

ARTS AS COMMUNITY EXPRESSION: MAPPING A MOSAIC OF MUSLIM  
ARTISTS IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

A Project Report

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology

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May 2023

The Undersigned Graduate Committee Approves the Project Report Titled  
ARTS AS COMMUNITY EXPRESSION: MAPPING A MOSAIC OF MUSLIM  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many individuals who guided me, supported me, and provided me with the resources I needed to succeed in this topsy-turvy ride through graduate school. To my advisor, Dr. Jan English Lueck, thank you for your ceaseless patience and support during the ups and downs of my project. Thank you for going out of your way, time and again, to be there for your students. You are such an incredible role model to myself and my peers, going out of your way to advocate on our behalf to ensure our success.

To Dr. A.J. Faas, who played a hugely important role in celebrating my lack of academic focus as an asset. You told me early on that my fascination for all things would be my secret weapon, opening numerous doors and possibilities throughout my education; you were absolutely right. Your commitment to the success of your students is so apparent in every pain-staking comment you left in our earliest papers. For your kind words and encouragement – and for your refusal to allow us to bullshit our way through theory – thank you.

To Dr. Melissa Beresford, I want to thank you for your dedication to your craft and ensuring that my methods were up to snuff. Your guidance during the early stages of my project provided me with a strong foundation for my research plan, without which I would surely have felt a fraud. I am so grateful to you for guiding myself and my cohort as we developed our own research focuses and processes during our time in the program. My consultations with you have strengthened my confidence in my scholarship and research and helped to disway my feelings of imposter syndrome.

To the alumni of this program who graciously took time out of their days to meet with me long before I had even applied, thank you. To Edher Zamudio, Melenie Maxwell Bailey, Ashley Estrada, and Kristen Constanza, thank you so much for your wonderful words of encouragement and

support. Special thanks to Edher and Melanie for graciously offering their help during my application process by providing feedback on my application essays. Your kindness moved me beyond words.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my fellow Mosaic Atlas interns, Alexandra Garcia, Kiley Stokes, Patrick Padiernos, Mitchell Tran, Graham Wade, Daniela Flores Paniagua, and Jonathan Santaella. To the Mosaic Atlas geography folks, Judi Heher and Dr. Kerry Rohrmeier, for your GIS excellence and quality control. Special thanks to Usha Srinivasan and Priya Das, Mosaic America Co-Founders and Mosaic Atlas project leaders. Thank you all for your incredible work and dedication, it has been such an honor working alongside you.

Special thanks to my incredibly talented cohort, Kiley Stokes, Rebecca Carmick, Jackson Benz, Cibella Gamma, Kayla Taduran, Cesar Villanueva, Brenna Wheelis, Anna Edmondson, Andriana Bodrouk, and Nolan Kriech. It has been such a joy getting to know and work with each and every one of you as your own unique projects developed. Learning alongside you all has been such a humbling experience.

I would be remiss if I did not mention my fantastic undergraduate anthropology professor and mentor, Dr. Susan Hyatt, for her endless encouragement and praise in the early years of my anthropology career. Dr. Hyatt's encouragement motivated me to continue on to graduate school, even in the midst of a global pandemic. Thank you, Sue, for your boundless kindness and friendship.

Finally, I want to thank my wonderful partner and husband, Çağkan Yıldız, for his love and wisdom throughout this journey. Your compassion and patience during the ups and downs have kept me grounded. Thank you for always being there to motivate me when I had no energy left and calming me when I was falling apart. I am so lucky to have you in my corner.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCING MOSAIC AMERICA AND THE MOSAIC ATLAS PROJECT

#### Introducing the Project

The San Francisco Bay Area is home to over seven million people spanning hundreds of distinct ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and cultures. Over a third of the population of the Bay Area is foreign-born, with an even larger population of first-generation descendants, people of mixed heritage, and multi language learners. Mosaic America, a nonprofit dedicated to connecting diverse communities of the Bay Area through multicultural and co-created art, initiated a project collaboration with San José State University to map cultural identities and assets using a combination of ArcGIS software and ethnographic interviewing. Envisioning art as a lever for expressing cultural identity, Mosaic America planned to combat cultural siloing, the tendency to only operate within one's own culture, by creating a digital interactive atlas featuring culturally distinct identities and organizations fostering the arts, thereby bringing visibility to marginalized identities. The resulting resource could then serve artists, community advocates, policy makers, and educators as a way to identify and collaborate with a range of artistic communities and organizations.

#### *Project Deliverable and Research Question*

My specific role within the Mosaic Atlas Project is to bring visibility to Muslim arts and culture while remaining sensitive to concerns around community representation and portrayal. In developing a research focus, I studied *how cultural arts intersect with and become an expression of Muslim identity, place, and social concern*. This focus guided me in generating ethnographic data on organizations in the Bay Area that foster, educate, and support Muslim and Islamic arts. I then compiled these findings into publicly accessible StoryMaps to inform the broader community of the

importance of combating bias and prejudice in how we think about and communicate with diverse ways of living.

My primary deliverable for the project were two ArcGIS StoryMaps featuring the unique experiences and perspectives of Muslim artists in the Bay Area, bringing human stories and community voices to the atlas. Anthropological considerations of identity, self-representation, cultural arts, and place-based meaning informed and guided my research and analysis. Through formal interviews, my Muslim participants shared insight into how they wanted to be represented on the digital Cultural Atlas. Through the public StoryMaps I created, my aim was to generate greater visibility for Muslim organizational leaders and artists and combat harmful stereotypes around Islam by placing an emphasis on self-representation. The histories, experiences, and concerns shared with me by my participants were essential to creating a resource that was true, accurate, and representative of the community.

### *Applied Significance*

The Mosaic Atlas Project exemplifies applied anthropology as a multidisciplinary, multi-organizational collaboration. In working with a non-profit organization, I learned how to navigate funding limitations, expectation management, interdisciplinary communication, record keeping, and data storage. One of my primary roles was that of an ethnographic researcher, working directly with the community and articulating important ideas and findings back to the research team. Due to its nature as a public resource, the Mosaic Atlas had to be accessible, comprehensible, and user friendly to the general public, including participants who were artists, educators, organizational leaders, and advocates. This required an intentional process of creating StoryMaps that were not too information heavy, yet still conveyed the important histories and experiences of the diverse Muslim Community to the best of my ability.

### *Project Report Roadmap*

My project report is broken down into three separate chapters. In the following pages of this chapter, I provide a brief history of my partner Organization, Mosaic America, and the insights that sparked the Mosaic Atlas Project. I then share a brief history of Muslim American presence in the Bay Area, before examining important theoretical contributions that guided my research, including the role art plays in expressing identity, political discourse, and belonging. In the last segment of this chapter, I spend time introducing my participants, their unique backgrounds, roles, associated organizations, and artistic expressions. Chapter Two is formatted as a stand-alone article conveying my project partnerships and goals, discussing the value of collaboration in applied anthropology contexts, and exploring how my learnings might contribute to a growing understanding of applied anthropology's unique role in community engagement scholarship. Finally, Chapter Three contains my reflections on the project, including important takeaways and learnings, limitations I encountered during the process, and future applications and recommendations.

### **Introducing the Partner and Project Background**

Usha Srinivasan and Priya Das, two Indian American artists, created my partner organization, Mosaic America, with the dream of bringing these distinct cultural groups together through art, music, and dance. In its early days as Sangham Arts, the organization was dedicated to breaking down social barriers between cultures and communities to celebrate differences, find commonalities, and co-create in ways that celebrated unique heritage and ways of life. The name – Mosaic America – signifies a new way of thinking about cultural identities in the United States; a mosaic is made up of many interlocking pieces of different sizes, shapes, and colors, all working together to create a beautiful artwork. The metaphor used most frequently in North America is that of a melting pot, which conveys a sense of distorting or changing one's identity to fit within American culture. This

way of thinking normalizes the narratives of assimilation and conformity that have underwritten symbolic, structural, and often physical violence against immigrant, indigenous, and black communities in the United States for centuries. It is Mosaic America's dream to strengthen communities by cultivating lasting feelings of belonging among diverse communities and celebrating multiculturalism through co-created art festivals, performances, and community programs.

In attempting to connect with the diverse communities of the Bay Area, it quickly became apparent that there were few resources available to Mosaic America for locating and collaborating with other cultural groups. This realization sparked the idea that would become the Mosaic Atlas Project. Funded by the Hewlett Foundation, Mosaic America initiated a partnership with San José State University's (SJSU) Dr. Jan English-Lueck, applied anthropologist, and Dr. Kerry Rohrmeier, cultural geographer, to begin mapping multicultural arts as a public collection of oral histories, places of significance among cultural groups, interest groups, artistic organizations, community centers, gallery spaces, and more. The resulting Mosaic Atlas would become a free digital map to serve artists, community advocates, and educators as a tool for identifying and collaborating with a range of artistic communities and organizations.

The project required time, care, and understanding to connect with communities and build trust. It also required cultural competence and inquisitive minds in recognizing and navigating the unique needs of each community. A combination of anthropology and cultural geography students and faculty staffed the program, navigating the software and compiling census data that would become the Explorer Map. Anthropology undergraduate and graduate students conducted community outreach, oral history interviews, and photographed people, places, and events to aid in creating StoryMaps – multimedia narratives of the unique stories of each group or neighborhood. I joined the

Mosaic Atlas team in order to bring visibility to the Muslim American presence here in the Bay Area due to my connection with Turkey, a Muslim-minority nation with rich Islamic heritage.

### **A Brief History of Muslims in the Bay Area**

Muslim and Middle Eastern communities began to arrive in San Francisco during the 1960s, driven by immigration, political displacement, war, and gender violence. In the last two decades alone, there have been U.S.-backed wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and the Philippines, resulting in the displacement of around 50 million people (Vine et al. 2020). During the 1980s and 1990s, economic and employment opportunities driven by the technology boom of the region generated a new wave of immigration. This tech boom created a demand for skilled labor from around the world where domestic labor could not meet the high demand of the times. Since then, a steady stream of Indian, Pakistani, Egyptian, Turkish, and Arab Muslims have entered the Bay Area on H1B visas to contribute to the transformation of Silicon Valley (Senzai and Bazien 2013).

The first Muslims to arrive had no dedicated space of worship, urging the creation of the first mosque in the Bay Area, the Islamic Center of San Francisco, which opened its doors in 1965 and changed the landscape for Muslims and their families. The population has since grown to nearly 250,000 individuals from around the world, with origins in approximately fifty different countries, with well over half of the population speaking more than two languages (Senzai and Bazien 2013).

In addition to the wave of Muslim immigration bringing international Islamic presence to the Bay, the city of Oakland contains one of the oldest African American Muslim communities in the country. The African American Muslim community have been referred to as indigenous Muslims, many of whom converted to Islam with the establishment of the Nation of Islam, a unique branch of the Muslim faith founded and led by Elijah Muhammad in the 1930s (Senzai and Bazien 2013). The

movement promoted Black Nationalism, racial independence, and Islamic education, resulting in the establishment of Islamic centers in Oakland decades before the arrival of South Asian and Middle Eastern Muslim immigrants and refugees. After Elijah's successor and son, Wallace Muhammad, took over, the African American Muslim population converted to Sunni Islam.

Due to the clear differences in driving immigration to the region, education, socioeconomic, and political gaps begin to emerge within the growing Muslim population in the Bay Area. While those driven by economic opportunities grow in wealth, refugees and asylum seekers struggle to establish roots and access resources, working as laborers, taxi drivers, and small business owners, while undocumented Muslim groups live in fear of deportation, further hindering their options (Senzai and Bazien 2013). Among the most underserved and understudied communities in the region are Somali refugees and asylum seekers fleeing the civil war in their homeland (Senzai and Bazien 2013). Additionally, Uyghur refugees fleeing persecution and imprisonment in their homeland of Xinjiang, China have established roots in the Bay Area, but remain cautious of drawing attention to themselves for fear of repercussions.

It is critical to mention the differences in how Islam is practiced and experienced across Muslim groups in the Bay Area, as there are numerous interpretations of the faith. Due to the breadth of practices, over eighty mosques exist within the region, at least one in every city across the Bay, to address the unique needs of each group. Islamic presence in the region covers all major branches of the Muslim religion, including Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, and Ismaeli. In addition to the differences in religious practice, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences necessitate a broad range of offerings to meet the needs of each community. While there are clear overlaps among some ethnolinguistic groups, minority Muslim groups, such as Bosniak Muslims and Indonesian Muslims, require services and spaces that meet their unique needs.

The events of September 11, 2001 drew a wave of attention to the Muslim community, much of it largely negative. While one might assume that this would drive Muslims to hide or deny their religious beliefs, the event actually motivated many Muslims to identify even stronger as Muslim, expressing their identities and educating the broader community about their faith, most notably among the youth (Senzai and Bazien 2013). Recent years have seen an emergence of political and social solidarity among Muslim youth in the Bay Area, with efforts to share, express, and reclaim the narrative of Islamic teachings. The concepts and theories I outline below informed my research question and approach, my outreach strategies and sampling, and aided my analysis and synthesis during the process of translating my data into publicly accessible StoryMaps.

### **Muslim Identity**

In public discourse, pundits tend to clump together those who practice Islam into one amalgamous idea of what it is to be a Muslim. This tendency erases the nuanced complexity of difference in ethnicity, language, culture, history, experience, and tradition. Regardless of their nuanced ethnolinguistic origins, Muslims in the U.S. have endured negative media portrayal for decades, often becoming the target of anti-Islamic rhetoric, discrimination, and attacks (Itaoui 2020). In recent years, anthropologists have observed an “othering” of Islam within non-Muslim countries, resulting in the racialization of the Muslim identity (Itaoui 2020; Khabeer 2017; Qutami 2020). According to Itaoui (2020), this racial ideology is envisioned predominantly within non-Muslim countries and is driven and shaped by political, historical, cultural, and geographic influences that change and shift over time. As a result of such tendencies, Khabeer (2017) and Itaoui (2020) call for the application of race scholarship to understand Muslim experience in the United States.

Su’ad Abdul Khabeer (2017) theorizes Muslim Americans as both citizens and suspects, drawing on the impacts of post-9/11 surveillance and suspicion as putting into question notions of

citizenship and belonging. Itaoui, Dufty-Jone, and Dunn (2021) go further in analyzing the Muslim experience after Trump's election in 2016, observing the reemergence of Islamophobia and the resulting restricted mobilities experienced by those practicing the faith. With a new wave of anti-Islamic rhetoric came a new wave of political solidarity and resistance among Muslim youth (Maira 2016; Tekelioglu 2016). Just as they did after the September 11 attacks, the Muslim community is working to educate, display, and celebrate their faith in order to combat the stigma and build bridges among those from other backgrounds (Senzai and Bazien 2013).

### **Arts and Culture**

An important aspect of my project is the significance of arts within the communities that produce it. Scholars have long theorized multicultural arts as political and embedded with meaning around power, identity, and heritage (Frost 2016; Gell 1998; Girshick 2008; Hatcher 1999). Public arts often operate as a way to mediate identity and representation within a broader community context (Küchler 2020; Tung 2013; Schneider 2012). Evelyn Hatcher (1999) argues for studying "art in context" to interpolate the cultural relationships and meanings associated with the production and consumption of arts in community spaces. Furthermore, scholars have identified public art as a tool for creating collective identity and community in urban spaces (Lowe 2000).

### **Urban Space**

The Mosaic Atlas places arts activities and venues within specific neighborhoods. Spatial significance connects with perceptions of identity and power (Bain 2004; Lowe 1996; McDonogh and Rotenberg 1993; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). As people imbue places with meaning, spatial ethnography can be a helpful technique for capturing that connection (McDonogh and Rotenberg 1993). Public art that is representative and informed by the diverse inhabitants of urban space play an important role in generating place-image and instilling a greater sense of belonging to place

(McCarthy 2006; Grodach 2009). In recognizing the importance of lived experiences, geographic scholarship plays a powerful role in mapping the Muslim experience and sense of mobility within a society that has historically perceived Islam with suspicion and, more recently, a sense of racism (Itaoui, Dufty-Jones, and Dunn 2021). These nuanced and ever-changing understandings of urban connection and belonging, as well as the role art plays in navigating and instilling these connections, provide me with a glimpse into the lived experiences of my participants.

### **Conducting Oral History Interviews**

Oral histories were the foundation for this project; they were the tool that guided my conversations with participants and provided a platform for insightful discussions around identity, art, and politics. The oral histories I conducted did not redact identifying information as their purpose was to document the lived experiences of individuals in moments of history. Once a participant agreed to interview with me, I asked them to review and sign a consent form detailing the purpose of the project, their role in the project, their rights as participants, and any risk associated with their participation before scheduling an interview. After conducting each interview, I then sent transcripts back to the interviewee via email for final approval before uploading them to our team Drive, allowing them to redact any information they do not wish to make public. I conducted all of my interviews virtually over Zoom, recording the audio for transcription. After sending it through an initial AI transcription software, I carefully corrected and cleaned the transcriptions of errors before sending them to participants for final review. This step was vital to the integrity of the project as the Mosaic Atlas would be a public resource. Thereby, we ensured that participants had the opportunity to read their transcripts to remove or revise any information they did not want to make public. Once approved, I uploaded the transcripts to a team Drive for future use. I approached this project rather ambitiously, hoping to interview around twenty participants from a diverse range of nationalities and

ethnicities. In reality, I met with ten participants; two identified as Iranian Persian, one as Iranian Persian and Azerbaijani mixed, one as Iranian American, four as Pakistani American, one as Indian American, and one as Mexican American.

### **Creating the StoryMaps**

Creating two StoryMaps that would represent all the unique stories, experiences, perspectives, and goals of my participants posed a challenge. First, I had to transcribe and review each interview transcript, listening carefully for pronunciation and often doing research to ensure correct spelling. After transcribing, I would send each transcript back to the participants to give them the opportunity to add, remove, or revise their words to ensure they were comfortable making the information public. I then uploaded the cleaned and approved transcripts to a team drive and labeled each carefully. The cleaned transcripts were analyzed for meaningful relationships between art, politics, and place, using Quinn's (2005) schema analysis approach. Finally, I began selecting quotes to feature on the StoryMaps, marking the timestamps in order to include an audio clipping in the voice of the individual.

In addition to transcriptions and community voices, I wanted to include photos and soundbites to engage multiple senses through the StoryMaps. As many of my participants were unable to hold events in-person over the last few years because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to rely on existing photos of their previous work or events. Each photo my participants sent me had to be high-resolution to ensure clarity, and released to me formally through signing a photo release form. This process took considerable time, and I was still unable to collect all the photo content I had hoped to. For some artists and organizations, I had to include content from their websites or portfolios, indicating in the StoryMap the origins of each public photo.

The last key elements of the StoryMaps were the organizations, associations, community centers, schools, cultural centers, museums, performance venues, festivals, and gallery spaces. In other words, the places. After all, this project set out to MAP multicultural arts. Identifying geographically grounded locations to feature proved far more difficult than originally anticipated. Due to its nature as a public resource, the organizations we mapped had to have physical addresses that were not private residences. However, the organizations I identified as important among my community were non-profits, with limited funding and resources. As a result, many organizations operated virtually, holding programs in already established locations, such as mosques, centers, and schools. In fact, Mosaic America is one such organization.

So how do we represent virtual communities in a geographically grounded StoryMap? I chose to feature them within the text body of the maps, describing each organization and the important roles they play in fostering and promoting cultural art in the Bay Area. I provided a few examples of the kinds of spaces they work in, who they serve, and what their goals are. I also included weblinks to each organization to bring further visibility to their work and connect viewers directly. During my oral history interviews, I asked organizational leaders to talk about their existing collaborations with other organizations and spaces. I featured the organizations with a physical presence directly within the map function of the resource. Through this process, I was able to map a network of interconnected physical and virtual communities representing Muslim and Middle Eastern artist communities.

## **Introducing My Participants**

In the paragraphs below, I provide a glimpse into the cultural backgrounds, associated identities, journeys, artistic motivations, and significant contributions of each of my participants. In the coming chapters, I will reference a few of my participants by name, sharing a few of the most insightful quotes to illustrate what I learned through this project collaboration.

### *Somaieh Amini*

Somaieh Amini is a fine artist, illustrator, and animator based out of the Bay Area. Somaieh identifies as a Iranian Persian Buddhist, and conveys stories of pain, hardship, and suffering through her artwork. Somaieh believes that in the art world, too much emphasis is placed on beauty, with little attention given to stories of suffering, which deserve attention, care, and compassion. Somaieh's most recent series was titled "تعلق گسخته" (Ruptured Belonging) and spoke to stories of displacement, relocation, and lack of belonging.

### *Salma Kamlesh Arastu*

Salma Arastu is an established sculptor, fine artist, and community leader in the Bay Area, based primarily out of Berkeley. Salma identifies as Indian American Hindu Sindhu and Sufi Muslim. Salma describes her work as lyrical, spiritual, figurative, and calligraphic, revealing stories of unity in diversity, hope, connection, and a celebration of life, earth, and women. Through her artwork, Salma is committed to bringing people together, believing that we are all one, part of a single ecosystem. As a community leader, Salma champions other diverse female artists, primarily those who, like herself, are double minorities. Salma is the founder of Islamic Art Exhibit, made up of a group of Muslim artists who seek to bring greater visibility to their stories and experiences by sharing their art and faith with others.

*Farima Berenji*

Farima Berenji is a dance artist, ethnologist, choreographer, instructor, and performance artist with international acclaim. Farima identifies as an Iranian Persian and Azeri Sufi Muslim and Zoroastrian Mystic. In 2007, Farima founded a global dance collective, which she named the Simorgh Dance Collective, referencing a mythical bird in Persian mythology that represents divinity, frequently referenced in Sufi poetry and mysticism. In creating the collective, Farima dreamed of representing Persian culture and heritage by performing devotional dances and movements. The collective is currently dedicated to preserving, promoting, and performing folk dances from along the Silk Road, with partnerships around the world.

*Rabea Chaudhry*

Rabea Chaudhry is a fine artist and educator working independently in the Bay Area. Rabea identifies as Pakistani American Muslim and incorporates inverted stamping and layering techniques that set her work apart from other Muslim fine artists in the region. Rabea describes her art as a physical representation of her spiritual journey, incorporating elements of her mixed heritage, as well as the influences of Sufi mysticism in her faith. According to Rabea, the process of layering helps her convey the many overlapping stories that make up her identity. In addition to practicing as an independent fine artist, Rabea is also a prominent art teacher in her community, guiding children through the process of creating artworks that express their unique ideas and experiences.

*Gabril Garay*

Gabril Garay is a mixed-medium public artist and educator with backgrounds in graffiti and mural art. Gabriel identifies as Hispanic Mexican American Muslim, having converted to the Islamic faith later in life after marrying into a Muslim family. Gabriel perceives his Muslim identity as an inherited history rather than a cultural one. Driven by his backgrounds in graffiti and typography,

Gabril interlays his Muslim faith with his Chicano roots by developing unique Islamic calligraphic designs into his artwork. Gabriel has taught graffiti in schools, education centers, and cultural centers in and around Central Valley, as well as in Malaysia as a Cultural Ambassador. Gabriel primarily envisions art and graffiti as a powerful tool for self-expression and identity exploration.

*Abbas Mohamed*

Abbas Mohamed is the executive director and co-founder of the GAMA Collective, an acronym that stands for Gathering All Muslim Artists. Abbas identifies as a South Asian American Muslim, with roots in the South Bay Muslim community. As an artist and poet, Abbas dreamed of cultivating a community of creators who could reclaim their identities as Muslims and come together to rewrite their identities in the public eye. GAMA has been described as an organization that “tackles the misrepresentation of Islam by empowering visual artists, photographers and digital designers in the Muslim community to come forward with their talent and enrich the current, one-sided narrative” (Ilaf Esuf 2017).

*Irfan Rydhan*

Irfan Rydhan is the founder and chief operating officer of HalalFest, an organization hosting annual Halal food festivals in the Bay Area. Irfan identifies as a Pakistani Indian American Muslim and is committed to bringing the diverse Muslim community together to explore each other’s cultures and foods, collaborate and co-create art, music, and performances, and bring greater visibility to Muslim presence in the Bay Area. Irfan has also worked to create opportunities for non-Muslims to experience important Islamic celebrations to demystify the Muslim faith at his local mosque, the South Bay Islamic Association.

*Ayesha Samdani*

Ayesha Samdani is a fine artist and educator who moved to the United States to pursue her fine art degree at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. Ayesha identifies as Pakistani American Muslim and uses calligraphy in her artwork to identify her Muslim faith. Ayesha is part of the Islamic Art Exhibit, a collective seeking to promote Islamic arts and culture by creating platforms for Muslim artists to share their work with the larger community. Ayesha operates out of her studio in a community space, Alameda Artworks, which houses around 40 different artists from varying backgrounds.

*Badri Valian*

Badri Valian is a contemporary performance artist, painter, and art teacher working out of the Bay Area. Badri identifies as an Iranian Persian American. Badri describes her art as social practice that is participatory and interactive conceptual art, meaning that they require direct interaction between the artist, the work, and the audience. Badri identifies key themes and topics she works to address through art, among them sexual harassment, gender discrimination, poverty, and dictatorship. Badri also works with ARTogether, an organization serving immigrant and refugee communities through art as a form of healing and community creation.

*Leva Zand*

Leva Zand is the founder and executive director of ARTogether, an organization that is working to build community, belonging, and healing through art among immigrant and refugee communities in the Bay Area. Leva identifies as Iranian American, and created ARTogether with the goal of providing art programs that foster compassionate communities among immigrants and refugees through inclusive art activities. Through her organization, Leva uses art as a medium to connect people together and bring awareness to our shared humanity. In addition to providing

resources to newly immigrant and refugee artists, Leva is also dedicated to breaking down ideas of art as elite and unattainable, demonstrating that art can and should be practiced by anyone and opens powerful channels of self-expression.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **INTERSECTING IDENTITIES IN ART**

#### **Abstract**

Art is a powerful tool for expressing cultural heritage, establishing identity, and revealing stories of social concern. In this article, I describe my contributions to the Mosaic Atlas Project as an ethnographer and content creator. I studied how Muslim artists express their identity, sense of place, and social concerns through the medium of art. I then documented these insights by creating StoryMap narratives for the Mosaic Atlas. I conducted in-depth oral history interviews with Muslim artists, Middle Eastern artists, and social advocates within the Bay Area, listening as participants shared their backgrounds, connections to the arts, ongoing collaborations, and how they wished to be represented to the public. During interviews, themes of anti-Islamic rhetoric, gender discrimination, and social isolation emerged. In retelling these stories from the perspectives of Middle Eastern and Muslim community members, we created a platform for self-representation and collaboration to generate greater visibility for Muslim and Middle Eastern artists and leaders.

**Keywords:** Muslim identity, Islam, community, multicultural arts, social concern

## **Introduction**

In the spring of 2022, I joined an ongoing collaboration between San José State University (SJSU) and a local nonprofit organization, Mosaic America. The project was coined the Mosaic Atlas, the goal of which was to strengthen communities by cultivating belonging and inclusion through intercultural and co-created arts. To accomplish this goal, the founders of Mosaic America initiated a collaboration with SJSU applied anthropologist Dr. Jan English-Lueck and cultural geographer Dr. Kerry Rohrmeier to create a digital atlas showcasing culturally distinct artistic organizations across the Bay Area. My unique focus within this larger project was to bring visibility to the Muslim American community in the San Francisco Bay Area by conducting ethnographic research and oral history interviews. The team leaders asked me to take on the role due to my deeply rooted connection with Turkey, a Muslim-majority nation. I recently married into a Turkish family and have witnessed first-hand the impacts of anti-Islamic narratives on Muslim Americans in the United States. For nearly a decade, I have been interested in combating the Islamophobic rhetoric that riddles American media. Through this project collaboration, I aimed to generate greater visibility for Muslim organizational artists and leaders, combating harmful stereotypes around Islam by placing an emphasis on self-representation.

I grounded my research with a focus on identity, self-representation, cultural arts, and place-based meaning. I investigated how arts intersect with and become an expression of Muslim identity, place, and social concern among artists and organizations in the Bay Area. The community members I connected with all played important roles in fostering, educating, and supporting Muslim and Islamic arts. Through ethnographic interviews, I gained valuable user insight as Muslim community members communicated how they wanted to be represented on the digital atlas. I carefully reported the perspectives, concerns, and experiences conveyed to me during interviews back

to the Mosaic Atlas development team. I then focused on translating my research data into ArcGIS StoryMaps (ESRI 2019), an ArcGIS digital narrative tool that pairs geographic data tools and mapping software with narrative storytelling. The StoryMaps generated through the Mosaic Atlas Project focus largely on the voices of community members as they described their stories and spaces of significance in their own voice. In creating StoryMaps representative of the Muslim American community, I compiled audio excerpts, text quotations, photographs, and weblinks to create an interactive digital resource that not only brings visibility to the community and their organizations, but also operates as a space of networking and collaboration among artists and advocates. In this article, I describe what I have learned through this project collaboration, highlight quotes from community members, and reflect on my experience working as a practicing anthropologist with Mosaic America.

### **A Brief History of Muslims in the Bay Area**

Muslim identity includes a multitude of ethnicities, nationalities, and language groups. Through the ages, Islam has spread across all parts of the world. The Middle Eastern and Islamic community may experience the Muslim identity as a cultural identity, a set of lived values, a religion, or simply a way of life. In other words, what it means to be Muslim changes depending on the individual, and like many religions, there are numerous interpretations of the Islamic faith practiced around the world. Within Muslim-majority communities, there are pockets of religious minorities, both within and outside of the Bay Area. This list includes Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. In fact, some participants identified with more than one religion.

Muslim and Middle Eastern immigrants first began to arrive in the Bay Area during the 1960s through immigration and political displacement. Prior to the 1980s, only a small population of Muslims resided in the Bay Area. The first operational mosque, the Islamic Center of San Francisco,

opened in 1965, changing the landscape for Muslims by opening a space for religious expression in the Bay Area (Senzai and Bazien 2013). Over the last fifty years, these communities have worked to cultivate a sense of belonging and shared identity through culture, food, art, music, and faith. The Muslim community in the San Francisco Bay Area is now one of the highest concentrations of Muslims in the country, estimated to be around 250,000 (Senzai and Bazien 2013). Despite these numbers, this group remains underrepresented in public spaces.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Muslims in the United States have endured negative media portrayals for decades, often becoming the target of anti-Islamic rhetoric, discrimination, and attacks (Itaoui 2020). In recent years, anthropologists have observed an “othering” of Islam within non-Muslim countries, resulting in the racialization of the Muslim identity (Itaoui 2020; Khabeer 2017; Qutami 2020). Su’ad Abdul Khabeer (2017) theorizes Muslim Americans as both citizens and suspects, drawing attention to the impacts of post-9/11 surveillance and suspicion on feelings of citizenship and belonging. In response to such feelings of alienation, Sunaina Maira (2016) has observed the emergence of political solidarity among Muslim American youth in the Bay Area over the last two decades.

As this project took place within an urban landscape, the relationships, meanings, and experiences of my participants are important stories to tell. To gain a deeper understanding of these connections, Evelyn Hatcher (1999) argues for studying “art in context” to interpolate the cultural relationships and meanings associated with the production and consumption of arts in community spaces. Historically, urban landscapes become segregated spaces of cultural siloes, while multicultural arts are theorized by social scholars as political and embedded with meaning around power, identity, and heritage (Girshick 2008; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Taken together, these concepts provide a broader understanding of the importance art holds in creating collective identity,

mediating community representation, and instilling cultural meaning in urban spaces (Lowe 2000; Tung 2013; Schneider 2012).

### **Community Outreach**

In conducting outreach and data collection for this project, I began by searching for organizations in the Bay Area that had connections with Islamic art and culture. I found some of this information through previous ethnographies conducted in the region, including Sunaina Marr Maira's (2016) *The 9/11 Generation*. Many of the organizations I identified during this initial search operated in virtual spaces, such as the Gathering All Muslim Artists Collective (GAMA), an organization created to bring Muslim artists together, share resources, and reclaim the narrative of the Muslim identity. The organizations supporting Muslim American arts and culture operated almost exclusively as nonprofits, and volunteers were their sole staff members. It quickly became apparent that the organizations I hoped to represent were negatively impacted by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, with many having suspended their programs and services indefinitely during the global pandemic. As a result, very few had the capacity to respond to my outreach attempts. Those who did respond were excited about the opportunities this project may generate for collaboration and growth in the future.

To identify independent artists, I had to do more rigorous research, diving into old exhibition announcements and gallery archives on local news platforms and museum websites. Once I had the opportunity to begin interviewing artists, they quickly connected me with other members of their artistic social networks. This way, I was able to recruit a variety of artists engaging with multiple forms of artistic expression, including cuisine art, musical performance, painting, poetry, sculpture, textile, and abstract art. As organizations were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, so too were many of the artists I interviewed. Some lost access to studio spaces, while others received little to no opportunities to display their work during the pandemic. I also observed that it was rare for

artists to rely solely on their art careers for income in the Bay Area. In fact, this very trend inspired a GAMA Collective workshop, “*Artist And,*” wherein participants were asked to state their professions, beginning by saying, “I am an artist and...”, and finishing with their other profession. The founder of GAMA Collective, Abbas Mohamad, describes this as progress, noting that many artists in the Bay Area often have to consider their art careers as secondary.

“Because usually, it's the inverse, ‘I'm a tech worker and I play music on the weekends.’ You know, I do such and such for my job and also in the evenings I paint sometimes. So that's the reality of it. ... And I hate to do this to any artist, but telling an artist, ‘Hey, maybe you should look into content marketing on the side. You have a great skill, use that skill.’ You know, at the risk of that job then killing your passion. But what else are you gonna do? You gotta eat.”

In conducting outreach, I focused on contacting organizational leaders and artists engaging with Islamic arts and culture. After hearing back from potential participants, I explained the project in detail, answering any questions they had and sharing how I envisioned the tool as a resource for future collaboration across organizations and communities. At this stage, I emphasized that the Mosaic Atlas would be a public resource, meaning that it would reference real names, organizations, and places.

While interviewing participants, I asked them to share their cultural identities and backgrounds, describe the organizations they engaged with, and explain their connections to the arts. More specifically, I asked participants how they became artists and leaders and what motivated and inspired them to create. Furthermore, I wanted to understand what barriers they faced because of their identities and what stories they wished to tell through their art. I also wanted to know how their cultural backgrounds influence their creative processes and what they hoped for future generations to take away from their work. I interviewed a total of ten participants; two identified as Iranian Persian, one as Iranian Persian and Azerbaijani mixed, one as Iranian American, four as Pakistani American, one as Indian American, and one as Mexican American. In analyzing interview transcripts and

deciding what stories to tell, I looked for overlapping themes across interviews. I took care to synthesize each response to determine how best to represent each individual within the StoryMaps. I am constantly aware of the extractive and exploitative origins of anthropology and do my best to ensure that my work serves the communities who painstakingly take the time to answer my tireless questions.

### **Creating the StoryMaps**

The first significant topic that I observed, most notably among my female participants, was concern around gender discrimination and violence towards women. Badri Valian, an Iranian Persian contemporary interactive performance artist, described the frequent news coverage of attacks on women in Egypt, Iran, and Afghanistan as the inspiration behind her art piece, the Tahrir Bra Project. The art installation, named after the violence perpetrated on women in Tahrir Square, is a call to women to send their used bras with holes cut to mark every instance of sexual harassment they remembered experiencing. So far, Badri has collected over 300 bras. In Figure 2.1, Badri is pictured tearing open her shirt to reveal her own bra, with 17 holes marking her personal experiences of sexual violence.



Figure 2.1: Badri Valian’s Tahrir Bra Project (courtesy of Badri Valian)

Another common idea was a desire to share their religious identities with others in order to destigmatize the Islamic faith and celebrate Muslim identity. This idea inspired Abbas Mohamed to create the GAMA Collective. It inspired Salma Arastu to organize a group for Muslim women, like herself, to bring their art into community spaces to educate the public and invite curiosity and questions from members of other faiths and backgrounds. This idea even inspired the *Faith Trio Initiative*, a partnership between the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California, the Montclair Presbyterian Church, and the Kehilla Community Synagogue. Every two years, the religious centers

hold an Interfaith Art Exhibition, a program developed to build interfaith relationships and increase understanding and collaboration among diverse cultural artists. Below, Irfan Rydhan describes the efforts of his local mosque, the South Bay Islamic Association, and their desire to build bridges and invite others to join them in celebrating Islamic holidays.

“Right after September 11, 2001, when a lot of mosques were being questioned...we said okay, let's open up the mosque during Ramadan, which is right now, you know, that's why I keep coughing because I'm fasting. Usually we have these community dinners where we break the fast together. So we said okay, let's invite the general public. We invited the media to come. We invited local city officials. ... And that made the front page of the San José Mercury News because...it was the first time that a mosque was inviting people to break the fast, which is called Iftar in Arabic, together with people of other faiths, or even if they don't have any faith at all.”

The last common thread I observed through my interviews and discussions is the notion of multiple religious identities. Of the ten participants I interviewed, three identified with more than one religion, including Hindu Muslim, Zoroastrian Muslim, and Buddhist Muslim. My participants explained that the Muslim identity is not necessarily reliant upon religious adherence, but often becomes a connection to heritage-based or regional identities that have been historically shaped by Islamic values and cultural tradition. Among those with mixed heritage, this notion of inherited religion becomes even more apparent. For example, two of the participants I interviewed converted to Islam after marrying into Muslim families. As Islamic heritage is steeped in rich cultural tradition and calligraphic design, artistic expression becomes a powerful tool for exploring and understanding inherited Muslim identities.

The StoryMaps have been made public and feature every organization and artist I identified throughout my research and outreach. The organizations and individuals I spoke with are but a fraction of the extensive community of Muslim and Middle Eastern artists and leaders here in the Bay Area. It is my hope that the community will continue to add to the maps as they are shared more widely. While the maps were primarily created as a collaborative resource for artists and

organizations to connect with one another, the StoryMaps also provide greater visibility to the community and help to educate the broader community about the Muslim and Middle Eastern community. The StoryMaps are available through the Mosaic Atlas website, mosaicatlas.org. Figure 2.2 features a screenshot of the Bay Area Network of Muslim and Middle Eastern Artists StoryMap.

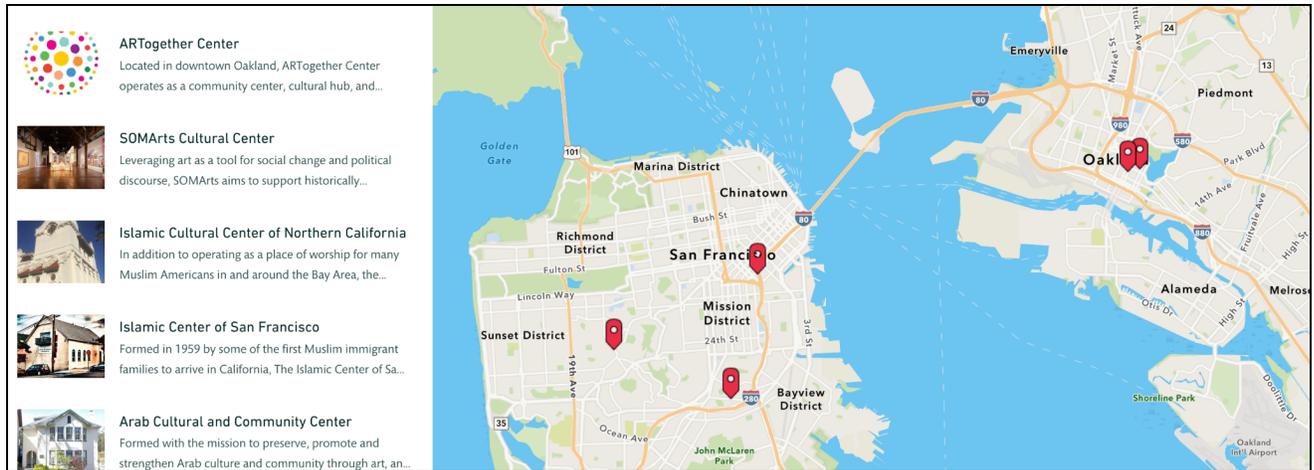


Figure 2.2: Screenshot from Bay Area Network of Muslim and Middle Eastern Artists StoryMap

### Art as Identity

As my participants shared their artistic processes with me, I observed a pattern emerging within the visual arts; Muslim artists frequently use Islamic calligraphy to indicate their shared identity and convey spiritual messages. Similarly, many of the artists I interviewed incorporated Islamic motifs as a nod to early Islamic designs. Calligraphy is, in its simplest terms, the art of writing beautifully. According to Graves, Quotah, and Simmons (2019), Arabic Calligraphy is one of the oldest visual expressions of Islam in the world, having traveled with Islam as it spread East through the centuries. In engaging in the art of Arabic calligraphy, artists are engaging their senses and grounding their artistic and religious connections to their faith. Ayesha Samdani, a Pakistani American Muslim fine artist, describes her use of organic shapes, colors, and Islamic calligraphy drawn from verses of the Quran as a way to mirror her faith through her paintings. Additionally,

Salma Arastu, an Indian American Hindu Muslim fine artist, uses Islamic calligraphy in her work to convey messages of unity, love, and compassion representing her Sufi faith, as featured below in Figure 2.3.



Figure 2.3: Salma Arastu’s “*Healing Prayer*” from a Celebration of Calligraphy (2013-2022)

As we step into the world of culinary arts, Muslims encounter a distinct limitation as a minority group: access to Halal food, or food that follows the dietary restrictions of Islam. One of the organizations that participated in this study has established America’s largest Halal Food Festival, HalalFest, which took place annually prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. As all anthropologists can attest to, food is essential to individual and group identities. Food brings people together and allows those who identify as Muslims to share their food and cultures with assurance and safety. Irfan Rydhan created HalalFest with the understanding that, like many minority groups in the Bay Area, Muslims from different ethnic, racial, and regional backgrounds needed an opportunity to join in

celebrating their connection through food, art, and music. Figure 2.4, a screenshot from the South Bay Network of Muslim and Middle Eastern Artists StoryMap (Ammon Yıldız 2023) features a photo of a chef guiding a mindful eating exercise at the 2018 HalalFest at the Town Fair Plaza in Fremont, CA. In the quote below, Irfan describes his desire to show his community how diverse their Muslim neighbors are.

“One of the things that we try to do in our event is have different types of cuisines and different types of cultures represented because that's one thing that we wanted to show to the general public, as well as the Muslim community... Sometimes even our own people, they just get used to eating only a certain few cuisines, so we try to show that hey, Muslims come from all over the world. And here in the Bay Area, you know, it's a diverse community.”



Figure 2.4: South Bay StoryMap Screenshot

Irfan Ryhan also hosts a podcast with his friend, Abbas Mohamed, entitled The Artistic Foodies. Together, the two host discussions on topics of food, music, history, culture, politics, gender discrimination, media representation, and community healing. In addition to co-hosting The Artistic Foodies, Abbas is also the co-founder of Gathering All Muslim Artists Collective (GAMA), an

organization dedicated to cultivating a community of Muslim creators. Abbas created GAMA with the hope of addressing the misrepresentation of Islam by empowering Muslim creatives to explore their talents, enrich their connections, and reshape the narrative of Islam that dominates in the United States. During our interview, Abbas told me that GAMA's definition of the artist is not as someone who is a producer of a product to be consumed in a transactional way, but rather as a service provider, where that service is essential to the health, the wellbeing, and the liberation of the community. Abbas's insistence on an inclusive definition of what it means to be an artist helped me to cultivate a broader understanding of art as well. When asked what type of art forms his organization has worked with, he replied:

“We've had musicians come and perform onstage, everyone from traditional rebab players to hip hop to jazz classical music. We've had spoken word artists and poets. We have had comedians. Visual art goes without saying, that includes photography, digital art, painting, acrylics, oils, [and] collages. We have had chefs guide mindful eating exercises, so culinary arts are included as well. At this point, I'm wondering if there's any art form that we haven't touched upon. And I can't think of any.”

### **Art as Politics and Place**

In interviewing participants for this project, I developed questions specifically asking whether my participants had experienced challenges or roadblocks because of their cultural or religious identities. As the demand for cultural diversity, inclusion, and equity continues to build in the United States, it is disheartening to see how prejudices and stereotypes still limit the opportunities available to individuals from specific communities or backgrounds. The impact of anti-Islamic rhetoric is especially evident in creative spaces, where artists from Muslim, Middle Eastern, or Islamic backgrounds often struggle to gain recognition and support for their work. In this context, I want to reflect on the following quote from Farima Berenji, an Iranian Persian dance artist and educator, as

she sheds light on the challenges faced by individuals from Muslim communities in the creative industry.

“You know, I have to say, unfortunately, there's a lot of prejudice in regards to who I am and where I come from. So, there's been times where, you know, I couldn't get a sponsor, because I wanted to do work that was representing Iran. I had people that didn't give me sponsors, or even my work was cut off because it had the word Iran or Persia in it. ...There's also the people challenge where, okay, they see the negative side of everything, you know, we're accustomed to see so many bad things through the media, and we're not used to seeing beauty.”

Farima Berenji describes the challenges she faces in getting sponsorship and recognition for her work due to her cultural heritage and religious beliefs, illustrating the negative impacts of Islamophobic media narratives on public perception of the Muslim faith and identity. Farima's words emphasize how the media often portrays the negative aspects of her home country of Iran, creating a one-dimensional and biased view of an otherwise vast and beautiful history of art and dance. As a result, people often fail to appreciate the beauty and complexity of diverse cultures, leading to further perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices. Finally, Farima Berenji's words emphasize the importance of actively seeking out and supporting artists from diverse backgrounds; it is important to appreciate and understand the complexity of diverse cultures, rather than reducing them to the most recent news headline.

Among social scholars, multicultural arts are often theorized as political and embedded with meaning around power, identity, and heritage (Frost 2016; Girshick 2008; Hatcher 1999). In light of this idea, I envision arts as a way to mediate identity and representation within a broader community context. One of the artists who participated in my project identifies as a mural artist, with roots in graffiti art. After converting to Islam, he began creating art representing his journey of self-discovery. With his artistic medium lying in public spaces, he can share his story and connect with a broader range of people. This outreach is the power of public art.

## **Conclusion**

My involvement in this project provided an excellent opportunity to work on a multi-disciplinary research team to highlight the diversity of cultural and artistic organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, particularly within the Muslim American community. The Mosaic Atlas project promoted the visibility of Muslim American artists by providing a space for their voices to be heard. Through this collaboration, I witnessed the importance of self-representation within the Muslim American community. By providing space for their stories and artistic expressions, they were able to combat the harmful stereotypes around Islam and voice their unique experiences and perspectives. Additionally, this project creates opportunities for communities to connect with one another and work towards strengthening their sense of belonging and inclusion within the larger Bay Area community. By demonstrating the diversity of Muslim American artistic expression and lived experience in the Bay Area, the Mosaic Atlas project helps to combat harmful stereotypes and promote greater understanding and acceptance.

The project also highlights the importance of self-representation and the need to provide space for individuals to tell their own stories. Furthermore, the project demonstrates the value of collaboration between academic institutions and community organizations. My collaboration with Mosaic America and SJSU provided me with the tools and resources to collect valuable insights into the lives and experiences of the Muslim American community in the Bay Area, insights that can inform future research and community engagement. The Mosaic Atlas Project is an excellent example of how arts and culture can serve as a means to promote belonging and inclusion within diverse communities. As an anthropologist, my ethnographic role in this project amplified Muslim American voices and perspectives. This project not only conveys the unique experiences and perspectives of Muslim American artists, but also serves as a call to action for greater representation and inclusion of

perpetually marginalized communities within the larger Bay Area community. These insights will be articulated and conveyed to the broader Bay Area community once Mosaic Atlas is published in July 2023.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PROJECT REFLECTIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE APPLICATIONS

#### **Project Takeaways**

In reflecting on my experience working on the Mosaic Atlas Project, there are so many things I learned, all of them valuable in building confidence and wisdom as an anthropologist, scholar, and collaborator. I have compiled a collection of some of my thoughts, reflections, and learnings in the following pages. In the final pages of this chapter, I address a few of the limitations I encountered in my work and explore possible solutions before recommending potential future applications.

#### *Working in Cross-Disciplinary Contexts*

One of the most impactful learnings I gained through this collaboration was the ability to work in cross-disciplinary contexts. With a clearly defined focus on geographies and ArcGIS mapping, I worked directly with cultural geographers, navigating and adapting to their needs as they adapted to mine. While our disciplines are not overtly dissimilar, there are definite differences in the ways we think about data collection and community outreach. While the cultural geography team placed a heavy emphasis on larger quantitative data pools, such as census reports and mass surveys, my team navigated more substantive in-depth interview processes to gain insight into each community. One of the challenges in working with a geography team was creating a process that reflected the needs of my community in creating my StoryMaps. This translation required adapting the tightly-bordered neighborhood model that worked well for other groups to the more broadly spread network of cultural hubs that better reflected the Muslim American experience.

#### *Working in Remote Environments*

Another challenge I encountered during this project was the reality of working in a remote environment. While this structure lends itself to quite a lot of freedom, including the ability to work

abroad for two months at a time, it also resulted in feelings of isolation and disconnect. My team met once a week to talk about our progress, align on goals, and navigate responsibilities, but this did not lessen the feeling of isolation. Part of the struggle may also have been the sheer lack of response from potential participants and organizations. As many can surely attest to, it is easy to fall behind on emails, especially during difficult times such as COVID-19. During interviews, a wave of excitement and relief rolled over me as I came to recognize that my participants were as interested and excited about the tool we were building as I was. I celebrated with my team as more and more StoryMaps were completed, published, and shown to the community. I do feel that it would have been easier to remain excited and engaged with the project if I felt a greater sense of community among participants and colleagues throughout the journey.

### *Managing Expectations*

Arguably one of the most important skills any scholar can learn is the value of managing expectations – among yourself, your participants, and most importantly, your partners and stakeholders. As a young scholar fighting to prove my value, I have a tendency to be swept away in the excitement and enthusiasm of those around me, often making unrealistic promises and unattainable goals. I do not want to seem disheartened; on the contrary, I am filled with gratitude at the opportunities granted to me through this project. I have, however, grown in my sensibilities and come to accept and recognize my own limitations. While it is important to be ambitious about our work, it is in no one's favor to make promises we may be unable to fulfill. MOUs are an important starting point when initiating a project collaboration to establish roles expectations going into the partnership. Throughout the project, maintaining frequent check-ins and keeping communication channels open can prevent misunderstandings and disappointment.

### *Adapting to Change*

In working on a project that was new, ambitious, and rather challenging, it was only natural to expect changes to occur. This project gave me the opportunity to experience the changes and adaptations that are frequently a reality in this line of work. From changes in leadership and structure, to budget restrictions, to shifting deadlines, the project required quite a few pivots. The change that caught me off guard most was the downsizing of the initially proposed scale of the Mosaic Atlas, which had initially set out to cover all five counties surrounding the Bay Area, including Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, San Francisco, and Santa Clara. The funder and Mosaic America team scaled back the overly ambitious scope of the project as they realized how long it took to collect Explorer Map data and conduct interviews for StoryMaps. So they pivoted to a new framework. They would focus on organizations in Santa Clara but recognize that artistic networks extended throughout the Bay Area. I was grateful to learn that the work I had done up to this point would not be a wasted effort.

### *Interdisciplinary Collaboration*

While I am familiar with the wonders and the challenges of collaboration, the Mosaic Atlas Project was my first paid collaboration as a professional scholar and content creator. Through this project, I gained valuable insight into the process of navigating the needs of my partner organization with my own knowledge and experience as an anthropologist and researcher. I learned to listen to the thoughts, ideas, and perspectives of various stakeholders and recognize the value of my contributions on topics of equity, ethics, and social concern. For example, communities that are frequently targeted by hate groups, such as my Muslim participants, might express concerns around sharing personal information and locations to the public. For any team or individual undertaking a public project of this scale, these kinds of concerns have to be addressed and explored by consulting directly with the

community and engaging them as collaborators and leaders. My team and I recognized the importance of creating spaces for underrepresented communities to voice their ideas and contribute their goals and perspectives on the tool we were creating.

### *Conference Experience*

One of the most rewarding experiences of this project collaboration was the ability to present my work to the anthropology community at five separate events:

- *The American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting on November 11, 2022*
- *The Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meeting on March 26, 2023*
- *The Southwestern Anthropological Association Annual Meeting on April 8, 2023*
- *The Reckmeyer Global Fellow Award presentation at the SJSU Anthropology Department's AnthROX! Event on April 21, 2023*
- *The College of Social Sciences Research Scholarships and Creative Activities Showcase in April 27, 2023*

At each presentation, I worked to impart new ideas, insights, and learnings as I discussed the work of my partner organizations, my colleagues, my participants, and myself. I discussed the important role art plays in our social fabric as a medium of identity expression, discourse, and place-making. As I did this, I came to recognize that I have a voice among the scholars, writers, and theorists that have awed me for my entire adult life. I found that I had a unique advantage as a young scholar in adapting new ways of thinking and engaging with the public on topics of culture, social justice, and human rights. My presentations and scholarship were supported and funded by my university, my partner organization, and research awards. I am grateful to have been granted the opportunity to collaborate with my team in bringing visibility to underrepresented groups in the Bay Area and revealing diverse experiences.

## Future Applications

By its very nature, the Mosaic Atlas is being created with the goal of expanding and updating it to reflect the needs and experiences of the Bay Area community. Table 3.1 features a list of possible applications outside of artistic collaboration and networking.

Table 3.1: Future Applications

<b>Education and Student Research</b>	The Mosaic Atlas tool could very easily be used as an educational tool to inform students on the intersectionality of arts, culture, identity, and social discourse. Furthermore, the resource could provide a more diverse and inclusive understanding of how cultural groups navigate society and retain a sense of belonging.
<b>Community and Civic Engagement</b>	This resource could easily serve in encouraging community engagement and advocacy work among members of underrepresented groups and among majority allies. This resource could easily offer a platform for connecting people to drive positive change by promoting cultural understanding and shared belonging.
<b>Social Justice and Policy Reform</b>	The resource could further operate as a tool in driving policy reform to address social injustice and structural inequality. By bringing visibility to underrepresented voices, it may generate momentum for grassroots movements that support and promote cultural diversity and inclusion.
<b>Cultural Preservation and Continuation</b>	A topic near and dear to my heart, the Mosaic Atlas can become a tool for documenting and preserving diverse cultural heritage and ways of life. Operating as a public resource, the map may serve as an archive of stories, art forms, language, dances, and experiences to share with future generations. Furthermore, such a resource could easily operate as a tool in reconnecting descendants with their cultural heritage and roots after feeling disconnected. This feeling is frequently expressed among second generation people and those with mixed heritage.

### *Long-Term Development*

I set out on the project with tentativeness that grew to excitement as I began to recognize, often through the words of my participants, the value the resource we were creating might hold among underserved communities. In being granted the important role of showcasing the experiences of the Muslim community in the Bay Area, I felt a great responsibility to accurately represent the rich diversity of the community by interviewing Muslims from as many backgrounds as I could.

Unfortunately, this did not happen; in the end, I interviewed with three Pakistani American Muslims, one Indian American Muslim, three Iranian Persian Muslims, one Iranian American, and one Mexican American Muslim.

For the very reasons we sought out to create this resource to bring visibility to underserved and underrepresented communities, the responses from less privileged individuals and communities were few and far between. Those with more established socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to engage with the project as they had the energy and resources to engage with me. Those hit hardest by COVID-19 and other recent disasters were unable to connect at all. Despite these realities, I remain optimistic that the long-term nature of the project and the foundations we have set will inspire other members of the community to come forward and express their presence in time. The intention behind the atlas is to create an open-access resource that will continue to grow and be updated to reflect the social and cultural change of the Bay Area.

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## **APPENDIX A: ASSOCIATED LINKS**

### **Bay Area Network of Muslim and Middle Eastern Artists:**

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/4fee6fb74f574436b19d10ce12811114>

### **South Bay Network of Muslim and Middle Eastern Artists:**

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/54fed70a8d07425ca0c540aee5832f3b>

**Mosaic America Website:** <https://mosaicamerica.org/>

**Mosaic Atlas Website:** <https://mosaicatlas.org/>

## **APPENDIX B: AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Caroline Ammon Yıldız is a graduate of the Master of Arts Program in Applied Anthropology at San José State University. As an applied anthropologist, Caroline engages in topics of public art, social justice, community representation, resistance to cultural erasure, and cultural revival. Caroline's previous research has explored Native American language revitalization, Uyghur activism and leadership, and cultural arts as an expression of identity, politics, and social concern. Her graduate project focused on bringing visibility to Middle Eastern and Muslim artistic organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area through an ongoing collaboration with local nonprofit, Mosaic America.

## **APPENDIX C: MUSLIM ARTIST PROTOCOL**

### **PART 1. IDENTITY AND ART**

1. What is your full name?
2. What culture(s) do you identify with? Are there other cultures that you identify with?
3. Tell me about your art, what do you do? Are there other art forms you do as well?
4. What motivates you to create?
5. What role do you have in promoting your art? Are you an artist or performer, educator, or organizer?
6. How does your art form express your cultural or religious identity? Could you give me an example of how a specific work spoke to your identity?
7. Are there any roadblocks or challenges you face as a Muslim artist?

### **PART 2. PLACE AND COMMUNITY**

8. Where do you go to practice your art? Is the location of your artistic expression important? Probe: Are you active in any local artistic communities? If so, please describe. Where are they located?
9. How does your location influence the connections you make with different cultural or artistic communities? What are the assets? What are the challenges?
10. Are you a member of any Muslim organizations or associations in the Bay Area?
11. Is there an organization (or organizations) that supports your work? If so, where are they located? In what neighborhoods?
12. In your art, what influence does your culture have on what you do? Could you tell me of a specific time your culture shaped the way you did your art? Any traditions? Symbols? Celebrations?
13. How do other cultures, maybe not the one you identify with, influence your work?
14. What do you want the next generation of people in your culture to take away from your work?

### **PART 3. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)**

15. Tell me more about the organizations you work with. What are all the things that they do? How do you fit in with their mission?
16. Are there other organizations that you work with? What are their names and where are they?

### **PART 4. FINAL THOUGHTS**

17. Could you share a photograph of your work that you would be pleased to share? (we need a consent form if they allow us to put their work on the Story Map)
18. If people were to see this work on the cultural atlas, what would you like them to know about it?
19. Is there anyone else you think we should talk to?
20. Finally, this is the last question. Is there anything you would like to tell me about your work, your art, or your life I haven't asked about that you think I should know? Please tell me about that.