myths about their tradition and clarifying for others exactly what it is their tradition stands for. One Muslim interfaith participant explained – “You feel like you are representing your religion. You are the ambassador of Islam. You try to do your best during these meetings.” Another Muslim participant in a college interfaith group explained that the Muslim students are often the first to speak out during dialogues on topics especially sensitive to Muslims, like the role of women or religious violence, because they may feel more of a need to defend their religion against public perceptions. One Muslim participant expressed a sense of duty in representing Islam in this way:

For people to know, especially after 9/11, for people to know, um, I’ve been Muslim for so long and I don’t know any people who do what happened on 9/11. And I guess that was the biggest thing, the question for our community was why do you do that, why do Muslims do that, and that was always my message, my message was that’s not what we do.

The reticence of some minority faith communities generally to become involved in interfaith work, then, may lead to situations in which those communities are underrepresented in interfaith work. Further, the representation of these faith communities may fall onto certain individuals who take up as their special responsibility to ensure that their tradition is sufficiently and accurately understood among others in the larger community.

But what more can we understand about why these faith communities refuse or give limited support to the interfaith organizations of which certain of their members are a part? Certainly the above comments help shed some light on this phenomenon – that smaller minority faith communities may be more concerned about and focused on establishing their own communities rather than reaching out to their larger surrounding community. Additionally, however, some interviewees indicated that minority faith communities may generally harbor some suspicion about or concern over interfaith encounters as threatening to take away members or sully the traditions they are seeking to pass down to their children. One group leader discussed concerns from Muslim parents over their children’s involvement in interfaith work:

A lot of time when you do adult interfaith, yeah, everyone gets together ... the rabbis and imams, usually people who know the religion and they discuss, but the kids it’s not about you know, knowing everything, but asking the question and being asked so that now you’re thinking about your own religion. So ... there’s, you know, always some underlying fear like they’re going to go and the Christian’s going to tell them how great Christianity is.

The leader of the college interfaith group expressed similar concerns from his family during his initial months doing interfaith work:

Family back home likes [interfaith], think it's a good push. The very first time, they said, "Make sure you keep to your beliefs. You're going to hear about a lot of different things, try to hang on to what you believe." My mosque doesn't know about the interfaith ... Some people there, when I was going to [college], were saying stuff like "Make sure when you're in college you stick with Muslims and only Muslims." I was like no. This guy was talking about how if you stick with non-Muslims they'll lead you astray and lead you to the hell fire.

For minority faith communities, then, direct involvement in interfaith work and indirect support of members' involvement in interfaith work raises certain concerns over preserving cultural and religious identities and traditions with which non-minority faith communities necessarily do not need to contend.

A recent study by Min (2010) may further help shed light on this phenomenon. Through his comparative study on Korean evangelicals and Indian Hindus, Min sought to uncover whether and in what ways immigrants to the US maintain their homeland cultural and ethnic traditions through the vehicle of their faith communities. In the case of Indian Hindus in particular, their religious tradition is considered the indigenous religion in their homeland and as such is infused with much of the local culture of that homeland (what Calvillo and Bailey, 2015, have likened to processes of inculturation, or the comingling of religious practice with local culture). Continued practice of that religion in the US, then, becomes a way of preserving their cultural practices and ethnic identity and of passing that identity down through subsequent generations. Hinduism, for Indian Hindus immigrated to the US, becomes a bridge to their homeland culture and may contribute to their hesitation to participate in interfaith work and (they may worry, whether reasonably or not) risk losing or "burning" that bridge to their homeland. While these faith communities do not restrict members from participating and do not actively oppose interfaith work, the perceived lack of involvement and lack of resourcing of some of these communities certainly stands in stark contrast to other faith communities that appear to be much more supportive of interfaith work, potentially leaving individual representatives of their faith community to bear much of the burden of interfaith involvement and "public relations" for their community.

Discussion and Conclusion

The above analysis uncovers several important features of the interfaith organization mesosystem which warrant brief discussion. First, the individual interfaith participant's faith community emerges as a meaningful source of support in many cases, backing these participants with finances, volunteers, and other concrete resources useful in the implementation of interfaith work. Interfaith practitioners would do well – and many in the interfaith movement have done so already – to leverage local faith communities as strategically important partners in initiating and carrying out local interfaith initiatives. Second, however, the above analysis also suggests that interfaith practitioners would do well to pay attention to the ways in which different faith communities within their local ecology respond differently to the invitation to the interfaith encounter. In particular,

minority faith communities comprised largely of immigrant families and individuals may not enjoy the requisite stability and power to comfortably participate in exchanges of religious ideas, for example, that to them may represent a greater risk of loss of community identity and permanence. The result may be that these faith communities are more prone to avoid becoming involved in interfaith work altogether or, as experienced by some of the interviewees above, that the one or few members within these communities who do choose to participate in interfaith work may feel a much greater burden to represent their community within those spaces. The perceived lack of resourcing for these individuals may further limit those who are willing to participate in interfaith work to a select few who are more educated or trained within their tradition.

Interfaith practitioners may respond to these challenges in a number of ways. Some may offer to host interfaith events at the minority faith communities' own places of worship or gathering, to help ensure a level of comfort or safety for minority faith community members. Others, as with one of our case studies in this project, may put into place organizational decision-making processes that give greater weight to the needs and perspectives of minority faith community members as the organization attempts to discern its missional goals and priorities. Finally, there may be merit in considering whether and when common interfaith activities such as theological dialogue, often involving the open and public exchange (and even debate) of religious ideas, are simply inherently unwelcoming or "risky" as perceived by faith communities and individuals in positions of relative vulnerability and powerlessness. Such instances may warrant discussion on appropriate alternative approaches to interfaith relationship-building that represent less risk on the part of certain participants and are more responsive to the particular needs of those participants. In these and other ways, interfaith practitioners may effectively develop interfaith initiatives structured less by "identity logics" that oversimplify individual differences and lead to oversimplified approaches to navigating those differences, and structured more by an ecological view of participants that more fully captures the complexities within and surrounding those participants.

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The Power of Relationships and Personal Story in Transforming Community

By Aziza Hasan

April 2015

By 2043, the United States will be a majority-minority country.⁶ This shift may have significant implications for our society; a key question becomes how are we preparing for this major shift? When Lina Akkad, a young Muslim professional joined *NewGround*, a year-long intensive program that models and instills pluralism among Los Angeles Muslims and Jews, she walked in thinking she was open-minded. However, during the course of the fellowship she realized how much ‘open-mindedness’ she still needed to cultivate. In fact, many of those who come into the *NewGround* experience are surprised to find themselves struggling with practicing pluralism. Though one may think of oneself as open-minded, the situation is different when theory shifts to practice. In *NewGround’s* case, a Sunni Muslim prays next to Shia, Ismaili, or Ahmaddiya Muslims; a Modern Orthodox Jew worships side by side with Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Humanist Jews. Community issues relating to gender, identity, and values unleash uncomfortable conversations typically taboo in many circles. In the process of understanding the ‘other,’ participants become aware of their own anxiety and fears; they become aware of the range of opinions within their own ‘community.’ Thus, the practice of pluralism re-constructs the perception of the ‘other,’ which builds character and, ultimately, communities.

“That is not true. At least not in the mainstream of the 99% of Muslims,” reverberated the voice of a male Muslim participant of *NewGround*. “Women do not lead prayer,” he continued. This was in response to a female peer explaining that women lead prayer regularly in her community. The intensity of the conversation picked up as one fellow after the other shared her/his perspective on the subject-- while a Muslim and Jewish facilitator team helped diffuse the conversation with carefully crafted questions. “What I find interesting, is that many of the same arguments you are using are used in the Jewish community as well,” chimed in one of the Jewish professionals. And like that, the tension started to evaporate. The power of being seen and an image in another community helping demonstrate how normal the conversation was and is. During the first weekend residential retreat as part of the *NewGround: A Muslim Jewish Partnership for Change’s* year-long program for professionals, the Muslims are tasked with leading an authentic Muslim prayer and the Jews are asked to lead a Shabbat prayer service. Each group helping the other experience the tradition in a way that is both authentic, meaningful and informative. When the fellows begin planning for their assignment, it initially seems easy and straightforward yet soon becomes complicated. Challenges arise when participants realize how important their own vision is for how the tradition should be carried out. Some insisting that a religious leader be brought in to lead the experience while others bring in family traditions

⁶ “America Will Become Majority Minority in 2043--But in Many Ways That New America Has Already Arrived,” *PRI*, October 03, 2014, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-10-03/america-will-become-majority-minority-2043-many-ways-new-america-has-already>.

and interpretations behind specific rituals. Each person wanting to perform the prayer the 'right' way. Eventually the 10 Jews and 10 Muslims figure it out and each present a piece of the tradition that enriches their own life. During the question and answer portion, fellows dive deeper into vulnerability. One year, a Muslim fellow finally found the courage to say that the way the Muslim group decided to perform the prayer was not at all the way he experiences it in his own family as an Ismaili Muslim. This allowed for the Shia individuals in the group to speak to the differences of their own tradition from the majority Sunni population among the fellows. Likewise, humanist Jews find meaningful ways to share Shabbat, while others are so overwhelmed with emotion that they opt to do their Shabbat prayers separately before the Shabbat experience so that they can have an intimate connection with the Divine prior to sharing the Almighty with others.

Each year, *NewGround* brings together 20 Muslim and Jewish professionals and 20 high school students for year-long programs to learn alongside one another, experience the beauty and challenges of pluralism, and build something to benefit the larger community of Muslims and Jews. *NewGround's* model dives deep into a safe space where people trust in a process that allows them to be vulnerable both in their own community and with the other. It is intensive and requires a great deal of structure, with skilled facilitators that promote dialogue during weekend retreats that take participants away from their everyday lives. Though remarkably successful, a few years ago, the leadership of *NewGround* had to make a decision about whether to keep the *NewGround* experience a small safe space or admit as many people as possible. This took place after the team was confronted with the realization that a heavily guarded safe space may liberate the participants in the room. And yet, for every 100 people who express interest in the program, 80 must be turned away; shut out from an experience that they would love to pursue. It was a problem that spoke to the very core of the pluralistic focus of the organization. *NewGround* was pushing away willing individuals eager to take part in a different type of conversation. So the leadership of *NewGround* expanded the circle by offering public events that now gather hundreds of Muslims and Jews for opportunities to connect, learn from, and alongside each other.

So how to ensure a respectful exchange of ideas?

Though the events look simple, a great deal of intense thought is put into constructing them. A team of change-makers experienced in small and large group convenings discuss each activity and the words that frame it. The strength of the program heavily relies on the team's ability to engage through a pluralistic process that frames a meaningful event that builds relationships on a larger scale with many more people in the room. This intense effort is guided by the phrase '**interfaith not done well, can do harm.**' It is a phrase that was born out of the failures of interfaith events and projects that, though well-intentioned, led people to walk away resentful of the experience. This is not to say that the *NewGround* process makes people happy all the time--approaching conflict as natural and inevitable yet not intractable is a difficult concept. Individuals are bound to hear things that they do not like. However, when they are ready, they know where to find their friends and leverage relationships in order to finally undertake a difficult conversation.

That is why, **empowering people with the tools to have difficult conversations** and commit to working through conflict is so important. For example, participants are taught the practice of intentional listening, which stresses individuals to remain present when it is easier to stop hearing perspectives that trigger strong emotions, in order to gain one of the important skills necessary for engaging in constructive pluralism. Yet, how often is pluralism, an American value, modeled in a constructive way? How often do we, as a community, demonstrate what it actually looks like to embrace diversity and learn side by side? A high school student participating in the *NewGround* program recently asked for a debate-style format where the students in the program could argue facts. And yet, 'date dumps' are just that: an opportunity to off-load one 'fact' about the other. Instead, *NewGround's* style of practicing pluralism is an opportunity for individuals to not necessarily remember facts, but remember the strong emotions that the exchange evoked--be it anger, defeat, or frustration.⁷ Storytelling is an effective and thoughtful approach to dialogue. It is an approach that *NewGround* has utilized to connect and transform hearts and minds. During one of *Newground's* weekend-long overnight retreats on Israel-Palestine, a Muslim Palestinian fellow took a stand to say that he had the most at stake to be part of a group like *NewGround*. Instantly, many of the fellows in the room took in large breaths as if timed in unison. The Jewish facilitator tried to reframe his comments but he kept insisting his stake was larger than anyone else's. Then the Muslim Palestinian facilitator stepped in and reframed the conversation asking him if he could agree that "he had a lot at stake to be part of the discussion." He agreed. This very example being one of the important reasons why *NewGround* uses trained facilitator teams consisting of one Muslim and one Jew. Acting as a pair, the facilitators may tag team, listen for cultural undertones and utilize their similarities with participants to help move the conversations into constructive space. The Muslim Palestinian fellow was then prompted to share his personal story and experience of how his life was impacted by Israeli policies and actions. It was a string of stories of loss, heart-break and challenge. After fellows took in his story, those who were visually triggered were prompted by the facilitators to share their personal stories of how they have been affected. One of the Jewish fellows responding had narrowly escaped a suicide bombing at a university cafeteria in Israel. Her story was also filled with moving emotion and pain. These narratives and others were shared in a space that by no means resolved the conflict. However, what it did do, was open up a vulnerable space where a common humanity could be seen. A humanity for people who could see across the divide of conflict and start to see the human beings across from them.

Sometimes the luxury of time--whether to do a year-long fellowship or invite people over to dinner--is not available. In light of this reality, *NewGround* organizes **large-scale public events for hundreds of people**, where individuals connect through National Public Radio (NPR) MOTH-style storytelling by answering specific guided questions. *NewGround* invests in amplifying individual stories that move hearts and minds because each story allows each person in the audience to confront their own fears with courage. Individuals receive questions that come from a place of curiosity and are encouraged to ask questions when they feel uncomfortable. This instantly moves dialogue into a vulnerable place. More

⁷ Peter Guber, *Telling to Win* (New York: Crown Business, 2011), 16.

importantly, the parameters of a safe space, which require a timed exchange that solicits questions that come from a place of curiosity, enable individuals to connect quickly and have a meaningful dialogue that gives each person a platform to feel respected and heard. Without these, voices will be marginalized, muted, and isolated.

Fellowship: structured private safe space for 20 individuals with a Muslim and Jewish **facilitator who actively frame and reframe** the conversation throughout the course of the dialogue. Each intra group has an opportunity to challenge each other, as well as the other faith community while still adhering to community ground rules. From the outset, *NewGround* actively recruits individuals with diverse backgrounds -- including various religious, ethnic, gender identity, and sexual orientations -- ranging from Jews of Modern Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Reform or Humanist traditions; Muslims who are Sunni, Ismaili, Shia, culturally Muslim, or religiously conservative from many different ethnic backgrounds, including but not limited to people of Palestinian, Lebanese, African American, and South Asian descent, and individuals identifying as part of the Lesbian, Gay and Transgender communities. The *NewGround* fellows build friendships and relationships first as they explore topics of Judaism, Islam, hate, conflict resolution, and Israel-Palestine. These relationships culminate into individual Muslim-Jewish bridge-building projects that fellows complete in their respective communities.

In addition to the intimate Fellowship and high school leadership programs, *NewGround* convenes public events that bring in attendees as participants and not attendees--each actively engaged and connecting with someone new. All have targeted questions to answer OR are given an explicit goal or purpose. One of *NewGround's* largest popular public events that brings together hundreds of people each year is Spotlight, during which 26 organizations across LA serve as co-sponsors and bring out their constituents. This model of relationship building through storytelling offers a personal connection before entering into religious discussions. It helps individuals see the humanity in each other and even share the stories that deeply affect them with their friends online by posting the stories uploaded on *NewGround's* YouTube channel after the event and on their social media profiles. The story-telling event connects people and organizations who would not otherwise engage one another and empowers individuals with relationships and tools to interact with diversity in a way that builds community. This enables individuals in community to problem-solve and take greater ownership over the challenges they face. The foundation of our work is a respectful pluralism that builds on the strengths of diversity. Greater communication and connection builds healthy and resilient communities, which gives people empowered access to resources that will help them overcome the challenges they face and thus become proactive contributing members who strengthen community in diversity.

A follow-up evaluation of the program showed that 72% of participants improved their ability to engage with people from other religious groups while 91% of participants reported to have improved their leadership abilities as a result of *NewGround's* program. These findings provide insight into the efficacy of *NewGround's* model; thus, supporting the continuation and growth of *NewGround's* efforts to empower Jewish and Muslim change-makers through a professional fellowship, high school leadership council, and public

programming. Furthermore, *NewGround* alumni have initiated extraordinary projects and organizations as a result of their experience with *NewGround*. For example, Diane Vanette and Sajid Mohamedy both met at *NewGround*'s professional fellowship and decided to create "The Muslim and Jewish Organized Relief (MAJOR) Fund," which unites Muslims and Jews to assist communities with clean water, education, and healthcare. Tova Douglas, a recent graduate of the *NewGround* Professional Fellowship, captures the quintessence of *NewGround*'s mission in her 2014 Iftar Speech, "Before *NewGround*, I knew who I was. I was a liberal, feminist, humanist, social justice seeker, open minded to all faiths and cultures except that I wasn't [...] I never, ever truly embraced the opportunity to challenge my perception of myself and engage wholeheartedly with the other. I lived in my cozy box and was comfortable [...] *NewGround* challenged me to shift my thinking and begin to disassemble the box..."⁸

Authenticity, as challenging as it may be, is the bedrock of any relationship. Placing relationships before politics is a critical component of resilient relationships. Moreover, open communication--although, at times difficult and tense--is crucial to bringing Muslim and Jews to the conversation table when conflicts occur. Thus, it is imperative to help give people the tools to ensure they are adequately articulating their concerns before such conflicts occur because it is only a matter of time before it does occur. Thus, having the tools to work through conflict in an honest and authentic way will be the true measure of success.

Authentic expression goes hand in hand with the respect for self-definition. Rather than projecting one's own definition of what the other group 'ought to be, think or feel,' the onus falls back on the person who is uncomfortable with the other person's definition. This process can enable both individuals to wrestle through tension and work to truly hear what their peer is trying to say.

Facing conflict areas head-on by exploring issues of gender, identity, racism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict give people the ability to voice their concerns without having an unspoken elephant in the room. By confronting the elephant directly, its ability to undermine the relationship becomes limited. This allows the relationships to focus on the local instead of the international-- because while the international is important and of critical concern, the greatest impact may be made on relationships in the United States.

Possibilities

The possibilities of pluralism are infinite. The very fabric of diversity has the ability to make a community thrive. Los Angeles is a city of coalitions. When one group does not know how to work respectfully alongside others, they are at a significant disadvantage. Are we ready to be a minority-majority country? Is the nation prepared to be fruitful and manage its diverse populations effectively? There is no alternative. Progress, or what? The

⁸ "NewGround Change-Maker Reflection: Tova Leibovic Douglas '14," last modified July 11, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sHZnfPaYZo>.

role of pluralism is one of rising significance. The ability to cooperate well with other groups will not only define us as people, but define our ability to pass laws, build infrastructure, and problem-solve as a nation. Thus, the role of pluralism is crucial to the success of today's and tomorrow's world.

Empowering minority groups to adequately gain equal access to programs and resources is a critical part of pluralism. Healthy and resilient communities need to provide all community members with access to resources and programs that build communal and individual knowledge of the best and most effective ways to create desired change.

Jews and Muslims who have completed the *NewGround* program report a deeper connection to their own faith as a result of completing the fellowship. Take *NewGround* alumna Rachel Gandin for example. Rachel joined *NewGround* to build relationships with Arabs, however, during her fellowship, she realized that few Muslims are Arab. In her testimony of her experience, she explained that "after years of immersing myself in Arab and Muslim culture, I had put my relationship to Judaism on the back burner. *NewGround* allowed me to re-engage while exploring it with Muslims and Jews of differing beliefs. The safe space allowed me to bridge my two separate lives without having to defend either one."⁹

NewGround alumni are 150+ strong and have developed a number of different successful projects, examples including the New Horizon Islamic School and Sinai Akiba Day School Exchange Program, The Muslim and Jewish Organized Relief (MAJOR) Fund, various facilitated community conversations around racial tensions among youth in public schools following the Trayvon Martin tragedy, among many more. *NewGround's* success is in the diversity of its supporters and programs that continue beyond the fellowship: A board of directors who transitioned it from the two organizations, the Progressive Jewish Alliance and the Muslim Public Affairs Council, who birthed it to its own independent entity, 50+ organizations who support its public programs, and religious and lay leaders across the city who support the program and help us recruit a diverse body of applicants. The network will continue beyond the initial founding team. John Maxwell in the *360 Degree Leader*, defines this as a true mark of success.¹⁰

Limits of pluralism

At times, plurality can seem to be nonexistent. In fact, certain academics argue that plurality is more of an ideal that audaciously tosses aside the political, economical, and social realities that are marred by inequality and inequity. Perhaps Cornel West says it best, "If we don't learn with one another, then how can we learn to live with one another?" So, for some, it's clear: plurality is a myth. This is a particularly salient feeling in LA where one neighborhood can feature million dollar houses while adjacent neighborhoods face abject poverty.

⁹ "Testimonial: Rachel Gandin," last modified March 11, 2015, <http://mjnewground.org/stories/>.

¹⁰ John Maxwell, *The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence From Anywhere in The Organization Workbook* (Nashville: Nelson Impact, 2006), 17.

Thus, as important as pluralism is, turning a blind eye to its limitations will only lead to frustration. Consensus-building among diverse groups of people can be like herding cats -- essential and yet exhausting to the point of frustration. The process itself will slow down an already sluggish system, making change seem monumental. It is a sentiment that *NewGround* sometimes feels and experiences in communities, which is why we engage youth change-makers. Young people have the potential and passion to make change--they have not become as jaded to social, political, and economic realities that may otherwise discourage older individuals. This is why investing in the training of leaders--particularly young leaders--across industries in the critical skills of problem-solving, storytelling, self expression and access to opportunity will be a critical part of our futures.

Flashpoints where pluralism seems unlikely

Social media is an important tool that has great potential to bring out the best and the worst in people. Closed groups where people can bounce ideas off each other are great places for the exchange of ideas so long as there are explicit ground rules and moderators who enforce them. After the Chapel Hill murders, the family of the victims created a Facebook page titled, "Our Three Winners," that spread like wild fire. With hundreds of thousands of followers within one week's time, this page is a great example of how social media has a constructive role to play in an awful situation. And yet, when people strongly disagree on social media platforms, many times they respond immediately without thinking through their response or truly hearing what the other person has to say. That is why it is imperative to hold a guided forum where people can exchange ideas in a constructive way. However, once the conversation gets heated, there is no substitution for a face-to-face meeting, which has the potential to transform the conflict. Thus, it is imperative to allow members to participate on the condition that they commit to the community ground rules prior to joining.

Conclusion

Giving people the opportunity to be heard, seen, and valued will lead to greater community involvement. The idea of maintaining the status quo instead of preparing for 2043 is short-sighted and counter-productive. We, the United States, will be majority minority but no one racial group will be a majority, we will be a nation of minorities soon and all of us will need the skills of pluralistic cooperation and community building across lines of difference to flourish. Instead, we must use our differences to build pluralistic communities, to empower one another and our communities to flourish so that when 2043 comes around, we all can feel proud.

Endnotes

"America Will Become Majority Minority in 2043--But in Many Ways That New America Has Already Arrived." *PRI*. October 03, 2014. Accessed March 31, 2015.
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She is experienced in Small Claims Court mediation, coaching individuals and leading groups in conflict resolution. Her two years of AmeriCorps service gave her hands-on experience in community organizing and group problem-solving. Aziza has appeared on CNN, ABCnews, Fox 11, LA City View 35, National Public Radio, and KCRW. Print media coverage of her work may be found in The Mennonite, AltMuslimah, The Wichita Eagle, The Newton-Kansan, The Halstead Independent, Hutchinson News and The Bethel College Collegian.

Pluralism, Place, and the Local **By Whitney Barth**

“The social and cultural pluralism,” writes Wendell Berry, “that some now see as a goal is a public of destroyed communities,” and those “modern industrial urban centers” that are seen as “pluralistic” are such “because they are full of refugees from destroyed communities, destroyed community economies, disintegrated local cultures, and ruined local ecosystems.”¹¹ In his 1993 essay “Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community,” Berry, a prolific essayist, social critic, and poet, is troubled by the thought of diverse people living out their daily lives unaware of—and seemingly uninterested in—their surroundings, including fellow human beings. He sees proponents of pluralism as extending “tolerance...always to the uprooted and passive, never to the rooted and active,” and pluralism as antithetical to “people locally placed.”¹² Today, many local interfaith efforts name “relationship building” as a core, if not primary goal.¹³ Further, many engaged in these efforts filter this commitment to relationship building through a lens of pluralism, a strategy for responding to religious diversity. What kinds of local places are these individuals and communities imagining and building? In what ways does interfaith activity that foregrounds the importance of relationships engage in a process of place-making, both imaginatively and physically? A few examples from cities across the United States are offered here as preliminary starting points for this exploration. They are presented here in conversation with select scholarship on place and place-making from perspectives within religious studies, education, and geography.¹⁴ These examples and explorations are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive or conclusive, and each raises a different set of questions as we consider pluralism and place at the level of the local.

Although Berry sees fragmentation as the result of a preference for pluralism, many engaged in interfaith efforts draw upon a definition of pluralism that foregrounds engagement. Diana Eck, professor at Harvard University and founder and director of the Pluralism Project conceives of pluralism, at least in a civic sense, as an “energetic engagement with diversity,” coupled with an “active seeking of understanding across lines of difference,” and not relativism but “an encounter of commitments” and “based on dialogue.”¹⁵ For over twenty years, Pluralism Project researchers and affiliates have made the local a large part of their focus, exploring not only how immigration has changed the physical religious landscape of cities and towns across the U.S. but also what new

¹¹ Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1993),169. Berry’s critiques ought to be read within his broader concern over environmental degradation and his agrarian preferences. Yet, as this essay seeks to demonstrate, his linking of pluralism to a connection to place is worth exploring further.

¹² *Ibid.*, 170.

¹³ “Summary Report,” *America’s Interfaith Infrastructure: An Emerging Landscape*, Accessed March 2015, <http://www.pluralism.org/interfaith/report#purpose>.

¹⁴ For an excellent over view of the many ways in which place as a concept has been explored in geography and across different fields of study, see Tim Cresswell’s *Place: An Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd Edition, 2014).

¹⁵ Diana Eck, “What is Pluralism?” *The Pluralism Project at Harvard University*, Accessed April 2015, www.pluralism.org/pluralism/what_is_pluralism.

challenges and networks, interfaith and otherwise, have emerged in light of these changes. The Pluralism Project also aims “to discern, in light of this work, emerging meanings of religious ‘pluralism,’ both for religious communities and public institutions...”¹⁶ I interpret this focus as an acknowledgement that discussions of pluralism are most generative when attention to place, especially the local, is part of the conversation.¹⁷

In his seminal work *Place and Placelessness*, E. Relph claims that “[t]o be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know *your* place.”¹⁸ In their anthology *Space and Place*, Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires write that “[p]lace is space to which meaning has been ascribed.”¹⁹ They continue:

How then does space becomes place? By being named: as the flows of power and negotiations of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population.²⁰

Many interfaith efforts at a local level are transforming space into place in both of these ways, physically through architecture but also through the “symbolic and imaginary investments” of people, which includes framing and exploring what it means to be neighbors who notice and engage with one another. It is to a few of these examples that we now turn.

Atlanta, GA

In a volume on place-based education and globalization, David A. Gruenewald and Gregory A. Smith argue that the current assumption in public education is that “the purpose of schooling is to prepare the next generation to compete and succeed in the global economy.”²¹ In contrast, education that is place-conscious seeks to challenge both globalization at the expense of the local and a sense of “rootlessness.”²² One of the contributors to their volume, *Place-Based Education in a Global Age: Local Diversity*, is Mark Graham, a former high school art teacher in New York City turned professor, who echoes this concern. He writes of art classrooms as important sites for transforming students’ perceptions about the world in which they live, a world where “places are owned,

¹⁶ “Mission,” *The Pluralism Project at Harvard University*. Accessed April 2015. <http://www.pluralism.org/about/mission>.

¹⁷ The author acknowledges that this essay’s discussion of place and individual/communal place-making focuses mostly at a local (read: city) level. This focus intersects with discussions of how America is conceived as a place, both physically and imaginatively, and also how international ties bind individuals and communities to places beyond their daily geographies. These explorations are important and warrant more discussion than we can give them here.

¹⁸ E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (New York: Pion Limited, 1983), 1.

¹⁹ Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires, *Space and Place* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), xii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, xii.

²¹ David A. Gruenewald and Gregory A. Smith, *Place-Based Education in a Global Age: Local Diversity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), xiv.

²² *Ibid.*, xvi.

measured, used up, and thrown aside.”²³ Through observation, painting, drawing, and photography, Graham and his students reflect upon and seek to represent their connections to the environments in which they live and share with human and other-than-human neighbors. They share with one another their personal responses to this “exercise in walking and looking and questioning.”²⁴ Here, an attempt is made to startle individuals not out of the everyday but *into* it.

In Atlanta, Georgia, Interfaith Community Initiatives (ICI, formerly Interfaith Community Institute) host Interfaith Immersions, weekend-long opportunities for local leaders to visit several houses of worship, including a church, synagogue, mosque, and *mandir* and engage in dialogue with members and participants. The trips are intended to provide an opportunity for leaders to strengthen their own faith, cultivate appreciation for that of others, and participate in “the kind of interfaith engagement needed for the birthing of a new religious society in America.”²⁵ The program grew out of the ICI’s World Pilgrims Program, which uses international travel as an opportunity to cultivate “an atmosphere of friendship and trust” that can lead to “dialogue about areas of disagreement,” foregoing conversion attempts for increased “empathy” and conflict reduction.²⁶ Organizers emphasize that the word “pilgrimage,” was chosen intentionally to frame each trip as a “sacred journey” to places of “sacred importance” where “spiritual enrichment can take place,” and they contrast pilgrimage with a “travel seminar” or a “tourist venture.”²⁷ Interfaith Immersions was a way to provide a financially viable option for more people and to acknowledge the city of Atlanta’s own increasing religious diversity and the opportunity that exists to explore and deepen relationships at home.²⁸

Interfaith Immersion’s development out of a sense of pilgrimage and the emphasis placed on immersion suggests a different set of possibilities for interfaith encounters than those Robert Wuthnow found most churches employ if they choose to engage individuals and communities of different religious traditions. In a 2005 study, Wuthnow found that the majority of churches that do engage with their religiously diverse neighbors tend to do so through what he calls “ceremonial forms,” annual services or symbolic alliances which may “minimize the amount of interaction that actually takes place...”²⁹ These ceremonial forms are one of the “strategies of engagement” Wuthnow observes, in contrast to what he terms “strategies of avoidance,” which some church leaders use (intentionally or unintentionally)

²³ Mark Graham, “On the Fringe of Nirvana: Aesthetic Places and the Art Classroom,” in *Place-Based Education in a Global Age: Local Diversity*, eds. David A. Gruenewald and Gregory A. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2008), 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁵ “ICI Interfaith Immersions,” *Interfaith Community Initiatives*, Accessed May 2015, <http://www.interfaithci.org/interfaith-immersions.html>.

²⁶ “World Pilgrims Program,” *Interfaith Community Initiatives*, Accessed May 2015. <http://www.interfaithci.org/world-pilgrims.html>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ “ICI Interfaith Immersions,” *Interfaith Community Initiatives*, Accessed May 2015, <http://www.interfaithci.org/interfaith-immersions.html>.

²⁹ Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 248.

to avoid contact with other religious communities or leaders.³⁰ For the latter, he uses an interview with a priest in Northern California to illustrate: When asked whether or not his parish encouraged getting to know people from different faiths, the priest responded that “there just aren’t any Muslims around,” despite the fact that the parish was located less than one-third of a mile from a mosque.³¹

ICI’s Interfaith Immersion program, insofar as it seeks to deepen people’s understanding of the local environments in which they live, may find some common ground with proponents of place-based education like Gruenewald and Smith. To put it differently, how do interfaith efforts like the Interfaith Immersion program also serve as exercises in “walking, listening, and questioning?” And how might efforts that orient around communities with physical “homes” take into their purview those religious (and secular) communities who, although present, may not have (or, in some cases, desire) a permanent brick and mortar site?

Omaha, NE

Religious studies scholar Thomas Tweed writes that “[r]eligions are confluences of organic cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.”³² He further emphasizes that no one encounters “religion-in-general,” rather we are all “situated observers encountering particular practices performed by particular people in particular contexts.”³³ Each individual and community creates (and re-creates) maps of which serve to orient and to help articulate those spaces that become our places (or homes) as meaning is ascribed to them. At the same time, foregrounding “confluences” and “flows” acknowledges that this is not static but rather a dynamic process, both for individuals and communities. The boundaries of our individual and communal maps, our efforts to “make homes and cross boundaries,” can collide (and subsume) just as they can coexist and promote seeing a place in a new way. Indeed, these processes are more interrelated than mutually exclusive.

In Omaha, Nebraska, forgers of the Tri-Faith Initiative are in the process of visioning and creating a place where their respective communities do not just share a zip code; they share the same property. Since 2010, Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Omaha have been planning for the co-location of a synagogue, a mosque, a church, and an interfaith center, each a separate building built on the same campus.³⁴ Thought to be the first of its kind in

³⁰ Ibid., 244

³¹ Ibid., 245.

³² Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 54. Citing Tweed’s working definition of religions is intended not as an endorsement of his definition above others or to suggest that this definition and others exist in isolation; they do not. I draw upon Tweed here because I find his emphasis on the spatial to be generative for, to use Tweed’s terms, “prompting new sightings and crossings” (p. 47) for considering the role of religion in orienting humans toward each other and the worlds they share.

³³ Ibid., 55.

³⁴ The extent to which a perceived common theological ground between Jews, Christians, and Muslims facilitates efforts like the Tri-Faith Initiative is worth exploring further. See Kate McCarthy’s analysis of the “politics of dialogue” as interfaith coalitions consider who may be invited to the table and as responses to the invitation may vary depending, in part, by who is perceived to already be at the table (*Interfaith Encounters in America* [New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007], 84-91).

the United States, the initiative is a partnership between Temple Israel, a reform Jewish congregation; the American Muslim Institute, formerly known as the American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture; and Countryside Community Church, a member of the United Church of Christ denomination which took over the partnership from the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska in 2015. Tri-Faith is an intentional effort on behalf of the founding communities “to be in relationship together as neighbors on one campus, committed to practicing respect, acceptance and trust.”³⁵ Further adding to the significance of this undertaking, the property is the site of a former country club formed for and by the Jewish community of Omaha in 1924, an era when Jews were barred from other local options.³⁶

At the time of this writing, member communities and leaders of the Tri-Faith Initiative are fundraising and, accordingly, each of the buildings is at different phases of construction. Challenges to this intentional co-location have extended well beyond those of a building project; some challenges have been precipitated by events well beyond the local, including the “reverberations” of violence in the Middle East.³⁷ What does it mean to be a “people locally placed” when Muslims, Jews, and Christians who have made a commitment to deepening their relationship in Omaha have friends and relatives on either sides of a violent conflict? The realities of these and other diverse connections invite an exploration of place as “process,” to draw upon geographer Doreen Massey, that is, where places are seen as the locus of “multiple identities and histories.”³⁸ Further, what insights does a commitment to pluralism, which according to Diana Eck, includes room for “criticism and self criticism” and asks for “participation, and attunement to the life and energies of one another,” contribute to a notion of place that is rooted yet fluid?³⁹ And how might this understanding of pluralism encourage the seeing of a place’s uniqueness as being “defined by its interactions” rather than as having “single, essential, identities?”⁴⁰

Cincinnati, OH; Oak Creek, WI; Milford, MA

Doreen Massey’s argument for understanding place as “global” and “progressive” comes in response to critics who argue that attempts to create a “sense of place” in our interconnected and highly mobile world only result in inward-looking and “reactionary” senses of place which feed into—and are fed by—feelings of “uncertainty and anxiety” over the potential loss of one’s place.⁴¹ Relatedly, Tim Cresswell articulates how usage of the term “place” in everyday language links geography with social “arrangement” where some people are deemed by others as “out of place” based on who they are (or who they are

³⁵ “About,” *The Tri-Faith Initiative*, Accessed May 2015, <https://trifaith.org/about/>.

³⁶ “Precisely this Patch of Earth,” *One Nation Indivisible*, August 2013, Accessed May 2015, <http://www.onenationindivisible.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/ONistoryNo.11v6.pdf>.

³⁷ For this example, I am indebted to the 2014 case study “Gaza Reverberates in Nebraska,” developed for the Pluralism Project by the Rev. Dr. Marcia Moret Sietstra.

³⁸ Massey quoted in Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd Edition, 2014), 108.

³⁹ Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How A “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 70-71.

⁴⁰ Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” in *Space, Place, and Gender*, ed. Doreen Massey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 152.

⁴¹ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd Edition, 2014), 98.

not).⁴² Massey, in her notion of a “global sense of place,” presents a concept of place that recognizes its connections beyond itself while finding ways to “hold on to the notion of geographic difference, of uniqueness, even rootedness if people want that without being reactionary.”⁴³

Recently, Christians, Jews, and Sikhs in Southwestern Ohio were inspired to form a symbolic “ring” around the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati. Organizers planned this gesture of peace in light of a local controversy surrounding a public school program aimed to teach high school students about Islam as well as the feeling that, on the world stage, “extremists” get too much attention.⁴⁴ The group was inspired by a similar gesture in Oslo, Norway, where supporters surrounded a synagogue after an attack on a Jewish community in Denmark.⁴⁵ In 2012, after the deadly shooting at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin, vigils, memorials, and solidarity events took place at that location and at *gurdwaras*, churches, and public spaces around the country. One such vigil at a *gurdwara* in Milford, MA, drew hundreds of people, including members of the local Muslim community who broke their Ramadan fast with prayer on the lawn of the *gurdwara*.⁴⁶

In each of these examples individuals and members of different faith communities made a decision either to show up or, in the cases of the community under attack, to open up their doors as a response to violence and tragedy. These gestures can be read as statements about the kind of places those who show up and those who welcome envision their city or town to be. To use Cresswell’s framing, when neighbors show up in support, it is an affirmation to the affected community that they are, in fact, *in place*, despite any violent attempts that may seek to emphasize that Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, or others are somehow *out of place*. At the same time, these examples illustrate how someone else’s place can intentionally become part of the maps of others who may not otherwise foster a connection to that particular place. How might the gesture of welcome, the opening of doors to people beyond one’s own particular community lead to the ascription of additional “symbolic and imaginary investments of a population,” to use Relph’s terms?⁴⁷ The question is germane, too, for the religious who participate in programs like Interfaith Immersion in Atlanta, and

⁴² Ibid., 163. In his chapter “Working with Place – Anachronism,” in *Place: An Introduction* (Cresswell, 2014), Tim Cresswell explores different ways in which some people are seen as “in-place” and others “out-of-place,” drawing separate examples from social identity and sexuality, experiences of homelessness, and the existence of refugees.

⁴³ Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” in *Space, Place, and Gender*, ed. Doreen Massey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 152.

⁴⁴ “Local Muslims Host Faiths to Stand for Peace,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 3, 2015, Accessed May 2015, <http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2015/05/03/interfaith-muslims-west-chester/26841019/>.

⁴⁵ “Local Muslims Host Faiths to Stand for Peace,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 3, 2015, Accessed May 2015, <http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2015/05/03/interfaith-muslims-west-chester/26841019/>.

⁴⁶ “Framingham Man Remembers Relative Who Died Protecting Temple as Open-Hearted; Other Faiths Show Support in Milford,” *The Boston Globe*, August 7, 2012, Accessed May 2015, <http://www.boston.com/metrodesk/2012/08/06/framingham-man-says-relative-among-those-slain-attack-sikh-temple-wisconsin/wNpXG7OQ8YPRCPk4J5zigJ/story.html>.

⁴⁷ Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, xii. Further analysis is warranted here to explore the “flows of power and negotiations of social relations” (Relph) at work here, perhaps paralleling Doreen Massey’s examination of the ways in which social location impacts a person or group’s relationship to mobility and opportunity in an era of increased globalization.

further exploration is warranted to consider how different communities within the same city (and individuals within those communities) experience place and the process of place-making differently depending on their social location.⁴⁸

Orientating for Next Steps

I acknowledge that by drawing from explorations of place and place-making in religious studies, education, and geography, this article attempts to cover much ground, even when the miles between Atlanta, Omaha, and Cincinnati are not taken into account. From my vantage point as a particular “situated observer,” there is still much ground to cover and much that warrants further probing. For instance, what is the breadth and depth of the layers of meaning inscribed not only upon places that have been interfaith from the outset (like the Tri-Faith Initiative) but also those places that welcome pilgrims and neighbors? And, acknowledging this essay has located its discussion mostly with those affiliated with religious institutions, what kinds of “homes” and boundary crossings are brought to the fore when the focus is on individuals who may be active in interfaith efforts but not be affiliated with a particular religious community and/or who draw from many traditions?⁴⁹

Further, what additional possibilities emerge when place and a commitment to pluralism are put into conversation? Does the latter, insofar as it is manifested in local projects of engagement, contribute to a deepened sense and awareness of place like that sought by proponents of place-based education? Efforts like Interfaith Power and Light and city-based organizations like Faith in Place in Chicago are intentional about bringing ecological awareness into the interfaith picture.⁵⁰ Could being attentive to the kinds of places other interfaith efforts are imagining and building also contribute to an ecological awareness of some kind? And what new insights emerge for considering pluralism, as a strategy for engaging religious difference, not as antithetical to a “people locally placed” but rather a contributor to it if “place-making” is seen as a process attentive to connections both global and local? Much ground left to cover indeed.

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⁴⁸ Doreen Massey takes up this theme in “A Global Sense of Place” referring to the “power geometry,” that is recognizing different groups distinct relationships to “flows and interconnections” which comprise a place (Massey [1994], 149).

⁴⁹ This question is posed bearing in mind that the “religious are migrants as well as settlers,” (Tweed, 75) and that belonging to a particular group ought not be seen as simply stasis.

⁵⁰ Accessed May 2015, <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org>; <http://www.faithinplace.org>.

Diana Eck's Concept of Pluralism as a Norm for Civic Education in a Religiously Diverse Democracy
By Brendan W. Randall

Introduction

Over the last half century, the United States has become one of the most religiously diverse nations in world (Eck, 2001). In 2011, twenty-five scholars in religious studies and education met to discuss the implications of such religious diversity on civic education (Biondo & Fiala, 2014). A general consensus emerged that the legal protection of religious freedom was necessary, but not sufficient, to prepare students to become citizens of a religiously diverse democracy. In addition to such legal protection, the norm of civil discourse was critical. As the conference organizers, Vincent Biondo III and Andrew Fiala, explain, “the challenge for citizens is learning to remain civil and tolerant, while disagreeing with others and learning about new religious ideas” (p. 10).

In encouraging civility, Biondo and Fiala also advise educators to avoid “lightning rod” (p. 9) issues such as creationism, abortion, and sexual orientation, because these issues “are toxic to interreligious cooperation and civil discourse” (p. 9). Such lightning rod issues, however, are the ultimate test of any proposed norm as a means of negotiating conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs. For members of a diverse democratic society to coexist despite their differences, they need norms for discussing the issues that divide them the most. If the norm of civil discourse is not sufficient for this purpose, the solution is not to avoid lightning rod issues, but to ask what additional civic norm is needed. One such norm is Eck’s conception of religious pluralism.

The following presents a brief argument in favor of this proposition by examining the Day of Dialogue, an annual event in which conservative Christian students express religious opposition to behavior that does not adhere to heterosexual norms, especially homosexual relationships (Focus on the Family, 2014a). The Day of Dialogue’s focus on a lightning rod issue, sexual orientation, makes it an excellent case study for a normative analysis of civil discourse as a civic norm for negotiating conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs and identifying an additional needed norm, namely pluralism.

Free Expression and Civil Discourse

Religious student speech critical of homosexuality presents a dilemma for many educators in the United States. Even when such speech does not technically constitute harassment, it targets a vulnerable and historically marginalized population (Lee, 2014). Restricting such speech may help protect this population, but it also limits free expression (Curtis, 2007). For those who resolve the dilemma in favor of free expression, a common justification is that freedom of religion and speech enable members of a diverse democratic society to coexist despite their differences (Haynes & Thomas, 2007). Acknowledging concerns about harassment, however, many advocates of free expression also suggest an

ethical norm of civility in discussing sexual orientation (Haynes & Thomas, 2007; American Jewish Committee & First Amendment Center, 2012).

The United States Supreme Court set the modern legal standard for student free expression in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969). As the Court famously stated, “students [do not] shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate” (p. 506). The Court went on to conclude that schools may not limit student expression, even offensive speech, unless such speech “would substantially interfere with the work of the school or impinge upon the rights of other students” (p. 509). Although the Supreme Court has recognized other limited circumstances in which schools may restrict student speech, such as lewd speech (*Bethel School District #403 v. Fraser*, 1986) or speech promoting illegal activity (*Morse v. Frederick*, 2007), *Tinker* remains the dominant standard (Lee, 2014).

The *Tinker* standard applies to religious student expression (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2003), and courts routinely have found religious speech opposing non-heteronormative behavior constitutionally protected (Bilford, 2008). In *Nuxoll v. Indian Prairie School District #204* (2008), for example, a high school student expressed religiously-motivated opposition to the Day of Silence, an event designed to promote awareness of and combat harassment based on sexual orientation and gender expression. Among other things, the student wore a t-shirt that read “My Day of Silence, Straight Alliance” on the front and “Be Happy, Not Gay” on the back (p. 670, emphasis in original). The school district censored the t-shirt and the student sued, alleging a violation of his First Amendment rights. The Seventh Circuit agreed, concluding that the t-shirt did not involve the level of disruption required under *Tinker*. In reaching this conclusion, the court expressly invoked the metaphor of a “marketplace in ideas and opinions” (p. 671). With one exception, every federal court to consider comparable religiously-motivated speech has reached a similar conclusion, and the Supreme Court vacated the only contrary decision (*Harper v. Poway Unified School District*, 2007).

Although various scholars have questioned these decisions (Bilford, 2008; Saunders, 2011; Lee, 2014), educators must operate within the bounds of the existing law. In line with the dominant legal framework, the First Amendment Center, a non-partisan organization devoted to research and education on free expression issues, helped to develop guidelines for addressing disputes over sexual orientation in the context of public schools (Haynes & Thomas, 2007). These guidelines emphasize the First Amendment right of students to express their opinions, including religious beliefs, but also recognize a right to be free from harassment in school. The guidelines attempt to balance these rights by affirming free expression while advocating civil discourse. Stressing that “how we debate, and not only what we debate, is critical,” the guidelines urge that “all parties involved in public schools should agree to debate one another with civility and respect” (p. 148). Various groups, including the Christian Educators Association International and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educational Network (GLSEN), have endorsed these guidelines.

A similar balance between free expression and civil discourse also appears in a more recent set of guidelines published by the American Jewish Committee, a Jewish

advocacy and human rights organization, in conjunction with the First Amendment Center (2012; see Appendix B). Although this second set of guidelines addresses free speech and harassment in general, it includes the specific example of religious student speech critical of homosexuality. In response to speech on controversial issues, such as sexual orientation, the guidelines emphasize that “suppression of speech should be the last, not first, resort,” but add that “public schools may—and should—encourage all students to communicate with others in a tactful, respectful manner” (p. 9).

But as Biondo and Fiala’s (2014) advice to avoid lightning rod issues indicates, civility alone in conjunction with free expression may not be sufficient for a religiously diverse democratic society whose members hold conflicting beliefs on controversial issues. If civility does not inherently enable members of such a society to meaningfully interact and coexist despite their differences, schools need to promote an additional norm through civic education. The question is what that norm should be. If the norm of civil discourse is insufficient for citizenship in a diverse democratic society whose members hold conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs, then what additional norm should schools promote through civic education that is consonant with the First Amendment’s protection of freedom of religion and speech as currently interpreted by the judiciary?

The Normative Case Study

The question of what additional norm schools should promote through civic education is a philosophical one grounded in the contemporary legal, educational, and social landscape in the United States. In addition to the scholars who met in 2011, a number of other philosophers also have addressed religion and civic education in the United States context (Kunzman, 2006; Macedo, 2000; Spinner-Halev, 2000; Stolzenberg, 1993). I intend to build on this scholarship. Rather than use ideal theory, however, I intend to employ a normative case study, which reflects a non-ideal perspective that norms can and should be developed from actual experience.

Ideal theory approaches the development of norms through the assumption of an idealized social context in which the members of society typically are equals and comply with the rules governing the social order (Rawls, 2005; Mills, 2005; Stemplowska, 2008). It embodies a fact-value distinction: the proposition that close empirical observations of the particularities of lived experience are intrinsically distinct from value judgments and thus are neither necessary nor appropriate for developing ethical norms.

Various philosophers, however, have challenged the fact-value distinction and the purported superiority of ideal theory in developing ethical norms (Held, 1984; Mills, 2005; Thacher, 2006). For these scholars, lived experience is critical to the formation of normative principles. Virginia Held (1984), for example, contests the assumption that ethical norms developed in the abstract are more valid than those based on experience. At the heart of Held’s critique of ideal theory is the observation that we live in a non-ideal world. Charles Mills (2005) attacks ideal theory because it often reflects the privileged perspective of historically empowered groups, such as middle-class, white males, and ignores the experience of the traditionally marginalized. For Mills, the critical flaw in ideal

theory is its failure to acknowledge institutional forms of oppression and the barriers they present to the achievement of ideal norms. Consistent with such critiques of ideal theory, Thacher (2006) argues for the empirical examination of specific situations to generate normative value. He calls this approach the “normative case study” (p. 1637).

The Day of Dialogue affords an excellent subject for a normative case study regarding civil discourse as a means of negotiating conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs. First, the Day of Dialogue reflects the prevailing emphasis on free expression and civil discourse. The event’s organizers explicitly invoke the principle of free expression in defending the event and express a desire for civil dialogue. Second, the event involves a lightning rod issue, the morality of non-heteronormative behavior. Although public opinion on the morality of non-heteronormative behavior is shifting, deep divisions remain as demonstrated by recent disputes over the balance between religious freedom and anti-discrimination. Sexual orientation, accordingly, provides a critical case for testing the philosophical sufficiency of any norm in addition to free expression. If the norm is analytically sufficient to negotiate deeply conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs on a highly contested issue such as sexual orientation, then the norm also may be sufficient for other lightning rod issues.

The Day of Dialogue

The Day of Dialogue is an annual event in which conservative Christian students express religious opposition to non-heteronormative behavior (Focus on the Family, 2014b). According to Focus on the Family (2014a), which sponsors the event, the Day of Dialogue “is designed to empower Christian students who have a heart for sharing Christ’s love and express a Biblical perspective on current-day issues with peers” (para. 1). The stated goal of the event is to counter the allegedly “one-sided manner” (para. 5) in which schools address marriage and sexuality by presenting an alternative, religious view. The event’s national coordinator, for example, invokes a marketplace of ideas framework to justify the event: “We believe truth rises to the surface when honest conversations and a free exchange of ideas are allowed to happen” (para. 2).

Focus on the Family asserts that the Day of Dialogue serves to promote civil conversations. Focus on the Family, for example, prepared speaking cards for students participating in the event. Although the cards embodied a theological opposition to non-heteronormative behavior, they also emphasized a theme of love and even expressed concern for harassed students. In 2014, for example, the cards stated that Jesus “loves every person” and included a commitment “to stand up for students who are being teased, bullied or harmed” while simultaneously asserting that God “designed the best, loving plan for relationships and sexuality” (Focus on the Family, 2014c).

Embedded within the Day of Dialogue, however, are fundamental truth claims. According to Focus on the Family (2014b), for example, the Day of Dialogue “gives you, as a student, an opportunity to express the *true model* presented by Jesus Christ in the Bible—who didn’t back away from speaking truth, but neither held back in pouring out His incredible, compassionate love for hurting and vulnerable people” (para. 1, emphasis in

original). Furthermore, although the supporting materials express concern about harassment, they do so only in the most general terms—“[Jesus’] example calls us to stand for those being harmed or bullied” (Focus on the Family, 2014b, para. 1)—and actually discourage students from supporting anti-harassment policies that explicitly address harassment based on sexual orientation or gender expression.

The Day of Dialogue accordingly reflects an uncompromising stance regarding sexual orientation that is far from universal, even among Christians, and inherently fails to display mutual respect for differing truth claims (Randall, 2013). The fundamental nature of the truth claims associated with the Day of Dialogue undermines the ability of students to negotiate conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs. In particular, the Day of Dialogue encourages students to oppose the civic as well as moral acceptance of non-heteronormative behavior. For example, the Day of Dialogue encourages students to resist efforts associated with the Day of Silence, which includes the adoption of anti-harassment policies that specifically address sexual orientation and gender expression (Focus on the Family, 2014b). Research indicates, however, that such policies are associated with reduced harassment of LGBT students (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012). The Day of Dialogue thus invokes the marketplace of ideas to maintain institutional privilege for a historically dominant group, heterosexuals.

The Additional Norm of Pluralism

The reinforcement of institutional privilege associated with the Day of Dialogue suggests that civility in addition to the expanded conception of free expression associated with the marketplace of ideas is normatively insufficient to negotiate conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs. One response for educators is to adopt a more limited approach to free speech than the marketplace of ideas. As discussed above, however, the marketplace of ideas reflects well-established First Amendment law and educators cannot simply ignore the law. Educators, accordingly, must consider other norms in addition to civility. Given that the fundamental flaw of the Day of Dialogue is the failure to display mutual respect for differing truth claims, a logical additional civic norm would require mutual respect for conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs.

Such mutual respect does not have to entail avoiding conflicting truth claims or adopting relativism. Although scholars such as John Hick (1982, 2004) have advocated an ecumenical form of pluralism that stresses commonality across religious difference, this ecumenical approach does not accommodate exclusivist truth claims (Dueck, 2014). The result is a limited form of pluralism that effectively fails to include those who hold exclusivist truth claims, such as many conservative Christians. To ensure mutual respect but avoid such exclusion, an expanded form of pluralism is needed that entails mutual respect for conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs understood as more than mere tolerance, but not unqualified acceptance.

One of the most prominent scholars in religious studies to propose such an alternative conception of pluralism is Diana Eck (Eck, 2001, 2007). In contrast to Hick, Eck (2001) defines pluralism as “the dynamic process through which we engage with one

another in and through our very deepest differences” (p. 70). For Eck, pluralism involves “active engagement with . . . plurality,” “the active attempt to understand the other,” and “the encounter of commitments” (pp. 70-71). The last point is critical. As Eck explains, pluralism “does not displace or eliminate deep religious commitments,” but rather “is engagement with, not abdication of, differences and particularities” (p. 71).

Unlike the limited form of pluralism reflected in the ecumenical vision of pluralism, the conception of pluralism Eck advocates can accommodate those with exclusivist truth claims. This latter form of pluralism asks individuals with such truth claims to display mutual respect for conflicting worldviews not by abandoning the exclusivity of their truth claims, but rather by acknowledging that the reasoning they find sufficient for their beliefs may not be sufficient for others. Including this conception of pluralism as civic norm for negotiating conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs adds additional dimension to the framework of free expression and civil discourse.

Because Eck’s conception of pluralism enables individuals to approach differing truth claims without having “a forced choice between dogmatism or parochialism on the one hand and relativism or skepticism on the other” (Goodman, 2014, p. 2), students, such as conservative Christians who view non-heteronormative behavior as immoral, can affirm the truth of their beliefs without insisting that others accept such beliefs. Because fidelity to their beliefs is no longer linked to occupying a dominant social position, pluralism enables students to reconsider existing power relationships without having to compromise their identities. Conservative Christian supporters of an event called the “Golden Rule Pledge,” for example, consider non-heteronormative behavior immoral, but support laws recognizing same-sex marriage and anti-harassment policies that specifically including sexual orientation (Randall, 2013).

Implications and Limitations

The discussion above calls into question the dominant emphasis on legal principles, particularly the First Amendment, in guidelines and resources on religion and education, including religious expression on contested social issues (American Jewish Congress, 1995; Freedom Forum, 1995; U.S. Dept. of Ed., 1998, 2003; Haynes & Thomas, 2007; American Jewish Committee & First Amendment Center, 2012). The law may impose requirements on educators, but it does not eliminate discretion. Rather than merely ask what is legally permissible in a situation, educators should ask what is normatively desirable. With respect to negotiating differing worldviews and religious beliefs, an additional desirable norm is pluralism.

The norm of pluralism, however, is not without limitations. Like civil discourse, it balances the First Amendment’s broad protection of free expression and thus represents a compromise. In the context of religious student speech opposing non-heteronormative behavior, the norm of pluralism discourages speech associated with the Day of Dialogue. Pluralism, however, does not necessarily discourage all religious speech critical of non-heteronormative behavior. It is possible to oppose non-heteronormative behavior on theological grounds, yet still display mutual respect for conflicting worldviews and

religious beliefs (Randall, 2013). Nonetheless, by discouraging certain perspectives on the issue, the norm of pluralism raises the paradox of toleration: a tolerant society can survive only if it is intolerant of some beliefs (Stolzenberg, 1993; Macedo, 2000; Spinner-Halev, 2000). The norm of pluralism, however, *maximizes* tolerance consistent with the mutual respect required in such a society (Thiemann, 1996; Connolly, 2005).

Conclusion

Writing in the midst of the Second World War, Reinhold Niebuhr (1944) noted the fundamental challenge diversity poses in a democracy:

One of the greatest problems of democratic civilization is how to integrate the life of its various subordinate, ethnic, religious and economic groups in the community in such a way that the richness and harmony of the whole community will be enhanced and not destroyed by them. (p. 124)

Preparing students for citizenship in a diverse society whose members hold deeply conflicting worldviews and religious beliefs, accordingly, is an essential task of civic education in a democratic society. As the Day of Dialogue demonstrates, however, the dominant emphasis in the United States on civil discourse as a means to moderate free expression is normatively insufficient to accomplish this task. When applied to lightning rod issues, such as sexual orientation, the norms of free expression moderated by civility fail to acknowledge structural inequities in the marketplace of ideas and do not require meaningful mutual respect for differing perspectives. To fully prepare students for a diverse democratic society, educators also should promote the more robust norm of religious pluralism as understood by Eck.

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Out of Incorporation, Pluralism **By Lucia Hulsether⁵¹**

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Twenty years ago Diana Eck interpreted the United States national motto, *e pluribus unum*, as a slogan for American religious pluralism. Eck claimed that these words, engraved in the country's currency, capture the potential for "world's most religiously diverse nation" to hone difference as a civic strength, rather than as a threat or source of division. "*E pluribus unum*," she insisted, should not be read as a mandate for homogeneity. It aspires neither to exclude nor to assimilate expressions of difference. At its best this motto, and the nation it describes, locates "unum" not in religious sameness but in "oneness of a commitment to the common covenants of our citizenship out of the manyness of religious worlds."⁵² "For the pluralist," Eck declared, "the American promise [is] to come as you are, with all of your differences, *pledged only to the common civic demands of citizenship.*"

It is difficult to disagree with such high-minded rhetoric. Calls to religious pluralism—and invocations of its proud legacy—are ready-made rebuttals to calls for theocracy, religious violence, and racism. And yet such disagreements are many. Organizations established to promote pluralism—such as the Pluralism Project and the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC)—have become lightning rods for interventions against the classically liberal ideals that they espouse.⁵³ Pluralism, as articulated by these critics, is not the uncontroversial democratic telos that it initially may seem to be. They ask questions like the following: What are the "common demands of citizenship," and why does pluralism require adherence to them? Who gets to be a citizen? What naturalization procedure is required? In what political and economic system must citizens participate? What kind of subjectivity must "citizens" perform? On whose histories is this citizenship built? To what futures does it aspire?

The answers to such questions seem fairly clear in Eck's rendering of pluralism. Citizenship is measured against American citizenship; the progression of pluralism is charted through American history; the actualization of pluralism is witnessed in American electoral politics and, increasingly, American-style global capitalism.⁵⁴ If pluralism retains "manyness" within its ultimate civic "oneness," the possibility for gaining entry rights into the "oneness"

⁵¹ I am grateful to Jason Smith and Emily Owens for their lucid and generous feedback on this essay.

⁵² Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a 'Christian Country' Became the Most Religiously Diverse Nation on Earth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 31.

⁵³ For a volume that compiles some of these critiques, see Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen, ed. *After Pluralism: Rethinking Religious Engagement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For an account of how a stress on liberal pluralism has reproduced imperial logics in the historiography of U.S. religion, see Rosemary R. Hicks, "Between Lived and the Law: Power, Empire, and Expansion in Studies of North American Religions," *Religion* 42, no. 3 (2012): 409–424.

⁵⁴ For examples of the connection between American nationalism, citizenship, and the idea of American religious pluralism we need only consider key texts published on the topic. Two examples are Diana Eck's *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Became the Most Religiously Diverse Nation on Earth* and Eboo Patel's *On Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America*. See sections below for elaboration of these points.

begins to sound increasingly conditional and circumscribed. With this concern at hand, a phalanx of scholars and activists has rejected pluralism both as an aspirational discourse and as a political program.

Such critics launch sharp accusations: Pluralism is a Trojan horse for U.S. military and economic imperialism. Interfaith dialogue, advanced in pluralism's name, is a civilizing project. Working in tandem, pluralism discourse and interfaith initiatives advance American exceptionalism, in ways both overt and covert, both conscious and unconscious, both actively instrumentalizing and *passé*. They announce that "America" is the most religiously diverse and/or most exceptionally pluralist nation on earth. This means that the United States and its citizens are uniquely capable of combatting religious extremism—through both directive intervention and soft development. All of this translates to a mandate for American global hegemony, exercised in the name of development, dialogue, and democracy.

Critical appraisals of religious pluralism have emerged within a broader academic turn to interrogate the limits of liberalism as political philosophy, mode of discourse, and affective economy. Scholars like Chandan Reddy, Wendy Brown, Roderick Ferguson, Jasbir Puar, and Rey Chow have argued that American imperialism is justified by the idea that the United States is uniquely capable of incorporating and managing diversity.⁵⁵ Scholars within the academic study of religion have extended such critiques to the embrace of pluralism within their own discipline. As early as 2001, Peter Gardella mused that the "American attachment to pluralism and the universalism of our elite culture express the simultaneous drives toward freedom, riches, and global empire that have marked the whole history of Europeans on this continent."⁵⁶ The critique is *not* that pluralism fails to be sufficiently inclusive. It is that its ideal of inclusion—especially when paired with soliloquies about the exceptional capacity of America to accommodate difference—recapitulates arguments to expand U.S. economic, political, and military power into further corners of the globe.

Yet liberal pluralism discourses have remained largely unmarred by critics of pluralism's disciplinary power. Indeed there has been no indication that advocates of pluralism are even aware of the gravity of the structural charges leveled against them. There is significant irony here—given that these groups of scholars share much in common. Both are preoccupied with human difference as a problem and a promise. They circulate in the same universities. They participate in the same professional associations. They are concerned about threats to human freedom. Presumably they all have good intentions. And still an impasse seems to divide them. It divides not "pluralists" from "extremists," nor "scholars of religion" from "theologians," nor "the west" from "the rest." It separates people

⁵⁵ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Chandan Reddy, *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the U.S. State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁵⁶ Peter Gardella, "Pluralisms in the United States and in the American Empire," *Religious Studies Review* 29, no. 3 (2003): 259.

who celebrate pluralism as ascension toward freedom and those who condemn it as a descent into tyranny.

Why have these groups of scholars remained so disconnected? In this essay I argue that their impasse is prefigured in part by the ways the most pervasive discourses of pluralism—those propagated by the Interfaith Youth Core and the Pluralism Project—tend to relate to their various critics.⁵⁷ On one hand, discourses of liberal pluralism survive and grow by responding to a subset of their critics—those who critique them only on the basis of their capacity to accommodate more difference—and working harder to include them at the multicultural table. This is to their credit. On the other hand, the logic of liberal pluralism has thus far failed to conceptualize a response to critiques that would result in anything other than the simple inclusion of a new identity category at the multicultural table. It is exactly this incorporative logic that the most sophisticated critics of pluralism fault.

Pluralism as Philosophy of History

This special issue of the *Journal for Interreligious Studies* is framed by Diana Eck's definition of pluralism as the "energetic engagement with diversity, active seeking of understanding across lines of difference, encounter of commitments, and willingness to engage (and remain) in dialogue." Eck's definition asserts pluralism as an action that takes place in the present moment, as each individual seizes responsibility for creating a better world *today*. But, as the opening essay for this issue gently suggests, the habits prescribed by pluralism come with a history—Christopher Cantwell specifically names "America's founding documents"—which act as both their past precedent and their inspiration for subsequent work. This mode of historical consciousness, by which I mean not events themselves than the commitment to identify one's past in order to work toward a possible future, is the key to the discourse of pluralism. To explore the historical imagination of pluralism is to delve into the internal logic of this discourse. Ultimately, this inquiry uncovers the sites at which pluralism's flagship values—such as the commitment to engaging difference—reach a point of breakdown.

Pluralism is a complicated term that various actors have mobilized in myriad ways over the past three centuries. For the purposes of pluralism's role in contemporary conversation about religious diversity, however, it is possible to break its definition into three parts. It is an assertion of a *past legacy* (pluralism is in America's founding documents); an injunction to *present practices* (we live up to this legacy by coming to the table and committing to stay), and vision for a *better future* (our present habits hasten tomorrow's more unified world). Pluralism is a philosophy of history, wherein the past is marked by identitarian discord and the future is marked by collective reconciliation. Pluralism is an ethical

⁵⁷ Of the numerous interfaith organizations in the US, I focus in this essay on the Interfaith Youth Core because of its impressive, unmatched role in popularizing interfaith initiatives on over 400 college campuses and providing to prospective interfaith leaders. IFYC staff have served on Presidential Interfaith Councils, consulted the State Department, and—since the organization was founded in 2002—won prominent grants from prominent nonprofit and corporate philanthropic groups.

program, where pluralist subjects transform discord into collaboration and reconciliation. *Out of many, one.*

In the United States, this process comes to its most developed fruition in the historical drama of the American nation-state. Eboo Patel explains it this way in a promotional video for his book, *On Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America*:

I think the spine of the American project is pluralism, is this idea that we're a nation that welcomes the contributions of all communities and nurtures cooperation between those communities—and we were the first nation in human history to have that idea, to believe in that dream, and there's still people who don't believe in that dream. And what that means is that those of us who believe in the American project of pluralism cannot be shy, we have to be on the rise. ... [T]his is work that would make our founding fathers proud.⁵⁸

Within this quotation, the basic ingredients to a pluralist philosophy of history—past legacy (“we were the first nation” and “founding fathers”), present practice (“welcomes the contributions of all communities and nurtures cooperation”), future goal (“we have to be on the rise”)—converge on the United States landscape. For Patel, this does not mean that America is special in *essence*; it means that American citizens have *made* America exceptional. National exceptionalism is built through exceptional enterprise; Americans have earned, and must continue to earn, their exceptional status on an international stage. Patel insists, “America is exceptional not because there is magic in our air but because there is fierce determination in our citizens. ... Every generation has to affirm and extend the American promise.”⁵⁹

This imperative to “affirm and extend” is made urgent by a seeming litany of religious tensions gripping the world. “Increasing religious diversity is causing increasing religious conflict,” declares the Interfaith Youth Core.⁶⁰ A cursory glance at today’s newspaper headlines—the ascent of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, ongoing violence in Israel and Palestine, mass-kidnappings by Boko Haram in Nigeria, the trial of Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev—seems to reaffirm the high stakes of interfaith dialogue projects. Patel continues in the promotional clip,

If we are not advancing a positive, public discourse about religious diversity, we sacrifice that territory to terrorists, and folks who want to dominate, and folks who want to spread prejudice. Those people don't just go away. They get defeated. It's the forces of pluralism that rise up and live out the next

⁵⁸ Eboo Patel, Interfaith Youth Core, website, “Sacred Ground,” <http://www.ifyc.org/sacred-ground> (accessed March 1, 2015).

⁵⁹ Eboo Patel, *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013): xxviii.

⁶⁰ Laurie Goodstein, “An Effort to Foster Tolerance in Religion,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2011.

generation of the American project. Sacred Ground is a call to this generation's forces of pluralism.⁶¹

The forms of violence and extremism that gain public reputation as being “terrorist” and “prejudiced”—the kinds of violence that demand intervention from a secular state that values pluralism— usually are coded as Muslim, racialized as non-white, and situated as either outside of the U.S. body politic or traitorous to it.⁶² This is not a coincidence. William Cavanaugh has shown that the concept of “religious violence” emerged alongside the modern secular state as it sought to control and dominate populations elsewhere. Modern states cordon religion into a private sphere, while describing their public spaces as secular, rational, and neutral. What is understood as “religious violence” depends on the distribution of power. To condemn some forms of violence as “religious”—while simultaneously disavowing the religious genealogies of the secular state and its armies—is to underwrite other kinds of violence as neutral, rational, secular, and supportive of pluralist futures. The concrete effect of this discourse is to affirm the (rational, humanitarian) violence of a secular state, as deployed against (irrational, fanatical) violence of religious extremists (most often in the Middle East).⁶³

Within this binary-producing discursive field, threats to the hegemony of the state and its pluralist ethos double as a mandate for the state to expand its reach. “There’s still people who don’t believe in that dream,” reminds Patel, “...and that means that those of us who believe in that dream have to be on the rise.” Threats to pluralism must be neutralized for the protection of the common. But preferably, those who pose a threat to pluralism are reformed and incorporated as part of its growing realm. This is the extension of the “American promise,” which finds expression in the extension of citizenship to people long denied it. The failures of pluralism are an argument for more and better pluralism. Menaces to pluralism are opportunities to expand its borders.

Expanding the border of the American democratic influence is, within the pluralist narrative espoused by Patel and Eck, an opportunity to achieve both *social* and *historical* progress. Such expansion writes the next chapter in a pluralist narrative. This is a developmentalist frame on history, wherein past inadequacies are replaced by a promise of a better future, through the work of enlightened subjects in the present. This form of historical reasoning is the inheritance of Enlightenment philosophy and the watermark of

⁶¹ Patel, IFYC, “Sacred Ground,” <http://www.ifyc.org/sacred-ground> (accessed March 1, 2015).

⁶² Certainly this is not *always* the case—one need only think of white Christian bombers of abortion clinics, often tagged as “religious extremists” in mainstream media—but on a grand scale, it is undeniable that the people most often targeted by secular interventions against religious extremism have black or brown bodies. Jodi Melamed lucidly describes how in the context of shifting regimes of race within neoliberal multiculturalism, “categories of privilege and stigma determined by ideological, economic, and cultural criteria overlay older, conventional racial categories so that traditionally recognized racial identities—black, Asian, white, Arab/Muslim—can now occupy both sides of the privilege/stigma opposition.” The overall *effects* of these discourses remain largely stratified along lines of race, in addition to producing new racial formations. Jodi Melamed, “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism,” *Social Text* 89 (Winter 2006): 42.

⁶³ William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Religious Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

modernity, described by Gustavo Benavides as marked by conscious “self-extrication from a situation now regarded as naïve.”⁶⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty has shown how these historicist narrative structures are repeated to different political ends by thinkers from Hegel, to Heidegger, to Marx.⁶⁵ Christian evangelicals in particular have long made use of this genre in millennialist commitment to prepare the world for Christ’s return and to build multicultural churches. Consider, for example, a *Christianity Today* article, published on Martin Luther King Day in 2014, on the state of race in American churches. “Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated hours in American life,” the survey announced, gesturing toward King’s famous quip. And yet “most worshipers think their church is fine the way it is.”⁶⁶ To fail to foster diversity within the universal church is to abrogate the duties of discipleship. “The Bible talks a lot about men and women from every tongue, tribe, and nation being in heaven,” a spokesperson admonished, “so it might be good to get accustomed to that heavenly expression here and now.”

Here, we have all of the basic ingredients of a laxly Hegelian philosophy of history. There is an assertion of an origin (the revelation of God’s word in the Bible); a future ideal (the kingdom of heaven); and a prescription for present action in the meantime (to diversify churches). The *Christianity Today* article and Patel’s quote mimic each other. In their intersecting madlib, “America” substitutes for “Kingdom of God”; “God” substitutes for “founders.”⁶⁷ In one version, multiculturalism represents and actualizes the Kingdom of God. In the other account, multiculturalism represents and actualizes America.

My comparison of a Christian evangelical magazine with the Interfaith Youth Core should not be taken as an argument that Christian missions and interfaith projects are the same thing. Nor am I echoing the common argument that pluralism is covertly Christian.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Gustavo Benavides, “Modernity,” in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁶⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton UP: 2000).

⁶⁶ Bob Smietana, “Sunday Morning in America Still Segregated – and that’s OK With Worshipers,” *Christianity Today*, January 15, 2015, <http://www.lifewayresearch.com/2015/01/15/sunday-morning-in-america-still-segregated-and-thats-ok-with-worshippers/> (accessed February 1, 2015).

⁶⁷ In the suggested “madlib” version of these pieces, the *Christianity Today* article would read, “American founding documents talk a lot about men and women from every tongue, tribe, and nation being in the nation, so it might be good to get accustomed to that national expression.” Patel’s quote above would read, “I think the spine of the Christian project is pluralism, is this idea that we’re a church that welcomes the contributions of all communities and nurtures cooperation between those communities—and we were the first people in human history to have that idea, to believe in that dream, and there’s still people that don’t believe in that dream. And what that means is that those of us who believe in the Christian project of pluralism cannot be shy, we have to be on the rise.”

⁶⁸ A growing group of scholars suggests that American pluralism, and the secularism that supports it, is normatively Protestant. The argument is that the discourse of religion as ossified in United States law maps onto a normatively Protestant definition of religion as belief-centered, individual, and privatized—and disciplines subjects according to its rules. It is not possible to be counted as a “religious” subject if one’s practice is not legible to this concept of religion. For the most developed versions of this argument, see Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, ed. *Secularisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) and Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). For a thick historical account of how the legal category of religion has facilitated violence against

Rather, it is to examine developmentalist historical narratives as one potent move in a repertoire of exceptionalist claim-making, deployed by a wide variety of political, cultural, and religious organizations. Cultural studies scholar Jasbir Puar defines exceptionalism as a “paradoxical” form that “signals distinction from (to be unlike, dissimilar) as well as excellence (imminence, superiority), suggesting a departure from yet mastery of linear teleologies of progress.”⁶⁹ In our examples, the *mastery of the linear teleology* is denoted by an assertion of a unique origin that is blooming into a reconciled future. Insofar as these narratives assume some version of teleological progress, the invocation of past materializing as a better future offers a sense of being superiors in a cosmic race into universal futures. And still, some actors operate outside the governing force of this trajectory—demonstrating that this particular destiny is a product of particular effort. These are the agents who, by educating and recruiting others, midwife the reconciled future. They cajole others from point A to point B. They are, so to speak, *in* but not *of* the teleology.

The rhetorical parallelism between the *Christianity Today* article and IFYC is not the only point of common ground between them. The somewhat counterintuitive affinity between a classically (if not politically) liberal interfaith NGO and certain evangelical churches manifests in an emergent effort to incorporate evangelical Christians into the interfaith movement. Patel urges interfaith leaders not to exclude evangelical and conservative people from their organizations—because interfaith work aims toward “bridging social capital” among “different” groups, rather than “bonding social capital” by bringing homogenous groups together. To bridge social capital is to engage more “identities” in projects that enhance civic life for the whole. *Out of many, one*. In ten years, IFYC has led interfaith organizations in broadening its general lexicon from “religious traditions” to “religious and philosophical traditions” (to include atheists and humanists) and from “people of faith” to “people who orient around religion differently” (to include anyone who has a relationship to “religion” as a category). Seemingly mundane examples about normative words belie the extent to which interfaith groups have become veritable entrepreneurs at expanding their constituencies. As with missionaries who gained global reach by translating the Bible into multiple languages, interfaith projects thrive on their capacity to accommodate identitarian claims about difference. This reconciliation of difference indexes historical progress.

Those who ascribe to developmentalist philosophies of history, whether stated in abstract terms or in terms of practices, need not change their structural form in response to conflicts with designated others. They annex new common ground. They move their borders. In other words: the presence of difference and critique is not an occasion for basic structural overhaul of the philosophy of history that informs pluralism. Rather, critique of pluralism is merely occasion for the territorial growth, incorporation of others, and historical ascent of pluralism. *Interfaith projects grow when they encounter new forms of*

Native American nations, see Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁶⁹ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

difference to incorporate; they rely on critics for their growth. The incorporative thrust of pluralism discourse reflects the expansionist logic of empire, as it surrounds more people, builds more bridges, transgresses more borders, and wins more hearts for its cause.

Pluralist Dyspepsia

When pluralist and interfaith projects depend on the presence of critique for their own flourishing, it becomes difficult to constructively question their *structural* logic of incorporation. Again, in normal circumstances, every threat to pluralism is license for it to get better at its job. So when critics argue that the problem is not in a *failure to include*, but rather in the *politics of recognition and incorporation*, the critique easily gets lost in translation. The argument is not that advocates of pluralism and interfaith cooperation need to include more atheists, more black people, more Muslims, or more evangelicals in their organizations. The argument is that the incorporative project is the problem—namely because this is the logic of American empire, which itself becomes stronger by transgressing ever more borders and adding more and more subjects to its realm. If pluralists engaged the fundamental grievances of their critics, their developmentalist narrative might shift to the point of non-recognition.

When we accept as natural the basic terms on which so much of pluralism discourse is constructed—the primacy of the nation-state, the concept of “world religions,” a concept of redemption through linear time, the naturalness of the individual and self-contained subject—other configurations of difference and power are rendered not only invisible, but even unthinkable.⁷⁰ If we take the terms of the Pluralism Project and IFYC for granted, for example, it becomes quite difficult to see how discourses of religious diversity might contribute to the regimes of anti-Muslim violence that these organizations decry. We should analyze the increased prominence of interfaith initiatives in this country in light of the tremendous pressure upon Muslims to answer to a U.S. state with sophisticated and growing regimes of racial and religious profiling. In this climate, interfaith and pluralist initiatives can play numerous roles. They might affirm America’s most authentic legacy of pluralism and cajole from suspicion to engagement. They might offer an informal platform for religiously and racially minoritized subjects to demonstrate their patriotism. They might offer much-needed avenues for self-protection against a state that has assumed a disturbingly active role in surveilling its own citizenry. But in all of these roles, they will necessarily go beyond simply *providing* a platform for celebrations of citizenship and demonstrations of loyalty. When harnessed to state power—which they increasingly are—organizations founded to promote pluralism naturalize criteria for dividing pluralists from terrorists, civilians from barbarians, the saved from the damned, lives worth saving from lives marked for death.

⁷⁰ I am grateful to Richard Amesbury for feedback on an earlier project, in which he helped me find this language.

Conclusion: On Common Ground

The stakes of pluralist discourses, and the subject-formations and taxonomies that they produce, are literally life and death for people who remain illegible to or dispossessed by U.S. regimes of governance. Within the logic of pluralism, individual and communal progress is measured the capacity to reconcile identitarian difference into shared “common ground.” This plausibility structure for this common ground is “America,” as formal state and imagined community. The condition for stepping onto this ground is access to—and a commitment to uphold—an exceedingly specific performance of citizen-subjectivity.

Numerous interfaith organizations encourage participants to seek “common ground” in shared values and commitments to service, while steering clear of divisive and politicized issues that accentuate difference. But underneath the abstract discursive ground of pluralism, there still remains the common ground of soil, territory, resources, and homeland. If the soil is poisoned; if an army occupies the territory; if the homeland’s police gun down the populace; if the wealthy hoard the resources; if the perpetrators and guilty bystanders describe ourselves as pluralists; if we cannot hear the calls of those who point us to our faults—of what pluralism do we speak?

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Pluralism: Problems and Promise

By Diana L. Eck

The Pluralism Project began twenty-five years ago as a research project, investigating the many ways in which America's religious landscape has changed with the renewed period of immigration launched 50 years ago this year, in 1965, with the passage of the Immigration and Nationalities Act. This issue of the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* brings together several perspectives on pluralism, each of which raises important issues, drawing for the most part from research in on-the-ground studies. This gives me the opportunity to reflect on the roots of the Pluralism Project, why it began, and what are the problems and the promise of this research.

The project began during the early 1990s when the University of Chicago, under the leadership of Martin Marty and Scott Appleby, had commissioned scholars from across the academy to write about the dynamic phenomenon loosely identified as "fundamentalism" that seemed to have new relevance in global life. A term that had a particular identity in American Protestantism was used as a marker for the phenomenon. The term was used, not without controversy, but also not without full awareness of its deficiencies on the part of the remarkable group of scholars who contributed to the first of the five volumes published, *Fundamentalism Observed* (1994). As important as the Fundamentalism Project was in its time, and in ours, I was not tempted to participate.

For intellectual reasons, and as a matter of temperament and personal history, I was not drawn to this aspect of human religious life. I was far more interested in finding out what was happening at the other end of the spectrum, in those places, those movements, those coffee shops where people of every faith were expressing themselves anew in more hopeful and positive ways, even in contexts fraught with the religious and ideological energies of extremism. I had seen some of those places, those movements, those coffee-shop thinkers and the emerging relationships between and among people of different religious traditions. For most of the 1980s, I had served on a working group of the World Council of Churches on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, a twenty-five person commission of people from member churches of the W.C.C. from Korea to Kenya, charged with thinking anew about the relation of Christians to neighbors of other faiths. It marked a turn in a history that had long been driven by mission and evangelism, a history that to be sure had grown over the centuries in the entourage of empire and colonialism. And yet that same history had given rise to vibrant churches that now asked tough and complex questions about their relations with people of other faiths in their own societies.

There was, of course, a range of responses to the challenge of living in communities and contexts of religious difference. There were and are exclusivists whose life as Christians is secured by theological and social exclusivism that could be seen as part of the "family resemblance" of fundamentalism. There were inclusivists who had a more benign incorporative vision, including strangers and neighbors at the table they had already set in the Christian household. But there were also those who had a different vision, one based on the conviction of mutual witness—that Christians did have a faith and witness to share, but

also had a witness to hear from the voices and visions of the people with whom they shared a village, a city, a society. Many who saw this turn in Christian thinking used the term "pluralist" to describe it. The logic of pluralism was not one of incorporation, but of genuine encounter, an encounter that recognizes difference, that does not elide differences into a "we" that is already known.

As the Fundamentalism Project got underway, therefore, my interest and engagement was with movements at the "other end of the spectrum," having found among Christians and among Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu colleagues, a range of dynamic and deliberate movements toward a new relationship with one another. The movement of people as refugees, political, and economic migrants had reshaped many societies, including those in Europe and including our own in the United States. What was happening as societies became more religiously complex? How were religious or theological views of each other challenged and changed? How did religious traditions handle their own internal divisions and diversities? Were there interfaith initiatives? Were there new civic organizations or advocacy groups? How did public schools, hospitals, and city councils respond to the growing diversity?

Approaching these questions as a scholar, I asked how we in the academy might study the complexity of this new world. How might we study the forms of multireligious and multicultural engagement that I have come to think of as "pluralism?" Pluralism, after all, is not just the enumeration of difference, and pluralism is certainly not premised upon the celebration of diversity in a spirit of good will. Pluralism is the engagement of difference in the often-difficult yet creative ways that we as scholars can observe, investigate, and interpret. We were challenged to study something that had received very little attention: the deliberate construction of multireligious relationships.

In my 2006 address to the American Academy of Religion, I asked, "What is at stake in gaining an intellectual grasp of these forms of pluralism?"⁷¹ I believe it is nothing less than understanding the currents of religious history and the remaking of religious life in our time. It is a history that is, to be sure, rent with episodes of violence that hit the newsstands every day. But it is also an evolving history shot through with new forms of connections that do not seize the headlines, except now and then, and locally. We need scholars in the academy who make it their work to see, track, and analyze what is going on." I was not the only person thinking about this, as this issue of the *Journal of Interreligious Studies* so clearly demonstrates.

Ellie Pierce has been a pioneer for the Pluralism Project in researching and developing case studies focused on some of the local controversies that have been the "stretching exercises" of America's expanded and complex religious diversity. As we mined two decades of cumulative research and thought about some of the persistent issues, it became clear that there were many that could be used as discussion cases, in much the same way that

⁷¹ For the full text of my remarks, see "Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2007) 75 (4): 743-776. Accessed July 9, 2015. <http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/content/75/4/743.full?keytype=ref&ijkey=hwfp56s1RLBhmWt>.

Harvard Business School uses case studies to teach decision making in business and corporate contexts. These cases are embedded in local contexts, but the questions they raise are those that perplex many communities in the U.S. and beyond.

Ellie has worked closely with those involved in each local context to understand the perspectives they have on the issue. What is at stake for them in, for instance, the public broadcast of the call to prayer? Are there legal issues here? Long-standing community issues? Religious issues? Emotional issues? A case study asks students not simply to talk *about* the situation, but to inhabit it, to try to articulate points of view of various stakeholders, including perspectives they may not hold. It is an in-class exercise in the kind of engagement and dialogue that is foundational to pluralism.

The Vanderbilt team has also undertaken to look closely at the local context. Their research project asks what is actually happening in the many local initiatives that go under the name "interfaith." Looking at "local ecologies" the team has been seeking to understand the experience of those involved in interfaith practice. They looked at five interfaith groups in the southeastern U.S.—groups that themselves represent something of the range of interfaith initiatives: a campus-based student group, a women's dialogue and service group, a congregation-based community service group, a youth dialogue and service group, and a parent-focused school-based group.

It is clear that the markers of religious identity (Christian, Muslim, Jewish) structure the experience of interfaith relations in these initiatives only in the most general sense. The complex identities of participants include their experience in families and extended families, in the workplace, and in the school. And the communities from which participants come vary widely in their interest in or commitment to interfaith engagement. Some are long-established liberal Protestant or Catholic churches that have a clear commitment to interfaith relations and give positive support to those involved in these ventures. Even churchgoers who don't participate themselves applaud those who do. Not so some of the communities the authors describe as "immigrant/ethnic minority faith communities." They often don't see interfaith work as critical at the level of their own community. The "energy and focus" of such communities is of necessity on getting the community established. This confirms some of my own experience visiting with members of Cambodian or Vietnamese Buddhist, South Indian Vaishnava Hindu, and Muslim communities. They are busy with what is most immediately at hand for them—festivals and worship, finding permanent homes for their community, perhaps buying or building a place of worship, dealing with both elders and teenagers, relating to newcomers who have come from the home country.

The members of these communities who do participate in interfaith activities often have quite a different experience from that of those coming from more established communities, especially churches. The Vanderbilt researchers report that not only are their home communities reluctant, or at least not proactive, participants, but as individuals they often feel called upon to "represent" a complex and often misunderstood community. They become "the Muslim voice" or "the Hindu voice," in the eyes of their interfaith colleagues, when in fact they themselves realize just how diverse their communities are. Even so, they often feel the responsibility to be educators, steering into the prevailing misunderstandings

of "Muslim violence" or "women's role in Islam," for example, in order to disabuse their interfaith colleagues of misleading impressions. In addition, our colleagues report on the perception that interfaith relations is sometimes seen as "risky" for minority faith communities: even adults might feel unprepared for theological dialogue as "representatives" of their community, and they might simultaneously feel that their young people are distinctly vulnerable to the powerful voices of a majority Christian community. The Vanderbilt project has enabled us to have a much closer look, not just at organizations, but at the experience of participation.

It is the close look that is also so valuable in the contribution of Aziza Hasan who has given us a portrait of *NewGround: A Muslim Jewish Partnership for Change*. In the varied multireligious landscape of Los Angeles, *NewGround* has truly excavated and settled new ground in the practice of pluralism, beginning with 20 young Jewish and Muslim professionals who commit themselves to a year of engagement with one another through weekend retreats and twice-monthly meetings. Building relationships is front and center as the participants work together to present what is most authentic and meaningful in their own tradition to the other. This involves story-telling, expressing one's own narrative as a Muslim or Jew, in the context of a wider and complex identity. Of course, such interfaith encounter reveals the many ways in which "our own" tradition is diverse and often messy and fractured with its internal diversity. Recognizing and expressing this diversity requires a certain vulnerability, both to those of the "other" faith, but also to those other voices in one's own faith.

Deep and sustained encounter, developing mutuality in the practice of dialogue, is not easy and *NewGround* has skilled facilitators, both Muslim and Jewish. While *NewGround* encounters are not issue driven, there is no way that national and international issues and controversies can be excluded from the dialogue. Islamophobia? Antisemitism? Israel-Palestine? This is rough terrain for dialogue, based in careful listening and mutual respect. Many an evening panel or program has brought these issues to the foreground. The participants come, speak, raise their voices, and leave with no commitment or obligation to return the next day, the next week, the next month and continue the discussion. The sustained, year-long trajectory of *NewGround* is a very different encounter, one in which relationships are built and tested on this rough terrain, understanding that conflict is "natural and inevitable, yet not intractable."

Here the language of dialogue, brought to sustained encounter, creates a process of learning, both about the "other" and oneself. A year as a fellow in this program enables young professionals to claim some new ground for themselves. This is leadership training for a world in which encounter can often mean collision.

Alumni of the program, now in its 8th year, often continue the relationships they have built by undertaking joint initiatives, such as the Muslim-Jewish initiative to help communities with clean water. While modest in size, *NewGround* has a potentially wide impact. There are many more applicants for the year-long fellowship than can be accommodated. There are now high school *NewGround* groups now. And *NewGround* participants also bring their experience to large-scale public events, to National Public Radio, and to other civic engagement non-profit groups.

If pluralism is about relationship-building across lines of difference, it is also about place-making, that is, creating a new sense of place in a diverse and changing landscape. Whitney Barth explores this aspect of pluralism: the importance of the local, of place and context in relationship building. The cultural and religious diversity of many cities testifies to the fragmentation and fracturing of communities and the emergence of ghettos in which migrants, refugees, and religious minorities live unto themselves. What are some of the ways in which the relationship building that is critical to interfaith initiatives can also be "place-making?" For immigrants, this means recognizing the particular place from which they come, creating a sense of place through establishing temples, gurdwaras, churches, and mosques on new ground, and finding a place in a broader and more complex landscape.

Barth asks how—in practice—people of diverse faith communities have been able to create a new sense of community in their own city, a sense of community that embodies "the symbolic and imaginary investments of a population." A city is not just a giant, sprawling town of indeterminate border, center, and ethos. It is not simply an agglomeration of people, industry, and power in one place. A city is an ordered human habitation with a center, perhaps many centers, with an ethos, with a sense of boundedness however large. It is, as Lewis Mumford put it, "energy converted into culture."

The city is one of the most important sites of inter-religious encounter in our time. It is the primary workshop of pluralism. There are new ways in which diverse religious communities inhabit common space, many informal ways in which citizens are ever more aware of the multiple religious lives lived right next door. On the bus, one might pass the cathedral, the storefront Islamic prayer hall, the new mosque, the small Islamic bookstore. Cities expand awareness, but cities are also places of isolation and ghettos, places where the pieces of a complex mosaic touch, but don't overlap or mix. Yet in cities of all sizes across the United States today there are new spaces created deliberately, carefully, with creativity and often with difficulty, where people of different religious faiths come together in a multitude of interfaith, multifaith initiatives. They begin to constitute a human infrastructure for the traffic and encounter of a new era.

Whitney Barth gives several examples from among the hundreds that have been studied by the "Interfaith Infrastructure" initiative of the Pluralism Project. Interfaith Immersions in Atlanta, for example, is a deliberate attempt to see the city of Atlanta as a place of pilgrimage, framing a program of visits to the religious centers and houses of worship as a sacred journey to make connections, to explore and learn, and to deepen relationships. "Immersion" also suggests an intention that is deeper than what Robert Wuthnow describes as the "ceremonial forms" that interfaith activity too often takes. Barth asks how such pilgrimages of leaders, of laity, of students enable those who live in Atlanta to reimagine and re-inhabit their place.

In Omaha, the Tri-Faith Initiative has brought together three congregations to settle new ground by co-locating their houses of worship. Temple Israel, the American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture, and Countryside Community Church UCC have intentionally joined a partnership to place themselves on the same plot of land, as neighbors. Temple

Israel has already moved in, and the Islamic and Christian communities are envisioning the day when they will as well. Story-telling, relationship building, and place-making are all part of this initiative. It is place-making that is not proprietary, with one inviting the others in. From the beginning, it is a shared initiative. And it has been fraught, from the beginning, with the difficult issues that *NewGround* attempts to address. How do their relations begin to fray when violence in the Middle East, in Israel, in Gaza? How do they address the tensions, head on. This is the kind of place-making, reimagining the local, that takes courage.

Barth also lifts up some of the many ways in which someone else's "place" becomes part of one's own landscape of sacred meaning. Vandalism and threats against a religious community calls out the members of other communities join in solidarity with neighbors they may not even know. She cites many examples, including religious communities and interfaith groups that responded with services of solidarity and mourning following the killings at the Oak Creek Sikh Temple in Milwaukee in the summer of 2012. For many Americans, this high-profile hate crime, widely covered in national news, became the first view they had of a Sikh community and the individuals whose lives were lost. In response to the June 2015 killings inside the AME Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston, many religious leaders, including those who led services in that very church, explicitly cited the experience of the Wisconsin Sikhs whose house of worship had also become a scene of violence.⁷²

From the beginning, it has been clear that research on the ways in which people encounter religious and cultural difference must look outside religious communities and interreligious initiatives. City councils, zoning boards, courts, corporations, and hospitals—all are sites where values and assumptions, claims and counterclaims, are negotiated in a diverse society. Nowhere is the respectful engagement of difference more important than in educational institutions. Here we need to be acutely aware of the ground on which we stand. Is it the civic ground that informs our lives, choices, and norms as citizens, co-citizens, in a society premised on the rights we have as citizens, regardless of our religious communities or convictions? Or is it the religious/theological ground of our own tradition of faith that informs the challenges and choices we face in a diverse society?

Here Brendan Randall, both a lawyer and an educator, investigates the dilemmas in schools where a diverse student body is increasingly the norm. Constitutionally protected standards of free speech and freedom of religious expression might well protect speech that is offensive to others or considered harassment by others. In a landmark 1969 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." Offensive speech cannot be limited without the evidence that it "would substantially interfere with the work of the school or impinge upon the rights of other students."
(*Tinker v. Des Moines*).

⁷² "Houses of Worship Hit by Violence Offer Advice, Prayers for Charleston" *The Huffington Post*. June 18, 2015. Accessed July 9, 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/18/faith-charleston-church-shooting_n_7613088.html.

Randall takes what some call a "lightning rod issue" to test for a norm of discourse that would be adequate for the case: the Day of Dialogue, a day designated to enable and empower Christian students to present their views on sexuality, sexual orientation, harassment, and marriage. Sponsored by the family-values group, Focus on the Family, the day aims to bring a viewpoint not ordinarily heard in what they consider to be the liberal context of the public schools. Students who participate express views that are rooted in clear truth claims and not really amenable to the mutuality of dialogue.

Randall raises a question that underlies the discourse of dialogue: How does one engage in dialogue with those whose truth claims are exclusivist? He finds the model of religious pluralism to be more helpful than the civic viewpoint of civil discourse, especially the insistence that pluralism is not premised on relativism or the retreat from commitments, but is the encounter of commitments. Religious speech is not excluded, but expressed in the context of mutual respect for others who may not accept the fundamental premises of one's truth claims. It is this norm that Randall as an educator finds most conducive to education for citizenship in a diverse society: not the norm of civil discourse, avoiding the hot-button issues that are divisive, but what he calls the "more robust norm of religious pluralism" that gives room for free expression in a context of mutual respect for real differences.

The final essay by Lucia Hulsether raises some important critiques that help us assess what we think we mean by pluralism. First, a clarification: The Pluralism Project is a university based research project and not an interfaith organization, not as the author puts it, "an organization established to promote pluralism." The Interfaith Youth Core, which is discussed as if its mission and work were one and the same with that of The Pluralism Project, is one of the kinds of organizations and initiatives that is a subject of our research. To be sure, the IFYC has drawn upon Pluralism Project research and has hired former Pluralism Project student researchers and staff. There are many other kinds of interfaith organizations, with many constituencies and modes of operation. The challenge I posed in "Prospects for Pluralism" is for academics to take into the domain of our interest and research the encounters, engagements, hybridizations, and initiatives that are happening in our own communities, our cities, states, and in our nation. I could see an eventual graduate student thesis on the Interfaith Youth Core.

Of course, undertaking to study something necessitates setting forth a general definition of what it is we are looking for. While documenting the changes in the religious landscape of Boston gives us a map of extraordinary and relatively "new" ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, this diversity alone is not pluralism. It is just a new set of facts, neighborhoods and neighbors, socio-economic, racial, and educational issues. Our purview has been deliberately limited to the United States as a practical matter, although our work has become a model for that of other scholars, especially in Europe. Here in the U.S. local engagements with religious difference have been studied by the scholars in this volume.

One concern of Lucia Hulsether and some of the scholars she cites from the *After Pluralism* volume is that religious pluralism re-inscribes and reifies the notion of "religions" as "units," skimming over the deep and abiding internal differences, the historic and

continuing diversity and inherent messiness of religiousness as one of many forms of identity. Of course, any serious student of "religion" will realize this sooner or later, the sooner the better. After five years of Pluralism Project research, our graduate students pressed for a CD-ROM format in presenting research and representing communities not only in text, but in visual form. In developing the CD-ROM, *On Common Ground*, we struggled with our router page, *America's Many Religions*, recognizing that "religions" are diverse, many without a term that even comes close to the term "religion."⁷³ To make matters worse, we decided to use buttons with religious symbols, to "represent" fifteen "religions," warning the reader/user that beneath the seemingly simple button is a complex and dynamic river of tradition, history, practice, and interpretation. We included on the router page itself (now online):

But this visual image of separate boundaried circles—graphically convenient as it is—is highly misleading, for every religious tradition has grown through the ages in dialogue and historical interaction with others. Christians, Jews, and Muslims have been part of one another's histories, have shared not only villages and cities, but ideas of God and divine revelation. Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, and Sikhs have shared a common cultural milieu in India, while in East Asia the Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian traditions are not only part of common cultures, but are also part of the complex religious inheritance of families and individuals whose lives are shaped by all three religions.

And there is a second caution: each tradition represented so neatly by a circle and a symbol has its own internal complexity which you will discover as you click one of those circles and begin to explore the tradition. The Native Peoples of America are not one, but many, each with its distinctive life-ways. The Hindu tradition is a rich tapestry of many streams of thought and devotion, many gods, and many regional cultures. The Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic traditions have spanned the world and speak in hundreds of languages and cultural contexts. Many traditions have their own complex internal disagreements and sectarian movements: Sunni and Shi'i Muslims; Orthodox and Reform Jews; Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians. And each tradition has many voices—women and men, traditionalists and reformers, clergy and laity.⁷⁴

These are, of course, the issues all of us who teach in introductory religious studies wrestle with and articulate in one way or another in countless contexts. The issues raised here are our common concerns: How do we use language and critique it at the same time?

⁷³ See *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, <http://www.pluralism.org/ocg/> and <http://www.pluralism.org/religion>.

⁷⁴ "Rivers of Faith" in *America's Many Religions*, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*. Accessed July 9, 2015. <http://www.pluralism.org/religion/rivers-of-faith>.

Of the many important issues raised by Hulsether, perhaps the most significant to address is her contention that the "logic of pluralism" is one of incorporation, a term she uses and critiques often. A pluralist move, in her view, would respond to ever increasing constituents of diversity—humanists, atheists, gay activists—including even critics of the relationships of pluralism at the "table." I would agree that the incorporative move characterizes many ways of dealing with difference—include more and more people. In this sense, the project of incorporation is, indeed as Hulsether contends, like the project of mission movements and, if you will, the project of economic and political imperialism. This is not, however, the project of pluralism and is a fundamental misunderstanding of pluralism in my view. Pluralism is more about transformation, not incorporation.

The inclusivist or incorporative move is usually majoritarian. Universities, for example, are proud to admit a more diverse student body and include a more diverse group of trustees and faculty, but assume that the structures of the university will not change when they do. The pluralist would insist that the shape of the table will change, the structures will change. The inclusivist understanding of citizenship and the polity of government is fixed and when newcomers come, they assimilate to the way things are. The pluralist would insist that newcomers bring new perspectives. Their voices count and that the incorporative, "melting pot," image of America is one that is not worthy of true democracy. The incorporative move is to assume one can incorporate "others" whomever they are into the structure of a body that is already formed. The pluralist would insist that process of engagement, however conceived, will change everyone. What Hulsether calls the "structural logic of incorporation" is, in my view, antithetical to the process of relationship building that is pluralism.

When I say that the "language" of pluralism is dialogue, this means the expression of critique and counter-critique, the mutuality of voices that count and have something to say. It is a language of give and take, and the bridges of understanding created by dialogue are also bridges snarled with traffic. Dialogue is not always the language of agreement or "common ground," but the language of relationship. But as in any relationship, it is strongest in its mutuality, and it is weakest when one incorporates the other.

The most important of our two-letter words is "we." Who do we mean when we say "we?" As scholars, in our analysis of what "we" see happening in the world, we need words to describe the range of new initiatives and relationships that are cropping profusely in cities and towns, colleges and chaplaincies. Pluralism is such a word. It is not a doctrine, but a process.

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Interview: The New MA of Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College

By Stephanie Varnon-Hughes, Martin B. Copenhaver, and Daniel L. Lehmann

Part of the mission of the *Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* has been to both document and amplify the emerging fields of study in interfaith learning. We are pleased to share here news of a new academic program developed in close collaboration between Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College.

The Global Interreligious Leadership degree is designed to help current and future religious and communal leaders—clergy, educators, chaplains, and activists—develop the knowledge and skills to serve effectively in an age of unprecedented interaction among people with different beliefs and practices. Students in the program can be enrolled primarily at either institution, but will interact extensively with students in the parallel program at the other school, creating together a vibrant and lasting interreligious cohort.

In July 2015, JIRS editor-in-chief Stephanie Varnon-Hughes interviewed the presidents of both Andover Newton and Hebrew College to learn more about the goals of the new MA program and about the presidents' personal impetuses for interfaith learning and dialogue. The interviews are captured here.

With Andover Newton Theological School President Martin B. Copenhaver:

SVH: Can you tell me about the importance of interfaith dialogue and learning in your professional and personal life?

MBC: For the 34 years before I became President of Andover Newton, I was a local church pastor. In that capacity, my role was to nurture faithfulness within the Christian tradition, but I have always believed that to be a faithful Christian means, in part, learning how to relate to those who come from other traditions. So, as early as the 1980s, I sought to develop relationships with leaders of other faith traditions. During my last 20 years as a pastor, the congregation I served in Wellesley, Massachusetts had a very rich, multi-dimensional partnership with the synagogue in Wellesley—Temple Beth Elohim. The relationship between our two congregations, and my friendship with Rabbi Joel Sisenwine of Temple Beth Elohim, were among the most enriching aspects of my pastorate in Wellesley. My own experience resonates with the approach to interreligious learning we are committed to here at Andover Newton—it is not merely learning *about* other faith traditions, it is learning *with* those of other faith traditions.

SVH: What has inter-religious learning and leadership meant for Andover Newton and your students and faculty? How is your community enriched, how do students who graduate benefit from this commitment?

MBC: At Andover Newton, interreligious learning, particularly as it is lived out in partnership with Hebrew College, is not just something we do—*it is part of who we are*. Everyone at Andover Newton—faculty, students, administration—could testify to how this partnership has enriched our school. Our students are prepared to lead interreligious endeavors wherever they are called to serve after graduation. **This partnership is so central to who we are that it is now hard to imagine Andover Newton without Hebrew College.**

SVH: Tell me about the genesis of the idea for this MA program---and what hopes do you have for it.

MBC: I am as proud of this new program as I would be if I had given birth to it myself! The truth, however, is that it grew out of the ongoing work of CIRCLE and the wonderful co-directors, Or Rose, Jenny Peace, and Celene Ibrahim-Lizzio. Each one of these three remarkable people—from the three Abrahamic traditions—is recognized as a leader in interfaith engagement. Together they are a visionary, trailblazing team. This new degree (Master of Arts in Global Interreligious Leadership) is the first-of-its-kind anywhere. **My hope—and expectation—is that it will equip students to be a major influence on interfaith organizations and movements in this country and beyond.**

SVH: Do you think interfaith engagement is an "ought to," or is it still an option for many of us? How do our commitments change as religious leaders (even within our own singular traditions) when we engage with an-other?

MBC: I would not call interfaith engagement an "ought to," because that makes it sound like a grim duty. To me, interfaith is a joyous "get to do" because it opens up new relationships and understandings. The word that comes to mind for me in relation to interfaith engagement is "essential." I choose that word because it conveys both the importance and the centrality of such engagement—it brings us to the essence of things, religiously speaking.

SVH: What most excites and inspires you personally about this program, and the students/community it will bring to your campus?

MBC: I think this new MA degree will invite us into an even deeper engagement with others across religious differences. I am particularly excited that two of the first four students to be admitted to this new degree program are Muslim. That's a first for us, and helps us live out our vision of being a leader in interreligious engagement through relationships. **That is not only groundbreaking for Andover Newton, it is potentially groundbreaking for the world in which we live.**

With Hebrew College President Daniel L. Lehmann:

SVH: Could you begin by talking about the importance of dialogue in your personal and professional life?

DLL: I've been involved in inter-religious learning since before moving to Boston, when I was living in Baltimore, at the Institute for Christian-Jewish Studies there. I also was involved in a project that Mary Boys and Sarah Lee led of Catholic and Jewish educators who met in a colloquium over a period of a number of years. That was really my first intensive introduction--both the work with ICJS in Baltimore and the work on this colloquium. These had a major impact on my own interests, and gave me a sense of calling to advance the work of inter-religious learning. When the opportunity came here in Boston to take this position at Hebrew College, part of what was so exciting to me about it was the chance to re-engage with inter-religious learning and leadership because of Hebrew College's relation to Andrew Newton. I was also excited about the opportunities of being a part of a Jewish institution of higher learning that was positioned as it was—*to be able to engage in a significant way as a leader in inter-religious learning.*

So, I would say that it's been one of the highlights for me professionally to be involved in it and to play a small role in advancing that work. When I came to Hebrew College, one of the things that was most compelling to me was the opportunity to have Hebrew College join the Boston Theological Institute, in order to create a broader inter-religious community that we could participate in. Since BTI had been all Christian collaboration, it represented a real shift that I had to push the BTI to consider—that was a successful process and we've been very happy to be a part of the consortium. And again, I consider that a significant step both for Hebrew College and for the inter-religious community here in Boston, that we have been able to integrate and work with these other institutions that have similar orientations as theological centers.

SVH: Could you talk about the genesis of the idea for the MA program and the hopes you have for Hebrew College students for the program?

DLL: Really, the MA program idea came as a result of the work that we've been doing over the years with Andrew Newton and then offering courses and the CIRCL fellowships. It seemed a natural progression to take the next step and coalesce and culminate that work in a more structured formal graduate program. Because up until now, it's really been kind of an addendum to other educational programs that we have been pursuing. I think the momentum that has been generated and the kind of trajectory that we've been on has led us to think that we really need to formalize this.

We need to concretize it and we need to be able to contribute to the field by producing people who have some specific credentials and training in the area of inter-religious leadership. I think for Hebrew College students in particular, both those in other programs who will do this Master's degree as well as people who come specifically for the Master's degree, **this is an opportunity to really focus energies in a direction that I think is really an urgent 21st century calling.**

Pluralism has been a central motif of Hebrew College and this Master's degree is an important extension of that commitment—pluralism—but it also has real global implications. One of the things that we're really trying to push forward is to understand

how Jewish resources can contribute to advancing certain global arenas or projects in which Judaism and Jewish values are in conversation with other religious traditions.

SVH: Do you think interfaith engagement is a “must” or do you think it’s still optional for many of us in emerging religious and inter-religious readers?

DLL: Well, some people think it’s an option. I don’t. I think it’s an ought. **I think any sophisticated analysis of where is a religious trajectory is headed in the 21st century, must conclude that there’s both a really compelling need for more work and leadership in the realm on inter-religious learning and the relationships that come out of it.** But more than that—we have to generate a vision for the way our religious traditions and religious communities can interact and intersect in generative, productive ways. This creates the need for differences to be acknowledged and celebrated, but we must also find ways for us to learn from each other and to collaborate where that collaboration is appropriate.

Where dialogue is in the second half of the 20th century, especially now that we’re in this year, celebrating the 50th year of *Nostra Aetate*—that period was about dialogue. We’re now entering a period where we really need to be talking about inter-religious learning and partnerships. That’s the next step on what inter-religious dialogue generated, and we need to move it forward.