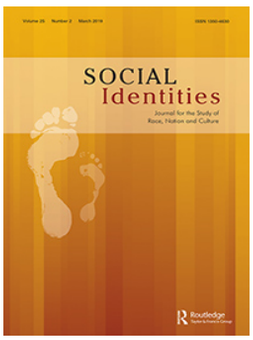

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The spacialization of modern, liberal Muslims with the Canadian nation: an animation of Ismaili Muslim exceptionality

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the production of Muslim exceptionality in Canada. I do this by tracing how Ismaili Muslims, as liberal and modern Muslims are being mapped onto Canada. This mapping happens in relation to other racialized and Indigenous bodies within the nation state. As part of a feminist ethnographic study, this paper specifically analyzes the presence, representation and consumption of a building called the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat on Confederation Boulevard in Ottawa, Canada's capital. This mapping is undertaken through examining the spacialization of liberal, modern Islam and its significance to ongoing colonial nation-building practices in Canada that are rooted in civilizational and humanistic goals. Through this analysis, the paper argues that the exceptional Muslim takes the form not as a body of negation but as a body of difference that is productively distinct and neo-oriental, paradoxically animating in the space of the Canadian nation.

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> As Governor General, I am proud that what Canada is – what it will be, what it seeks to do in the world – is so highly respected by the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community. This building proves the depth of that regard. With your perspective and experience, you have seen that, among the nations of the world, we have created a unique model for human society. Our celebrated diversity, our inclusive views of citizenship, and our peaceable ways of inhabiting our vast territory make us deeply conscious of the larger world. We are honoured that our capital has been chosen for this significant new opening, as well as for an exciting shared venture. It is said that chance makes our parents but choice makes our friends. It is marvellous that we have chosen each other as friends. (2005)

Unlike Adrienne Clarskson's embrace of the Aga Khan and Ismaili Muslim community described above at the sod turning ceremony of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat, the current space that Muslims have taken up in the Canadian public imaginary details the skepticism with which the Canadian multicultural nation recognizes Muslims. Since 9/11, national concerns about who Muslims really are and what they will do to Canada and real Canadians have intensified fears and anxieties about home-grown terrorism, the spreading of religious practices such as veiling, Shariah law and honor killings. The

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fear that mosques are hubs for radicalization is real. These material and value-based threats have been discussed upholding claims to ensure the security and sanctity of Canadian society by underscoring the danger of illiberal Muslims and radical Islam to Canada as a modern, liberal and multicultural society. In response, anti-terrorism legislation passed immediately after 9/11 and its permutations like Bill C-51 outline the two-tier citizenship Muslims are subject to, with their rights and civil liberties under constant question and possible reprisal. Further, in Canada's goal to be a global leader on terrorism taking an uncompromising stance against those Canadian citizens that the government deems terrorist, Bill C-24 allowed the striping of citizenship, despite it being a right and not a privilege. Given that terror has been marked on Muslim bodies, such unilateral power of a government outside of the rule of law is both unsettling and troubling. Calling such moments states of exception, critical race feminists such as Arat-Koc (2005), Razack (2008) and Thobani (2007) have argued that 'Muslims' are now subject to quarantining and handling through the diversion Canadian laws and liberties, as Canada's new risky unmanageable multicultural bodies.

Right after 9/11, it was argued that Canada must be in support of its American allies against the global threat of radical Islam as part of a Western collision. However, since then the project of shaping the war on terror has been articulated through Canada's own survival as a nation ontologically part of Western civilization. The positioning of Canada as 'Western' re-whitened the nation in its settler-colonial roots and re-established the out of placeness of Muslims as racial constructs (Arat-Koc, 2005). This has flattened Muslim subjectivities to one-dimensional social realities. Such national discourses and state practices embedded in the logics of colonial modernity and empire illuminate the fault lines of supposed inherent oppositions in values, ways of life, political interests and world views of 'Muslims' to 'real Canadians'. Mamdani (2004) argues that such 'political encounters' which rely on cultural difference defined in theological Otherness are abstracted out of the very history and social relations that produce the political identity of 'Muslim' and position Muslims as 'diaporas of empire' (Naber, 2014). Take for example the experience of Zijad Delic. In 2010, as Executive Director of the Canadian Islamic Congress, he was invited to speak at Canada's National Defense in Ottawa. Maclean's magazine (October 27, 2010) reported that, although thought to be a moderate, Delics's speaking invitation was revoked by the Harper government due to his associations with the Canadian Islamic Congress, a Muslim faith-based organization in Canada whose various positions were considered 'extremist' to the Canadian government, even though he had spoken at a forum by foreign affairs department held in 2008. Opposition leader Jack Layton criticized the decision, given that Delic was considered to be a respected Muslim leader. The positions of CIC, although embroiled in controversy, primarily dealt with challenging anti-terrorism policies of the Canadian government, publically questioning unfettered support of Israel against the well-being of Palestinians. They were also exposing certain Canadian media for their Islamophobic representations. The organization has now disbanded. Delic, however, was identified in the political and racial construct of 'Muslim' unworthy of national space because of his proximity to those that disturb the coherence of national discourse and policy on Muslims.

Recently, we have seen the Canadian government take a stance against Anti-Muslim discourse. This has been in response to violence against Muslims. A mosque attack in Quebec in January 2017 killed 6 people and injured 19. This precipitated a clear public

stance against Islamophobia from the Liberal government, a starkly different approach to the former conservative government. M-103 motion passed in March 2017 condemning Islamophobia, systemic racism and religious discrimination. We have also seen in response to this tragedy, Canadians creating peace circles around mosques and more explicitly befriending Muslims. Yet, even with these actions, anti-Muslim racism has continued, as have verbal threats of violence against politicians in support of the bill.

Imprinting Canadian national consciousness through such political encounters has provided a particular publically available Muslim cultural politic and social reality in Canada (Zine, 2012), which has constricted Muslims to victims of Islamophobia or threats to the state. As I argue in this paper, however, it is reductive to think that these are the only ways Muslim subjectivity is being enacted within Canada. If go back to Clarkson's words at the beginning of this essay, then we expand the national encounter Muslims are having with the Canadian nation through the Ismaili Muslims. By looking at the Ismailis encounter with the Canadian nation, we actually begin to unravel more paradoxical relations between Muslims and the Canadian nation. Here, I turn to Ahmed (2000) who argues that multicultural nations are involved in processes of differentiation in which it claims difference and incorporates it. This process reconstitutes who are more Other than Other. In doing so, boundaries within the nation and between bodies are defined. That is, Muslims do not occupy a singular subjectivity or position. Rather they are always relationally positioned. Looking at Muslims through this framing in Canada, we begin to unravel the ambiguities of particular bodies to the nation, rather than embrace wholesale the constitution of the Muslim as a fixed Other. Drawing on Ahmed, let's go back to the Delic example. As Maclean's magazine reported on him, simultaneously they reported on the Aga Khan who was invited to speak at the Lafontaine Baldwin Lecture that same weekend. The lecture series is set up through the Institute for Canadian Citizenship established to draw high profile individuals to speak on Canadian citizenship, civic participation and democracy. Contrasting the two Muslim figures, the author John Geddes (October 27, 2010) wrote, 'the Aga Khan's speech went off without a hitch because of *his* [emphasis added] achievement to present himself and the Ismailis as constructive non-threatening face of Islam'.

What if we are in a more paradoxical moment of Muslim encounters with the Canadian nation? What if the distance between Muslims and the Canadian nation is closing, while simultaneously retaining itself? What if this very closure of space through a respacialization of the Muslim subject to the Canadian nation is creating a new kind of exceptionalism? What this paper offers is a spacial animation of and introduction to what I posit as 'Muslim exceptionality'.

I present Muslim exceptionality as an analytic and theoretical tool. Through this tool, we make sense of the simultaneous reduction and maintenance of distance between particular Muslim bodies and the nation. In this process, Muslims also come to be positioned in relation to other racialized people and Indigenous communities in Canada. Muslim exceptionality also helps us understand the social and political animations that are produced when racialized Muslim bodies and nation encounter each other. Muslim exceptionality occurs through particular pedagogical moves. I use pedagogy here to reference social dynamics of power. In these dynamics, three moves are important: Animating distinction within existing differences within the nation state (i.e. Particular Muslims are distinct from other Muslims, or from other racialized or Indigenous Peoples); becoming distinguished

through 'modern' achievements not attained by all Others, while situated in the language of Islam and Canadian identity; and performing and embodying excellence as a neo-orientalizing and civilizational act.

Ismailis national encounter with the Canadian nation carries relations embedded in the colonial history and the war on terror. Their encounters also bring forth specific social enactments that are relational, ambiguous and paradoxical to their encounter in this current moment. In other words, their encounters produce new outcomes and effects. Further, looking at Muslim encounters with the Canadian state in this way complicates narratives about inclusion and exclusion. For this paper, I trace the social and political practices of relationality that emerge as the Ismaili Muslims and their leader the Aga Khan are mapped onto the Canadian nationscape. Specifically, I analyze the presence, representation and consumption of a building called the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat on Confederation Boulevard in Ottawa. To take up this exploration in the Canadian context, I do so looking at relations built through Canadian white settler colonialism and multiculturalism. I examine how in fact Muslim exceptionality comes to be in relation to other bodies of difference in Canada. Through a spacial analysis of the Delegation building, I argue that the exceptional Muslim takes form as a body of difference that is productively distinct and neo-oriental – a body the Canadian nation claims closeness with but through an already constituted 'triangulation' of relations between immigrants, Indigenous People and 'Canadians'. Such Muslims create a new material and discursive mapping between the Canadian nation, Muslims and Islam mingling in the evocations and expectations of modernity, enlightenment and civilization.

Methodology

The explorations in this article are part of a larger research project conducted between 2010 and 2013 in which I examined three layers of encounters Ismailis are having in Canada. I framed said research using a critical feminist ethnographic approach. I made field visits to different projects and buildings of the Ismaili Muslims in Canada developed in the last decade. The field visits were conducted over the course of several days, in which I made observations of the delegation building through a visitor's tour. Further, I engaged in discourse analysis, following the work of Foucault to analyze public articulations of the Aga Khan and others in relation to the delegation building.

Multicultural acquisitions

> The racial and gendered politics of the state were organized through a complex triangulation of relations, with Indigenous Peoples marked for physical and cultural extinction, European settlers for integration, and people of color for perpetual outsider status as 'immigrants' and newcomers'. (Razack, Smith, & Thobani, 2010, p. 5)

The constitution of racialized communities as Other to normative Canadians and Canada is not new to Canada's history and therefore Muslim experiences, such as those of the Ismailis as bodies of difference should be placed within that history.

Ismailis first arrived in Canada during the early 1970s when the country went through a shift in the explicit logic, identity, governing mechanisms and policy. Multiculturalism as an official government discourse was an outgrowth from the Royal Commission on

Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963. The Commission stated that, 'steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of equal partnership between two founding races, taking into account the contribution made by other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada' (Gupta, 1999, p. 191). Although multiculturalism was hailed as a unifying policy and inclusive form of recognition, it had very contradictory affects in which racist and colonial relations were obscured and perpetuated. The notion of the two-founding nation harkened back to the white settler identity of Canada. In this way, the liberal framework of multiculturalism authorized immigrants of color and Indigenous Peoples in inherent differences but always measured against the 'exalted subjects' of the state and Canada's true nature (white-European) (Thobani, 2007). The symbolic and at times explicit regulation of multicultural Others and the aspects of self they could project in society focused heavily on celebrating diversity, while obscuring social relations of power and the varied and opposing struggles with regard to citizenship, belonging, sovereignty and land. Consequently, in the limited frames of reference for communities of colors to identify themselves through the Canadian nation, there has always been pressure to perform 'Canadian' values and ways of life. Often this has happened by representing cohesive communities who experience equality and inclusion while down playing inequities they face. For instance, in an Environics survey (Adams, 2007), most Muslims said that multiculturalism was a strong factor for them. Highlighting it as a 'Canadian virtue' they more often than other Canadians strongly felt it was their virtue. Simultaneously, Muslims also felt discriminated against precisely because of their Muslimness (p. 92). In this way, multiculturalism provides legitimacy to their very existence in Canada as cultural Others, while they struggle to belong and are constituted in racial difference.

As the largest group of Muslims to be accepted to Canada at one time in the early 1970s, Ismailis from East Africa came escaping their expulsion from Uganda passing the point system screening mechanism through a significant agreement made between then Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliot Trudeau and the Aga Khan IV, Imam of the Ismailis (Nanji, 1983). Over the years to come, Ismailis from other parts of the world such as Afghanistan, Syria, Tajikistan, Pakistan and India would also comprise the Ismaili community in Canada.

Settling in Canada, Ismailis as minority Shi'a Muslims also have brought with them experiences of persecution. Historically, they have been antagonistically positioned by Muslims. Such Muslims have highlighted their difference in religious practice and interpretation, arguing that they are heretics and not real adherents to Islam. Even today in some parts of the Muslim dominated world, they live in a precarious status that often magnifies the need to hide their Ismailism and Ismaili identity.

Since European Colonialism in the nineteenth century, Ismailis through the leadership of their Imams, such as the former Imam, Aga Khan III, and current Imam, Aga Khan IV have strongly claimed their Muslim identity in a civilizational and enlightened Islam. This has meant personifying a modern, liberal Islam that they have historically embodied and now materialize in North America, Europe and other parts of the world. The social and political modernization policy of the Aga Khan III was explicit for his followers. He urged them to become like dominant in the countries in which they lived, as a way to assimilate and avoid further marginalization as minorities. He was noted as saying, 'Whatever country you choose to live in, work for it, mix with its people, achieve its outlook and keep religion in its

proper place – in your soul. If you do this, you will find many problems solved' (as cited in Aziz, 1998, p. 1278). It would be wrong therefore to assume that Ismailis socialization as 'modern' Muslims was simply a secularization of their identity and community. In this respect, Aziz (1998) says that the modernizing policy, showed the path to a liberal and rational interpretation of Islam, the acceptance and practical interpretation of which would bring them into the mainstream modern life without in the least betraying the fundamental tenets and injunctions of their religion (pp. xxv–xxvi).

In this way, the Ismailis as a religious community and institutional structure have been embraced as modern Muslims in Europe and North America because their 'modernity' was articulated as both Islamic and in harmony with postcolonial projects of human progress – capitalist advancement, educational meritocracy and active global and local citizenship in countries where Ismailis live (Steinberg, 2011). Although some individual Ismailis might see their modernity as distinguishing themselves from other Muslims, the official discourse of the community speaks in a language that situates them within a pan-Islam. In their ideal, Ismailis have therefore been socialized as Canadian Muslims to live no contradiction between tradition and modernity. Tradition is expressed in a religious acuity and temperament that is, esoteric, peaceful and enlightened, while Ismailis also live out modern expressions of the civil-citizen-subject socially, economically and culturally 'Canadian'.

Confederation Boulevard and Muslim exceptionality making

Razack (2002, p. 7) poses that to 'question how spaces come to be, and to trace what they produce as well as what produces them, is to unsettle familiar everyday notions'. In this section of the paper, I now explore the spacial meaning of the delegation of the Ismaili Imamat on Sussex Drive in Ottawa on Confederation Boulevard. I do this by uncovering the mapping of liberal Islam on Canada and on Indigenous land. This then allows us to see how Muslim exceptionality emerges relationally.

Before we move into examining the Delegation building itself, it is important to understand the land it sits on. Confederation represented the seminal moment in the birth of Canada as a nation state, both symbolically and materially. It is the celebrated moment that sees divergent groups (i.e. French and English) coming together under one banner of Canadian Confederation. Often forgotten in the popular rendition of Confederations materialization and the subsequent creation of Confederation Boulevard is the violence against Indigenous populations through which it was built. Amassing the 'Canadian' geography, the event of Confederation in 1867 made Indigenous Nations accountable to the newborn Canada, not as citizens, but as perpetual colonial conquests. During this time, the expansion of Canada through increased pressure for treaties with First Nations solidified what would come to be the assault on the intentions of the Gus-wen-tah (Borrows, 1997). What should have been an agreement about the sharing of land in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and the colonial apparatus became the moment when Indigenous People were defrauded out of treaty agreements and brought into a deeper system of violent spacial and embodied containment and eradication. It was soon after Confederation that the Indian Act (1876) became, 'Eurocanadian governments apartheid system and beauracratized hatred of native peoples' (Thobani, 2007, p. 48). Given this history then, the impregnating vision of Confederation Boulevard as a discovery and ceremonial route in Ottawa (the nation's capital) – on the lands of the Anishinaabe Nations –

symbolizes not only colonial amnesia but also 'colonial nostalgia'. Derreck Gregory (2004, p. 10) argues that this colonial nostalgia 'is a form of commodity fetishism and cannibalism repatriated to the metropolis … for the aggrandizing swagger of colonialism itself, for its privileges and powers'. The National Capital Commission website, in charge of deciding who occupies Confederation Boulevard reminds us that the 'swagger' of the ceremonial and discovery route in Ottawa, is epitomized in its ongoing expansion and renewal of nation-building activities that keep alive and recharge the nation state. This is enacted through the, 'symbolic identification with an "imagined community" and "collective memory" through foundation myths and heroic narratives, and the identification with particular places' (Gordon & Osborne, 2004, pp. 620–621).

Confederation Boulevard gives form to and popularizes a national imaginary of greatness, sacrifice and multicultural utopia, through the museumification, and continued displacement of First Nations Peoples as artefacts, techno color mosaikas on Parliament Hill (where the representative buildings of the Canadian nation state sit) and the welcoming of multicultural representations on Sussex Drive. Sussex Drive sitting on Confederation Boulevard is considered the diplomatic hub of Ottawa, where many embassy and inter-state relations happen. The optical illusion of Confederation Boulevard and the buildings that occupy Sussex Drive blind the theft, genocide, and one-sided memorialization it is built on. How then do we make sense of the Ismaili Muslims becoming spatially, visually and symbolically present on Sussex Drive through the Delegation building? How is this kind of spatial graphing an enactment of a paradoxical Muslim exceptionality in the continued project of coloniality and nation-building?

The desire of immigrant populations to take up space/land in Canada, through the construction of religious buildings, community and cultural centers, is not new. To be spacially present has meant establishing their place in the Canadian landscape, while giving them markers of identification as Canadian cultural and religious bodies. Erecting visible markers of group identity and representation has come with much struggle, in particular for Muslim communities in Canada. For example, the building of mosques has often been met with bureaucratic and public resistance. Calling these 'land struggles', Isin and Siemiatycki (2002) examine how in the 1990s, 'zoning and planning' difficulties were often experienced by Muslims wanting to build mosques in Toronto. It might be suggested that such activities, which impress the establishment of roots by immigrant and racialized communities, produce anxieties about who can be visible and accessible on 'Canadian' land. Even in the case of the Ismailis, the most recent construction of the Ismaili Centre on Wynford Drive, in Toronto, Canada was met with much resistance at the city of Toronto council level. Some of the public worried about Muslims taking over Canada and soiling it with uncivilized religious and community practices. This was ironic given that one of the explicitly public stated goals of establishing religious buildings in Canada for the Ismailis has been to build bridges with Canadians.

Despite these kinds of challenges and resistance, the Ismailis have come into a new level of representation and spacial presence in Canada. If we think of the need for immigrant populations to establish their place and identity in Canada in the hopes to become part of the normative landscape of the nation, then we can understand why physical markers can be important. However, building representative spaces of racialized immigrant religious communities on Indigenous land raises questions about settler privilege, complicity and the unintentional support of the continued colonization of Indigenous

Peoples. Simultaneously, the Ismailis representation on Confederation Boulevard raises antennas on liberal Islam's place in the Canadian national landscape, which seemingly disrupts the dissonance that exists between Muslims and the Canadian State. Becoming 'present' in this way offers productive and positive relations of convergence with Canada. This is hopeful to Muslims that are ever so reminded of their vulnerability to eviction, prejudice and exclusion. In juxtaposition then, as Lawrence (Rutherford, 2010) and others have argued, the very formation of the Canadian state's ruling mechanisms of racialized peoples and the colonization of Indigenous Peoples, are at odds in how they bring them into relationship with the state (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009; Sehdev, 2011; Thobani, 2007). This is significant as Indigenous Peoples struggle for sovereignty and land claims and the land acquisition of racialized peoples is uneven. Keeping this tension in mind, the Aga Khan stated in the Foundation Ceremony speech of the Delegation in June 2005, 'This event brings us together, the initiation of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat, is a celebration of the Ismaili community's permanent presence in and commitment to Canada' (2005). We might ask ourselves how this statement carries with it the paradoxes of Muslim exceptionality.

The delegation building

The delegation of the Ismaili Imamat opened its doors on 6 December 2008. The purpose of the building, as described in their promotional material and reiterated on the Aga Khan Development Network website, says, 'A secular facility, the Delegation offers a centre for building relationships, enabling quiet diplomacy, disseminating knowledge and information, while reflecting the wide-ranging humanistic and humanitarian agenda of the AKDN.' This building is a representative building for all Ismailis around the world and for Ismailis global network of the Ismaili Imamat. Steinberg (2011) suggests that this global network operates as a 'parallel sphere for citizenship and membership to that of nations in which they live' (p. 6). It is, therefore, ranked in relation to state representative buildings and not spaces of worship such as mosques that operate on a local level without diplomatic power. The purpose of the building is closely linked to where it is placed, its design and representation. Given that the building is of the Ismaili Imamat, making it a representative of a Muslim religious community and not a State, its presence is also unique. No other community outside of a State has such representation on Sussex, raising the level of the delegation's prestige and extraordinary status. It is physically situated between the former Prime Ministers home on the one side and the Saudi Arabian Embassy on the other side. One cannot help but consider the symbolic and material political meanings of such placing. Building on Confederation Boulevard is tightly regulated by the National Capital Commission that is 'accountable to parliament … and reports through the minister of foreign affairs'. They decide who are the most suitable clients and buildings to their goals of enhancing and representing national pride and identity.

Built by the architect Fumihiko Maki, the features of the building open access into entanglements of the sacred and secular, even though the building itself is hailed as a secular facility. Fumihiko Maki's attention to every detail and the elements in the building are noteworthy; whether one is gazing up at the glass crystal rock inspired ceiling, or noticing the lines that lead the eyes from the Canadian maple floors to the glass walls, or the charbag garden that welcomes water in its seasonal manifestations, or the Haida 'Bear

Mother' sculpture gifted to the Aga Khan by the Ismaili community in Canada. These features of the building, as the tour guide explained on my tour of the building, provoke reflections on themes such as transparency, reflections of light, beauty, diversity of shapes and forms, clarity and contrast, multiplicity of meaning and nature. Although the tour guide speaks of these themes in non-religious terms, they subtly layer contemporary modern and post-modern acuities with Islamic cosmological metaphors in a constructed materiality. Every aspect of the building speaks something about the intentions, hopes and goals of the Ismailis', the Aga Khan, and the Canadianess of the building. The Aga Khan has, therefore, noted that the building is, 'A new creative link between the spiritual dimensions of Islam and the cultures of the West. Even more particularly, it represents another new bridge between the peoples of Islam and the peoples of Canada.'

Nature and exceptionality

As a 'secular' edifice raised in the spirit of Islam, the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat relies on specific enactments and characterizations. The spacialization and spacial presence then of the building in the language, metaphors and actual presence of nature becomes a modality for Muslim exceptionality in a popular script of a 'natural' Canadiana.

The architect Fuhmihiko Maki was asked to take his inspiration for the Delegation building through rock crystal. Rock crystal is articulated as a symbol that reflects back the Divine mystery in our world that, in Islam, is to be explored and experienced through the use of the intellect and pursuit of knowledge. As a space of exploration, this pursuit is offered to all those that visit the building. Nature as metaphor and its actual presence in the Delegation, however, also gestures towards projects of naturalizing presence and relationships. Nature in the building is erected out of the secular and affirmed in the transcendental by connecting it to a spiritual quality, while then re-emerging again as a secular modality for relationships between the Ismailis, Canada and its people. The Aga Khan states:

> Above it will be a glass dome through which light will illuminate, from multiple directions, two symbolic spaces, an interior atrium and an exterior courtyard landscaped in four quarters, recalling the traditional Persian-Islamic garden, the chahar- bagh. Nature, through the greenery of trees and flowers, will be on the site but also in the building, just as we are sometimes able to see leaves and petals that are captured in rock crystal but still visible through its unique translucency. The building will be a metaphor for humanism and enlightenment. (2008)

Given the land the building sits on and its objective to be a space of dialogue, diplomacy and development work, it is not possible to see the mobilization of nature without attending to the discursive powers at play, particularly as they are linked back to modernity's aspirations. To roam in a building that represents enlightenment and humanism, we might ask ourselves of why this is so significant to Muslim exceptionality. I will return to this question later.

Much is made about the inspirations for the design of the Delegation building and actual presence of the 'natural world' and its metaphors. The use of metaphors and incorporating aspects of the natural world in the Islamic architecture is not new, and in fact, has been one way in which the Divine is symbolically accessed and meditated on, through the

built environment exemplified in buildings such as the Alhambra in Granada Spain. In using nature, the vision of the Aga Khan to bring the spiritual aspects of Islam to the West cannot be understated. In this way, nature doubles in its meaning. It speaks to how the natural world inhabits qualities related to the inner essence of Islam, and how the 'nature' of Aga Khan and the Ismailis can be best understood. For example, in the following excerpt from the inaugural speech, the Aga Khan lays out why rock crystal is so relevant an inspiration for the overall building design:

> Why rock crystal? Because of its translucency, its multiple planes, and the fascination of its colours – all of which present themselves differently as light moves around them. The hues of rock crystal are subtle, striking and widely varied – for they can be clear or milky, white, or rose coloured, or smoky, or golden, or black … It is because of these qualities that rock crystal seems to be such an appropriate symbol of the profound beauty and the ever-unfolding mystery of Creation itself – and the Creator. (2008)

This excerpt is pointing to the multiplicity of colors, and the varied perceptions, all of which echo diversity and its various forms, which sit nicely in a Canadian consciousness. But it is translucency that is particularly striking. He relates translucency to the beauty of Allah's creation, but also to the endless possibility of discovering the 'mysteries' as he calls them, of what exists in our universe. Translucency is also about light that is able to pass without barriers and does so also without creating an image; light that comes through and illuminates, and creates the possibility for seeing. This resonates when the need to see into Islam and Muslims is so great as a contingency to knowing what to expect from a suspect civilization and religion. Take for example the obsessive public rhetoric about Muslims and what actually goes on behind closed doors of mosques, as articulated by now former Prime Minister Harper. This is significant, as Muslims are feared to be exactly what people fear of them. Thus, translucency dissipates anxiety, as light makes visible what is unknown and Islam and Muslims can be clearly seen. The Aga Khan and Ismailis become distinctly known in their offering of being translucent, but really even beyond the material – in their very spiritual sense of self – thus, the very nature of them is here in clear view, unveiled. This moment can also be thought of as a cultural 'giving' in that culture here, 'involves the production, circulation, and legitimation of meanings through representations, practices and performances that enter fully into the constitutions of the world' (Gregory, 2004, p. 8). In this way, the Ismaili Muslims become distinct in their difference from other Muslims, who cannot culturally or religiously give that which would be terrifying to receive. Therefore, Ismailis Muslims become visible and quiet the discomforts and anxieties about Muslims in Canada.

The reliance on metaphors of nature abstracts Islam through comfortable, natural symbols, and affects the building's status and actual engagement with Ismailis. Islam itself becomes diffused and distanced from particular human images or institutional forms, which have been important in producing the binaries between Islam and the West. And yet, the Islam of this building is completely associated with particular images, institutions and bodies. In one way, this kind of representation of Islam and Muslims becomes a liberal opportunity to introduce non-Muslims to a relatable language and lens of Islam. At the same time, it suspends Islam into a place of poetics and aesthetics through a seemingly depoliticized discourse, but in a very political project. This distances the Delegation building from an overtly political Islam, and yet continues to work in the

frame of quiet politics, or quiet diplomacy, as one of its objectives. It allows a kind of simultaneous cognitive dissonance with Muslims in all their complicated positionality in the world today, and resonance with Canadian nature both in the land of Canada, and what Canada is as a nation itself internally – transparent, diverse, beautiful, welcoming and inclusive.

The naturalization of the relationship between Ismaili Muslims and Canada is imperative to being a distinct and distinguished Muslim, both because they represent an Islam of diplomacy and because they can speak in a language that embeds them in a kind of progressive and smart, yet esoteric abstraction – where Canada and this kind of Islam can meet in a cosmos brought down to our everyday world – departed from discourses of the terribleness of the world. Having said this, I do not want to suggest that the intention of the building, through its use of nature, is trying to escape the challenges present in the world, as the Delegation building is very much premised on and houses activities aimed at addressing social and economic challenges through the convergence of their socio-economic development activities in the global south, their liberal politics and esoteric Islam. What is important here, however, is that nature, language and aesthetics have a relationship to existing powers that defines what such things mean and the role they play in our very sense of being in relation to 'Others' in Canada. Moreover, 'Others' spatialize nature in its multiple meanings, through which the nation continually regenerates. For instance, the 'Bear Mother' sculpture by artist Bill Reid, based on the Haida mythology of the bear mother, was gifted to the Aga Khan by the Ismaili community on his Golden Jubilee in 2008.

In the brochure of the Delegation building, it is listed as a key feature. On the tour is a special stop to see the sculpture. The guide tells us that the sculpture represents all ancestors flowing from one mythology or story, to another. This seems very important, particularly as the story of Ismailis and that of Canada are flowing from each other and to one another. When asked for more detail about the bear mother story, the tour guide is not sure about the details. She points out that the story and sculpture is Haida. When asked by the tour group who are the Haida? She says that they are one of the Indigenous groups in Canada. The questions and answers never raise connections between the 'mythology' of the Haida, their living realities, and what it means to have this sculpture and by extension, one aspect of Indigenous understanding about the world present in this building.

The special stop with the sculpture reveals itself as a talking point. The fact that it was a gift points to some kind of awareness on the part of Ismailis that there are Indigenous People in Canada. This awareness in relation to the story the Delegation building is attempting to convey remains at the level of mythology that continues to artifact Indigenous Peoples in naturalized motifs. But this becomes an important moment in portraying the Ismailis as immigrants, apparently not ignorant to 'Canada's' people, and committed to Canada. To make present Indigenousness in the building, distinguishes the Ismailis in their acceptance of other spiritual mythologies. Simultaneously, they reiterate colonial appropriation of Indigeneity, going back to how exceptionality works in tandem through the ongoing production of other differences. Paradoxically to bring 'Canada' into the building then is to make present colonial violence, even as the intentions are not such.

The place of nature in the colonial, settler vision of Canada has shaped the psyche of Canadians often through the scripting and mirroring of white racial purity with the untapped marvelous clean, white, natural Canadian north. In this way, we might ask how 'nature' – as ontology and earth – in the Delegation building and the Haida sculpture come into dialogue through a colonial frame? Various scholars have noted that part of the colonial narrative has been the identification of Canada in its natural characteristics, as pure, grand and abundant and its connection to imagining the Indigenous person as a reflection of an opposite nature (Mackey, 1999). The 'natural' Indigenous person whether in art or text has many times been represented as indignant to be eradicated, or as the tamed Indigenous body or as fetishized and appropriated through Indigenous epistemologies of sacredness and nature. All of this to serve white voyeurism and appetites. Given the utilization of nature in relation to Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian landscape, pointing out the placing, for example, of Canadian maple floors and the Haida sculpture, speaks to 'Canada's' presence in the building. Even if the intentions were not such, the sculpted indigenousness and natural Canadianness in the building harken to important colonial representations. The discovery and utilization of nature in an Islamic epistemology, and the racialization of Canadian wildness and the white North, are odd bedfellows – but one that stream in the Canadian national multicultural narrative quite comfortably because of what they are able to abstract and normalize.

As the tour guide briefly and tentatively speaks about the sculpture, it is also revealed to us with great enthusiasm that the 'Quilt of Belonging' made its most recent debut in Canada at the Delegation building. The guide with a great pride says that it was an honor to have the event at the Delegation building, as the quilt represents all Indigenous Nations of the world, a nice segue from the Haida sculpture. The Quilt was housed in the Delegation building for visitors to come and see, as part of its world travel. At the reception for the 'Quilt of Belonging', Senator Noel Kinsella (2009) opened her remarks by thanking the Delegation building for housing the quilt and went on to thank the Aga Khan Foundation for 'helping Canadians and policy makers further understand complex global issues'. Contrary to the tour guides description of the Quilt representing all the Indigenous Nations of the world, it has 263 blocks that represent according to Kensella, 'Canada's main First Nations' groupings and every nation of the world. They are all a part of Canada's complex social fabric, represented here in actual fabric.' Canada inhabits the world as the Quilt and then gives back Canada to the world. Speaking about the materials and artistry of the Quilt, she goes on:

> These parts and materials form a bold, integrated, and unified artwork to reflect a bold, integrated, and unified Canada … The Quilt of Belonging is a rare accomplishment, a piece of collaborative art that has educated Canadians and the world about our society and will continue to do so for years to come. (2009)

The irony of this event held at the Delegation building is noteworthy. An edifice representing a Muslim population in Canada, on Indigenous land, is hosting them as a Quilt. Here, Sara Ahmed's (2000) argument about the fetishization of Others in multicultural nations is relevant. She argues that, 'social and material realities need to be cut off from Othered bodies because then they can be presented as having a "life of their own" … .in so far as it cuts "the stranger" off from histories of determination' (p. 5). In this case, cutting

Indigenous People off from their colonial relations to the nation allows them to be figured as fetishized objects. Therefore in noble Canadian fashion, this event is replete with multicultural facility fabricating Indigenous Peoples. Ismailis as hosts for Canada, of a quilt of belonging, as a community that itself is gaining exceptional belonging, exists in contrast to Others within the nation who challenge the very idea of belonging. Thobani's (2007) argues that the 'categorization of human beings into Canadians, Indians, and immigrants ranks them in terms of their legalistic and sociocultural status' (p. 6). Therefore, this ranking shows the kinds of space, performance and embodiment that govern some Muslims in Canada against those who are even more Other. Further, she argues that this categorization

> Reflects differences in the quality of the humanity that is said to motivate their actions and forms of behaviour, differences which consequently make them deserving of different claims and entitlements, and which call for different modalities for their management. (p. 6)

Consequently, this moment also inhabits and acquires Indigeneity in an Ismaili space that allows the Delegation building to harbor the ontological paradoxes between immigrant populations and Indigenous Peoples. These linkages between Islam and Canada and Ismailis and 'Canadians' mobilize the ongoing colonization of Indigenous Peoples, reflecting that to be exceptional Muslims is constantly built through relational contrast spatially and discursively, to who and where particular bodies are in the Canadian socio-political reality. As Razack (2002, p. 17) states, to 'denaturalize or unmap spaces, then, we begin by exploring spaces as a social product, uncovering how bodies are produced in spaces and how spaces produce bodies'.

In the paradox of Muslim exceptionality

As a spatial formation, the Delegation building constructs Muslim exceptionality first through becoming uniquely visible on a national and international stage, by its existence on Confederation Boulevard, colonial land. Second, the Delegation building and its associated signs signify translucency of Muslims, and the acquisition of Indigenous difference, which point out how becoming distinct and distinguished, rests in spatial and aesthetic ontological techniques. What we can see is that the spacial mapping of liberal Islam and modern Muslims onto Canada closes the distance between the nation and particular Muslims. The Delegation buildings purpose to serve as a 'link' between the people of Canada and Islam ascribes this closure. However, this closure happens within the field of difference. What this means is that Ismaili Muslims representation and spacialization on to Canada can only exist within an already constituted 'triangulation' that situates immigrants, and Indigenous Peoples in an antagonistic relationality (Razack, Smith, & Thobani, 2010). We can, however, extend this triangulation by suggesting that Muslims are also relationally placed in antagonism to themselves. That is, they are constantly up against being re-figured through already existing conceptions of the Muslim Other. In this arena of relations, to be 'liberal and modern' is both to reiterate certain distinctions and simultaneously push against them. Further to be 'modern' and 'liberal' also means to accept or take for granted certain colonial arrangements, even as these arrangements invite in new actors, such as the Ismaili Muslims.

Simultaneously, the achievement of the building as a representative of the Ismaili Imamat and Islam becomes a pedagogical intervention – a social practice of power. Such an intervention challenges conceptions of Islam that 'cast out' Muslims from civilization. In this vein, in an article about agreements made between the Aga Khan, his networks, and the Alberta provincial government, the Aga Khan in his remarks asked the following question; 'How do you convince Western societies that Islam is a faith of civilization, and not just a faith?' (Mowlana Hazar Imam Signs, 2012). Why is convincing the 'West' so significant?

To be civilizational is to not only to be human but it is to have a history, place and creative role in the order of human progression. In this way, the delegation building becomes a place of possibility and production. However, in the colonial framework of humanism, the civilizational body and its associated enactments have been measurable through white Europe. The last 500 years of colonial violence Mignolo (2011) argues has authorized a humanness that was initially based on a theo-centric difference through Christianity, which made Muslims and others distinct in their very blood. The very naming of 'civilization' or the civilized has been necessary in revealing its opposite. It is in the relational that civilization has come to have meaning in modern consciousness. Therefore while the Ismailis are carving out a space for them as civilizational Muslim bodies, they do so within a colonial matrix. The mobilization of knowledge, nature and spirituality attempts to recuperate a humanness denied by the 'West', through the delegation building. As such Ismailis can emerge as neo-oriental bodies – those that can take up 'space' in communities of humans – who are moral, productive, likeable, relatable, good – but are very much rooted spiritually and materially in projects of modernity which continue to make necessary distinctions between the civilized and those that can only strive to be. In this striving, Ismaili slightly move-up in the scale of humanism, climbing away from the bottom.

Further, however, for Islam to be a religion of civilization through the delegation building means to map Ismailis within time and space. Time operates as a way to bring Ismailis into step with the rhythm of modernity through their offering to be known as humans of particular values (freedom, equality, celebration of diversity and pluralism, liberal citizenship) that align them with the Canadian nation. Time becomes a meter through which Ismailis become measurable and within the boundaries of Canada as a civilizational embodiment. They are spacialized within the circumference of modernity and civilization both in the material and in imagined geographies of Canada. This is not surprising given that Ismailis have since the nineteenth century clearly articulated their goal to be Muslims who practice an Islam that is not 'back-ward' but rather 'for-ward'. They are religious bodies who emerge better Muslims being modern – reiterating that the alternative does exist.

As described in the previous section of this article, their articulation of who they are as Muslims happens through spiritual metaphors, while they very much align within the secular realm of the state. To be situated within modernity means to erect religio-secular scapes that project back the aspirations of modern liberal subjects. It is hard, however, in such a dance of convergence, to read the humanism and enlightenment of the delegation building outside of already existing constitutions of civilization. Further to spacialize the delegation building means to re-design where Ismailis Muslims and Islam can be situated to plant their tillers.

The delegation building, however, does this work as Canada has reinvested in their inherent history as a European and white nation state. Arat-Koc (2005) and Razack

(2008) have argued that 'civilizational discourse' has become prominent in Canada since 9/11. This lineage and Canada's true nature has been brought back into the national Canadian consciousness by underscoring Canada's difference from those bodies within its border that are in fact uncivilized. Therefore to have Canada realize the 'humanness' of Muslims would not be necessary if we were still not playing within the logics and enactments of imperialist and colonial distinctions. The implications of taking the approach to be known as civilizational Muslims lie in what such Muslims do and end up doing that reiterate or challenge oppressive relations to the extent that they do not destabilize dominant powers or relational arrangements. Rather they make perceptible shifts within the borders of normatized social relationships, suggesting that Muslims can be diversely 'free' and active 'citizens' in states like Canada.

The nation-building project of Canada is happening within the dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. In this way, Sara Ahmed (2000, p. 100) has argued, 'The nation becomes imagined and embodied as a space, not simply by being defined against other spaces, but by being defined as close to some others (friends), and further away from other others (strangers)'. Muslim bodies who can come closer to and hold in place a rhetoric of pluralism seemingly stretch the boundaries of the nation to create a collective consciousness that imagines Canada as always having been and continuing to be the benefactor of 'Others'. The state extends friendships to those non-white bodies that can come closer to the social and cultural evolution of the nation state bringing us back to Adrienne Clarkson's words at the beginning of this paper. Even so, Muslim exceptionality is tenuous, as it exists in relation to a civilizational difference Ismailis also are measured against. Therefore, Muslim exceptionality as an analytic tool for and outcome of encounters between particular Muslims and the Canadian State allows us to consider the ambiguities of being modern and liberal, as a manifestation of unequal power relations that continue to regenerate.

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