Muslims and Public Places:
A Platform for Inclusion or Exclusion?

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the experiences of first-generation and second-generation Muslim immigrants in Knoxville, Tennessee. It is based on fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews conducted from August 2017 to June 2018. The interviews were conducted with fifteen individuals, eleven women and four men who were recruited through Muslim Centers in Knoxville and the University of Tennessee campus. I argue that social pressure and the negative climate affects the way Muslims are treated in the United States in public places. Muslim immigrants in Knoxville had positive and negative experiences of being in public places. They use public places for religious holidays and festivals organized by the Muslim Community of Knoxville, small-scale events organized by several Muslim organizations, and general leisure activities. Positive experiences of using public places include socializing with others within the community, involvement in city life, and assertion of their Muslim identity as part of Knoxville. Reported negative experiences ranged from stares to verbal attacks in public. My findings showed that Muslim women wearing hijab are more at risk of having negative experiences, compared to Muslim men or Muslim women who do not wear hijab. Responses to discrimination included ignoring stares and comments, responding to them, taking extra precautions, and avoiding certain public places. However, for most of the Muslim immigrants interviewed, the negative experiences did not cause them to avoid using public places. In particular, Muslim immigrants in Knoxville prefer to spend their leisure time engaging in group activities with friends, family, and other members of their

various immigrant communities using urban green spaces that are not crowded and that provide picnic areas and grassy areas for group sports.

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VITA 113

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

University of Tennessee at Knoxville……UTK

Muslim Community of Knoxville…….MCK

Muslim Student Association……..MSA

Annoor Academy of Knoxville……. AAK

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Racialization of Muslims in the United States

Migration is a reality that is happening all over the globe. According to an international migration report, the United States ranks first in hosting international immigrants with a total of 34 million foreign-born residents in the year 2000, which had risen to 49.8 million by the year 2017 globally, which represents nineteen percent of the world's total (United Nations Report, 2017). Increased migration from non-western countries since 1965 to the United States has generated significant racial, ethnic and cultural diversity.

Muslims are among the many immigrant groups who have chosen America as their migration destination. Although Muslim immigrants come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, they are often regarded as a single minority group in American society, centered around their identities as Muslims. Many Muslim immigrants tend to live in large cities like New York and Los Angeles, but many choose to live in smaller cities and towns. Knoxville, Tennessee, is a small city in the southeast of the United States. According to United States census data in 2017, 5.9 % of Knoxville's population are foreign-born individuals, and the Muslim population accounts for 0.22% of its whole population (Pew Research Center, 2017). This study is based on the premise that it is worth investigating how public places in Knoxville accommodate the needs of individuals, including those who belong to small minority groups. Muslim immigrants, as

well as other minorities, should be able to use public places and feel comfortable in those places, as public places ideally are ideally considered to be neutral spaces that presumably are open to all residents. This research documents the lived experiences of Muslim immigrants in public places in Knoxville.

In the United States, the Muslim identity is often stigmatized. According to Craig Considine (2017), there have been two significant periods of Muslim stigmatization and alienation in the recent history of the United States. The first occurred during the aftermath of 9/11, and the second, during the 2015-2016 presidential campaigns, followed by the election of Donald Trump and his executive orders banning travel to the United States by residents from six majority-Muslim countries (Casey, 2018; Considine, 2017; Disha, Cavendish and King, 2011; Lajevardi and Oskooii, 2018).

Ilir Disha, James C. Cavendish and Ryan D. King (2017) found out in their study that after 9/11, Arabs and/or Muslims became visible residents in American society that made them a target group of "vicarious retribution" (26), hate crimes and anti-Muslim attacks in America. After 9/11, the majority of racially and ethnically motivated hate crimes declined while anti Muslim/Arab hate crimes increased. Disha, Cavendish and King stated that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported a 1,700 percent increase in hate crimes against Muslim Americans between 2000 to 2001, noting that at this time all Americans felt the responsibility to be united against a "new enemy" (2011, 56). Although discrimination against Muslims existed before 9/11, because of negative portrayals in the media and by government officials that portray Muslims as being intolerant and violent (Considine, 2017; Khan & Ecklund, 2013), the events of 9/11

heated up the discriminations and pressures (Khan & Ecklund, 2013). Also, anti-Muslim hatred increased and was intensified by the presidential campaign in 2015 and 2016, and after the election, the Islamophobic rhetoric was sustained by the executive order signed by Donald Trump declaring the travel ban. According to the FBI, in 2015 during the presidential campaigns, hate crimes against Muslims increased by 67 percent, which was the highest level since 9/11 (Patel & Levinson-Waldman, 2017).

It is important to note that the line between racism and religious bigotry is often blurred. Although Muslims are from a wide range of origins, the Muslim label has been used as a monolithic identifier (Khan & Ecklund, 2013); they are considered as one group with similar behaviors even though there are many differences.

With the existence of Islamophobia and the intensified hatred against Muslims, it is essential to understand the life experiences of Muslims in America. My research focuses on the experiences of Muslims in public places in urban areas. Ideally urban public places serve as platforms through which individuals participate in city life and integrate within society (Carmona, 2010; Gehl & Gemzøe, 2004; Gmelch & Kuppinger, 2018), by interacting with others and thus developing a sense of community, attachment, and belonging from being in the place. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, many different factors influence the way people perceive and use public place. However, Chapter Two also will discuss the studies that have shown that public places can also be places for discrimination and harassment of ethnic groups and minorities (Brü\s s, 2008, 2008; Feagin, 1991; Livengood & Stodolska, 2004; Pincus, 1996; Poynting & Noble, 2004). This study seeks to document the experiences and perceptions of members of the

Muslim community to evaluate the influential factors in having positive and negative experiences in public places.

Public Places and Social Integration

In urban settings, ideally public places are spaces that should be accessible to everyone, and that individuals can use freely. The nature and uses of public spaces are ever-changing. Many years ago, public places were platforms for governments to showcase and practice their power. Nowadays the reasons for using public places might be necessary uses, optional uses or recreational uses (Gehl & Gemzøe, 2004; Low, 2010; Mitchell, 1995). Within the logic that public places should be accessible to all residents, it is assumed that public places can enhance a sense of belonging, which can be interpreted as a sign of inclusion in the local community (DeMiglio & Williams, 2016; Proshansky, 1978; Shamai, 1991). People who engage in activities in public places can be seen by others. Encounters between people in public places can be positive or negative. Activities organized in public places can promote diversity and tolerance, but people also can experience discrimination in public places. This is important for marginalized groups, as they are more vulnerable and can be the target of attacks. Public spaces can host people from many different backgrounds, ages and social strata; thus if a researcher wants to identify integrating or isolating factors of public places, this can best be derived from users' perspectives. In other words, one can observe people using public places, and interview them to better understand their experiences in public places.

Research Objectives

The goal of this thesis is to explore the factors that include or exclude Muslim immigrants as a minority in the city life of Knoxville. This research analyzes how Muslim immigrants in Knoxville perceive public places and the role of public places in their lives. This research investigates the extent to which public places in Knoxville help provide Muslims a chance to experience the city as a part of their identities. The research also documents the strategies use by Muslim immigrants to adapt to negative experiences and promote positive experiences.

Research Questions

My research explores how Muslim immigrants who vary by age, gender, racial/cultural and/or national background, and religious sect (Sunni or Shia) value public places in urban areas. The following questions have guided this research:

- Do public places provide a platform for socialization for Muslim immigrants?
- What are the characteristics of public places that include or exclude Muslim immigrants?
- What meanings do Muslim immigrants ascribe to public places in Knoxville?

This research aims to find out: Does Knoxville have places that promote what Henry Lefebvre (1996) calls a "socializing society"? Or, are the public places in Knoxville entangled with what he calls "generalized segregation"?

Why Use an Ethnographic Approach?

For this research, I interviewed and observed the activities of Muslim immigrants in Knoxville in public places. I view Knoxville, Tennessee as an example of a small city in the Southeast of the United States, which can be considered to be a "new destination" for immigrants (Drever, 2009). Using an ethnographic approach has enabled me to identify the factors that encourage or discourage Muslim presence in public places. Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw (2011) explain that ethnographic research is "the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives." Ethnography provides an in-depth analysis of how individuals see their environment. According to urban anthropologist Setha Low, "there is a relationship between what is experienced and socially constructed by the users [of public places such as an urban plaza], and the circumstances that socially produced the space and its current physical form and design" (2011,465).

Ethnography makes it possible for a more in-depth immersion into people's experiences and behaviors (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). According to Margaret Le Compte and Jean Schensul (2010), ethnography gives researchers the chance to see what people do and learn about their reasons for doing things. Ethnography provides an emic approach to understand city experiences. For this ethnography, I focused on how Muslim individuals experience life in Knoxville in public places. Ethnography has helped me identify the characteristics of public places that have caused isolation and integration of the target group. This ethnographic study employed various methods for data collection. Initially I proposed semi-structured in-depth interviews, cognitive mapping, participant

observation and informal street interviews as the primary methods, however over the course of the research, I ended up focusing on the in-depth interviews and participant observation and eliminating the street interviews and the cognitive mapping, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Thesis Outline

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter One has just presented an introduction to the significance of the research and the concepts that have influenced its formation and a brief review of its methods and procedures.

Chapter Two offers a literature review regarding the concepts of place, space, and public places, Muslim experiences in public places, and factors that affect the positive and negative experience in public places. It will discuss theories about experiences of discrimination in public places and review the role of public places in the integration of immigrants within the host society, and particularly the integration of Muslim immigrants into host communities in the United States, Europe, and Australia.

Chapter Three provides detailed information about the methods and procedures that were used to conduct the research. It explains in detail the qualitative approach, using ethnography for conducting this research and methods of data collection such as in-depth interviews and participant observation.

Chapter Four presents the data gained from field research that was obtained through interviews, supplemented with participant observation, provide results and discussion of the findings, the findings and results are accompanied by significant quotes from participants.

Chapter Five presents the conclusion, in this chapter I made a detailed comparison of what has been discussed in the literature and what was revealed through interviews and participant observation.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Muslims in an American Context

This study gathered data to document the ways that Muslim immigrants in Knoxville, Tennessee, a small city in a southern state of the United States, use public places. The literature about uses of public places can help us understand the reasons that people in general, and more specifically, immigrant populations who are minorities in their new contexts, choose to go or not to go to public places. For immigrant populations from Muslim countries in the United States, tensions have been continuous since 9/11. As stated in Chapter One, after 9/11, hate crimes against Muslims increased, and have continued over time. According to Craig Coinsidine (2017) the 9/11 incident transformed Muslims from non-visible to visible citizens, as they experienced many negative attitudes from the society. They became the target of anti-Muslim behaviors and incidents because of their appearance, skin color, accent or any other features that singled them out from the population. Tensions heated up again during the presidential campaigns in 2015 and 2016, followed by Donald Trump taking office as the President in January 2017. Statistics have shown that there was a 67% rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2016 compared to 2015.

The rise in anti-Muslim actions and the stigmatization of Muslims over the years have affected the lives of Muslims in many different ways. Several studies have investigated the effects of the anti-Muslim climate and discrimination on leisure behavior

post 9/11 (Livengood & Stodolska, 2004), anxiety and religious discrimination (Rippy & Newman, 2006), perceived abuse and discrimination among Muslims and psychological distress post 9/11(Padela & Heisler, 2010), perceived discrimination and its effect on health before and after 9/11 for newly arrived immigrants (Rousseau, Hassan, Moreau, & Thombs, 2011), and daily experiences of Muslim Arab women (Johnson & Miles, 2014). All of these studies discussed what it is like to be Muslim in today's world and in America when anti-Muslim discrimination has become more common.

As hate crimes have increased over the years (Council of American-Islamic Relations, 2018), studies have proven that racial and ethnic hate crimes and the political climate against minorities and Muslims have affected the lives of individuals. This means that Muslims may have positive experiences in public spaces, such as social integration, social interaction, and leisure activities and relaxing, but also have negative experiences, such as discrimination and danger (Gehl, 2011; Gehl & Gemzøe, 2004; Whyte, 1980). This study examines the ways that public spaces are seen and experienced by first-generation and second-generation Muslim immigrants in Knoxville, Tennessee. The literature discussed in this chapter helps suggest different patterns in uses of public spaces that one might expect to see among Muslim immigrants in Knoxville. First, it is important to investigate the concepts of public place and public space and how they have been studied in literature. Ahkil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) indicated that the "immediate experience of community" takes place in a social and spatial setting. Public places in urban areas can play this role, as a social setting that offers a possibility for the development of supportive relationships, and a spatial setting that can attract people.

However, as several of the studies suggested above, negative experiences such as discrimination and conflicts can also take place in public places in urban areas.

According to Liisa Malkki (1997), the place provides "rootedness" for people; it helps them derive identities based on that rootedness. Rootedness gives people a sense of familiarity and a chance to be a part of the place either through participating in activities and enjoying the place, or just because it is familiar to them and gives them a sense of comfort. Rootedness is about how people connect with the place. This may be of great importance to immigrant communities in the United States, including Muslim immigrants. It suggests that immigrants who move to a new place may feel more comfortable in public places that have features that remind them of similar places in their communities of origin.

Public Places and Public Space

In this thesis, I will sometimes use public place and public space interchangeably, in part because some authors use place while others use space. In the literature, what constitutes a public place compared to a public space can be ambiguous. Space becomes a place when it is associated with human activites. The concept of place has long been discussed by scholars in fields such as cultural anthropology, geography, urban planning, philosophy and other social sciences, but the concept was initially defined in geography and anthropology (Berger, 2016). Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), a geographer, defines the difference between space and place as the extent to which human beings have given meaning to space. The meanings and values added to space make it a place. Place is

constituted by social relations and physical resources (Cummins, Curtis, Diez-Roux, and Macintyre, 2007). David Harvey (1990), also a geographer, sees places as the outcome of social relations and power struggles between groups in society, or in other words, domination and implicit meanings can define how different groups of people use public places.

According to Tita Berger, "place is the intersection between the physical world and the perceived world; the place is the sum of the persistent but momentary confluence of forces, material and imagined, that create an experience" (2016, 15). Berger emphasizes the concept of place combines features of the physical world and perceived world. One could argue that the perceived world is usually constituted in the context of social relations, during which people assign meanings to space, making it a "place."

In public places, potentially people can share a collective sense of belonging and attachment. Cities need viable places for people to meet, chat, and socialize. Also, a public place can be a democratic place where people can voice their causes; an example of this is using public spaces for protests. However, as mentioned above, there might be features that include or exclude specific groups or individuals from public places.

Edward Relph defines a place as "the center of the immediate experience of the world" (1976:141). What is important to Relph for defining a place is the physical setting, the activities that occur in that setting, and the meanings given to that setting (1976, 17). Experiencing the environment and the meanings that people ascribe to the place is what is perceived as a place. Yi-Fu Tuan believes that "place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of people" (1979, 388).

In urban planning and design, public place refers to spaces which are owned publicly, and everyone is free to use them. This definition emphasizes physical, visual, social and psychological accessibility (Carmona et al. 2010; Lynch 1960). Kevin Lynch believed that "public places are all those regions in the environment which are open to the freely chosen and spontaneous action of people" (1995, 322). Amos Rapoport argued that people's freedom of action in public spaces happens "through their lack of restriction and obstruction whether physical or through rules of ownership or occupancy" (Rapoport, 1982, 289). Rapaport's definition, besides focusing on the physical design of public spaces, draws our attention to the management of public places and whether it encourages or discourages the presence of people. Also, it emphasizes that people should be free in what they are doing. To make it clear, Rappaport does not mean that people are free to do whatever they want, since there will be some rules, but public places should be places where people enjoy being in the place.

According to Henry Lefebvre (1996), an anthropological foundation can be traced in every social need, and individuals have specific needs. He was interested in "urban needs" and argued that urban places are places where residents need to interact, socialize and experience city life. With regards to the needs for interaction and socialization, Lefebvre suggests that "socialization" and "generalized segregation" are realities of a society and are also facts of civilization. His work suggests that researchers should pay attention to the extent to which a city provides platforms for interaction and socialization and the extent to which a city and its public places tend to maintain generalized segregation, which alienates and excludes some groups and individuals from city life.

The next section will discuss some positive and negative experiences that individuals and Muslims go through in public spaces.

Experiences in Public Places

Discrimination

Discrimination refers to the type of behavior that affect a specific group of people or individuals based on differences. According to John F. Dovidio, Miles Hewstone, Peter Glick, and Victoria M. Esses (2010, 9) discrimination is an inappropriate and potentially unfair treatment of individuals due to group membership. Similarly, then, racial/ethnic discrimination refers to being singled out for hostility, denigrated, or receiving unequal treatment because of one's race or ethnicity (Contrada et al., 2009). As public places are scenes to a wide variety of different behaviors, discrimination is one of the many different behaviors that may happen as people encounter strangers. Discrimination in public spaces has been a topic of research focusing on racial/ethnic groups and minority groups. Joe R. Feagin defines discrimination as "actions or practices carried out by members of dominant racial or ethnic groups that have a differential and negative impact on members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups" (1991, 1-2). In other words, minority groups can be more at risk of being discriminated against when they are in public places.

In a study that investigated antiblack discrimination, Feagin (1991), drew on 37 in-depth interviews from a larger study conducted from 1988-1990 of 135 individuals who were middle-class black Americans in Boston, Buffalo, Baltimore, Washington,

D.C., Detroit, Houston, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, Marshall (Iowa), Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. He used snowball sampling in order to maximize diversity. In his study, he classified two different types of discrimination that can occur in public spaces, *blatant* and *subtle*. His study focused on blatant discrimination by white Americans targeting middle-class blacks. The aspects of discrimination in public places that he emphasized included (1) the variation in sites of discrimination; (2) the range of discriminatory actions; and (3) the range of responses by blacks to discrimination (Feagin 1991, 102). His findings showed a strong relationship between type of discrimination and site. He also found out that the most common responses by black middle class to racial hostility were withdrawal or verbal confrontation. He indicates that violence is the most serious form of street discrimination. With regards to variations in sites, he hypothesized that individuals might experience lower or higher levels of discrimination based on how private or public the place is. Feagin found out that in public streets blacks have the greatest exposure to discriminatory behavior, as being in public settings involves contacts with white strangers. He also argued that the ascribed stereotypes and defined characteristics associated with specific groups influences how groups are seen by others.

Feagin figured out that discriminatory action against blacks occurs in five different forms: (1) avoidance actions, such as a white couple crossing the street when a black male approaches; (2) rejection actions, such as poor service in public accommodations such as poor service in restaurants; (3) verbal attacks, such as shouting racial epithets in the street; (4) physical threats and harassment by white police officers; and (5) physical threats and attacks by other whites, such as attacks by white

supremacists in the street. When encountering discrimination in a public setting, Feagin explored how black people respond to discrimination. The responses included careful assessment, withdrawal, resigned acceptance, verbal confrontation, or physical confrontation (103). What he found out was that the individual's experiences and the group's historical experiences with discrimination are of great importance in relation to the ways they perceive discriminatory actions.

The 9/11 tragic event was the turning point for racial discrimination against Muslims; they have been portrayed as terrorists in the media and have been the targets of discrimination and hate crimes even more than before. As noted in Chapter One, it has been reported that hate crimes against Muslims and against Arabs or those who look liked Arabs increased by 1700% after 9/11 (Council of American Islamic Relations, 2016). Therefore, when I started the research, I expected that the Muslim immigrants that I would interview would talk about experiences of being discriminated against in public places because of their race, ethnicity, religion, and country of origin. As Chapter Four will show, they did talk about experiences of discrimination.

When talking about racial discrimination against Muslims, it is important to note that the line between religious and racial discrimination is blurry in this case. In other words, religion can be racialized in the case of discrimination against Muslims. Several studies have investigated discrimination against Muslims. Karen J. Arojan (2011) investigated the discrimination against Muslim adolescents in a Southeastern city in the United States. The study was conducted with 14 Muslim participants, 10 boys and 4 girls between ages of 13 to 17 in two gender-specific focus groups. The data collection was

based on an Interactive Performance (IP) in a focus group format, in which stories of participants' life events or situations were adapted into performances done by the group, and by prompting participants, it was possible to provide personal details for an evolving story by them. In other words, it included members of the focus group depicting situations in school settings in which Muslim girls were at risk for harassment by strangers in public places. The performances also illustrated the ways that Muslims cope with these situations. Students identified 9/11 as the turning point that caused discrimination and said that it continued to grow due to the media assault. All experiences of boys had occurred at school with teachers and classmates, while for girls, it happened both at school by classmates and in non-school setting by strangers. In addition, she found out the alarming prevalence of harassment against girls who wear the hijab or headscarf. Some of these features match with the list that Feagin provides about the spatial aspects of discrimination. Girls experiencing harassment in non-school settings also is consistent with Feagin's explanation that in public settings minorities experience more discrimination by strangers.

Wahiba M. Abu-Ras & Zulema E. Suarez (2009) examined the relationship between discrimination and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms with 102 Muslim participants from New York, who were recruited through mosques in order to find out whether or not experiences of racial harassment and discrimination could predict PTSD symptoms. They used a cross-sectional questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions, and face-to-face interviews, which took place in a mosque. They found out that there was an intersectionality of ethnicity and religion mattered when it came to

experiencing PTSD among Arabs. Their findings showed different reactions among those who had experienced PTSD and hate crimes. Men were more likely to report a "feeling of fatigue/exhaustion" while women expressed a "reluctance to leave home." These findings are similar to Feagin's findings that one of the responses to discrimination is withdrawal. Also, women reported greater fear of being in public places, and fear of racial profiling and backlash (58). The authors found out that the majority of participants reported negative life changes after 9/11, but women were more likely than men to report feelings of less self-confidence and less self-esteem. For men, discrimination happened more in the form of loss of employment. The study also found that although participants had experienced numerous negative experiences, they also reported some positive experiences, such as positive changes in their religious beliefs, their coping system, and their knowledge, as they extracted positivity out of negative experiences to be stronger. The results indicated that females are more susceptible to discrimination in public places compared to males, and that the types of discrimination and the anxiety people go through after those experiences vary among men and women (Wahiba, Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009). Results of the study show that "feeling less safe" after the events of 9/11 emerged as the only significant predictor of PTSD and gender discrepancies indicated that men and women differed in symptom expression and reactions. Whereas men were more likely to experience racial harassment, women were more likely to express fear of being in public places.

In a study conducted in Tomelila, a small town in Malmö, Sweden, Carina Listerborn (2015) investigated the role of public places as the primary source for

interactions between natives and immigrants, since there is residential segregation between "the Swedish" and "the foreign backgrounds" areas. The study was based on qualitative research with a narrative approach that recruited 19 women participants whom all wore hijab. The study aimed to illustrate the violence that observant Muslim women experience in public places. The findings showed that the hatred expressed in public place encounters (like throwing a stone at a woman wearing hijab who walks her son to school) between Swedish people and immigrants led to the exclusion and isolation of Muslim women. The findings of the study can be related to what Feagin (1991) point that the site of discrimination is important. In this case, public places in Tomelila were sites where blatant discrimination occurred rather than social integration. In addition, Listerborn's findings confirmed that, as both Feagin (1991) and Wahiba et al (2009) found, one of the responses to discrimination was withdrawal and isolation.

In summary, the literature suggests that discrimination against racial/ethnic minorities does occur in public places, and that Muslims have been the target of attacks and hate crimes and different levels of discrimination in public places. Also, the studies have shown that experiences of discrimination vary between genders. Muslim women were more vulnerable to certain types of discrimination in public places compared to Muslim men. This suggests that Muslim immigrant men and women in Knoxville are also likely to report having had different experiences in public places. Based on this literature, I also expected to find and did find different results regarding the experiences of Muslim women who wear the hijab, because it is a visible marker of being Muslim, and women who do not wear hijab. Furthermore, because of this, I asked women who did not wear

hijab and men to talk about experiences they had had when they were with a group of Muslims that included women who wear hijab.

Although this literature suggested that is likely that Muslim immigrants in Knoxville have experienced discrimination in public places, I also wanted to investigate the extent to which these immigrants reported having had positive experiences in public places, or in other words, friendly interactions with people from other ethnic groups with whom they may or may not have been acquainted. As I discuss below, the literature on public places suggests that ideally public places should provide a variety of opportunities and experiences for individuals, including minorities and/or immigrants, which might help them feel integrated within the larger society. One might say that these ideas are associated with the notion of an ideal public place, and then there is the reality of how people experience public places. In the concept of an ideal place, it is assumed that every individual should have access to public places, while in reality not everyone is able to or chooses to use public spaces for several reasons. In Chapter Four, I will discuss the reasons why Muslims in Knoxville choose to go or not to go to public places, and my findings will show that Muslim immigrants in Knoxville had both negative and positive experiences in public places.

Social Interaction

As urban spaces and public places provide individuals with different opportunities, ideally, they can be platforms where different attitudes and different types of social interactions can emerge, however as just noted, the reality might be different.

Social interactions happen within groups and with other groups. In a research project that investigated uses of urban parks by non-western immigrants in the Netherlands; Karin Peters, Birgit Elands and Arjen Buijs (2010) indicated that since 1990 the tension between non-western immigrant groups and the native Dutch has increased. As a result, the government believed that their integration policies had failed, and that social interactions between immigrants and members of the Dutch community were not progressing anymore. Peters et al. (2010) note that the Dutch government looked for ways to improve inter-ethnic social interactions between native Dutch and foreign-born immigrants, which included improving uses of public parks and greenspaces, which they hoped could serve as places for developing social interactions between different groups. According to Peters, Elands & Buijs (2010), green spaces are likely to increase interactions as they provide shade, picnic areas, and wide spaces for playing sports and other types of leisure activities; however, in their research, they found out that urban parks were more successful in providing a ground for social interactions within groups compared to a non-urban green area located near the city. The authors assessed the meaning of parks for non-western immigrants, including first- and second-generation immigrants from Turkey, Morocco, Suriname, and Aruba. They conducted interviews with 40 individuals in two large parks, one in the center of Anhem and one in Haarleem which is the oldest park in the Netherlands, and two smaller parks in Utrecht. Their investigation aimed to find out the reasons that people use/not use parks and greenspaces. The results showed that in some cases immigrants were not aware of the existence of the parks and that knowledge was one of the defining factors for not using some places as

much as Dutch natives. Also, the authors found out that immigrants used urban parks more than other natural green areas located outside urban areas, while the same was not true for natives. The main reason was the distance; the immigrants preferred to go to places within walking distance or not very far from their homes. Furthermore, in this study, immigrant groups and Dutch natives avoided initiating interactions with members of other groups and tended to socialize with people from similar ethnic backgrounds because they felt more comfortable with members of their own group. In addition, they found out that activities such as walking, bicycling, having a barbecue or picnic, and meeting with others were important to both groups, however having a barbecue or picnic and meeting with others turned out to be more important for the non-western immigrants, while walking and cycling were equally less important to both groups (96). Their findings illustrated that native Dutch with dogs came out daily versus non-western immigrants who tended to come out on weekends. Also, native Dutch tended to go to parks more alone, compared to immigrants who tended to go as couples or in small groups. In addition to non-western immigrants preferring more to have picnics with friends and family compared to native Dutch, they also used the public parks for activities such as volleyball, football (soccer) and other group activities. The findings showed that both natives and immigrants wanted to spend time and socialize with people who understand them, and they all felt the need to use green spaces for relaxation. Therefore, for immigrants, parks play an important role in intra-group socialization, which they regarded as positive. The authors concluded that since urban green spaces provided people from different ethnicities with opportunities to organize picnics and group

activities, so in the sense of fulfilling their needs, the urban green spaces were inclusive. The study shows that immigrant groups mainly socialized with their own group or similar ethnic/cultural groups. It is understood that accessibility of public places does not guarantee social integration with native groups or other immigrant groups, however lack of accessibility can hinder it.

Karin Peters (2010) conducted another study in the Netherlands that investigated the use of urban parks by immigrant minorities. In this study, she wanted to find out if immigrant minority groups use public spaces differently than native Dutch people. She clarified that the Netherland's policy before 1990 was to encourage the formation of communities that are ethnically mixed, but over the years increased tension between native Dutch and immigrants was proof that the mixed ethnicity policies had failed. Peters (2010) conducted this research with four different migrant groups which included Turks, Moroccans, people from Suriname, and people from the Dutch Antilles, who lived in Nijmegen, a mid-sized city in the Netherlands, the majority of whom were Muslims. She conducted interviews with users of public parks, local experts, and visitors. The interviews were undertaken in Goffert Park, the largest park in the city, and Thieme Park, another park in Nijmegen. Along with interviews, she conducted surveys and observations at these parks during different times of the year. She concluded that even with the popularity of parks among both natives and immigrants, the immigrants preferred to interact among themselves rather than interacting with strangers. The author also concludes that the participants believed that group activities that encourage the participation of everyone, whether through events or other options in public spaces set the

stage for interactions with members of other groups, but immigrants preferred not to initiate communication and the language barrier was one reason, which confirms the findings of Peters, Elands and Buijs (2010) mentioned above. In addition, immigrants were not sure if it was acceptable to start a conversation. In other words, they tried to be cautious and not interrupt others in order to prevent any tension. The research in Nijmegen also indicated that urban parks were the choice for Muslim immigrants as they can have picnics and group gatherings there. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, several Muslim immigrants I interviewed and observed used neighborhood parks for picnics and group gatherings, which follows the patterns suggested by these studies for uses of public places and parks by Muslim immigrants.

In sum, the research projects in Netherlands suggested that some public parks were more popular with Muslim immigrants than others. In general, they preferred urban parks located closer to their homes, and they tended to use those parks mainly to socialize with members of their own immigrant communities. The design of the park like having shaded areas, cultural preferences for picnics and group activities, preferences for activities like group sports, and distance of the park from where people lived were among the key factors that affected how people use parks. These studies suggest that accessibility alone does not guarantee that immigrant groups will socialize with members of the native population, or for that matter, with members of other immigrant groups, but the literature shows that urban green spaces are popular with immigrants. I will now discuss what the literature has had to say about factors that influence uses of public places.

Influential Factors in Using Public Places

The literature suggests that several observable factors influence how, why and how often people use public spaces in urban areas. These factors include the quality of the spaces like availability of facilities, characteristics of the users, access to competing local facilities, the match between public space attributes and the needs of users, safety, maintenance, proximity, accessibility, aesthetic features such as the presence of trees, water and birdlife, and the size of a park (Giles-Corti et al., 2005, p. 168). More briefly, a mix of environmental, social and demographic factors affects the use of public places. In Chapter Four, I discuss the factors that affect how Muslim immigrants in Knoxville used or did not use public places.

Jasper Schipperijna, Ola Ekholmb, Ulrika K. Stigsdotter, Mette Toftager, Peter Bentsena, Finn Kamper-Jørgensenb, and Thomas B. Randrup (2010) also investigated factors that influence the use of green spaces. The authors attempted to find out the reasons for using/not using green spaces in Denmark. This was based on a nationwide survey sent to a regionally stratified sample of 21,832 adult Danes. 11,238 returned the questionnaires. Respondents were asked about different uses of green spaces and the frequency of use. Results showed that getting fresh air and enjoying the weather, stress reduction, and exercising and keeping in shape were the most important reasons. In addition, doing something together with family and friends was equally important to men and women. Furthermore, obtaining peace and quiet became less important with increasing age, and observing flowers became more important among elders. The

researchers found out that leisure activities are the most important reason for visiting green spaces, and that distance was not a limiting factor to visit green spaces.

Inequality in the distribution of and access to public open spaces has been investigated in some research. For example, Jennifer R. Wolch and Joshua P.Newell (2014), in their study on Los Angeles' Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area – the United States' largest urban national park, found out that people of color and the poor were generally excluded from this urban national park. They had to travel further to access the park and were less inclined to use the park. Park users primarily came from white and wealthy neighborhoods.

As noted earlier, ideally public places should be available to everyone, however they might contain characteristics or features that include or exclude specific groups of users. According to Ali Madanipour (2004) any characteristic that makes a person vulnerable paves the way for social exclusion from public space, for example, elderly people, children and people with disabilities. However, as Feagin's (1991) research suggests, one should note the attitudes and responses when individuals are excluded from a place.

Exclusion from public places can happen in many different forms. Neil Spicer (2008) in a study among refugees and asylum seekers in neighborhoods in the United Kingdom (UK), investigated experiences of place, social exclusion and social networks, and he found out that social inclusion is mainly associated with social networks among similar cultural groups and security, in other words, in places where people find people

like themselves from similar backgrounds they feel more involved in the place. His results are similar to what Peters (2010) and Peters et al. (2010) found in the Netherlands.

In a study conducted by Rebecca Miles and Asal Mohammadi Johnson (2014), the participants were Muslim women living in New York City who indicated that they felt excluded from what they perceived to be white-dominant and male-dominant public places. Their findings showed that women avoided going to places that were dominated by a specific social group as they felt they did not belong there. Instead, they preferred to go to a mosque or other familiar places where they could socialize and interact with other Muslims. This is an example of competing community places. In other words, people prefer to use their own community spaces instead of public places. In my study I expected to see a similar pattern as there are a several Muslim centers in Knoxville, and yet I also found that the centers also were occasionally and apparently increasingly using public places for some of their activities.

Setha Low, Dana Taplin and Mike Lamb (2005) observed that the "implicit meanings" of public spaces in multicultural areas can alienate or exclude some community members. Implicit meanings can have elements or characteristics that encourage or discourage presence of a group of people in public places. Thus, for example, as mentioned above, the domination of place by a specific group may cause other people to avoid going to certain public places. In other words, the implicit meanings suggest that only certain groups are welcome to use the place.

In sum, ideally public spaces are supposed to provide opportunities for every resident to engage in city life. Social and personal factors such as age, gender, behavioral

characterisictics, being introverted or extroverted, social class, level of education, and life experiences as well as environmental factors such as physical elements of the place, the location, and facilities and spaces it provides for activities and interactions determine whether a public place successfully meets the needs of city dwellers and offers different people equal opportunities to use that space. Providing different opportunities ranges from considering the needs of families with children, women, the elderly, and the disabled to considering the needs of religious minorities, people of color and immigrants. This thesis examines how Muslim immigrants talked about and perceived their experiences in various public spaces.

Setha Low (2005), a cultural anthropologist, has investigated the use of public space in Latin America. According to her, the cultural and political significance of plazas in Latin America is associated with the meanings that people have in mind about the plaza as a public space. In other words, her research stresses the importance of meanings that people attach to a place. According to Low, these meanings are social productions, which imply that the meaning of a place is based on the narratives and stories that people have about the specific place. Along these lines, the objective of my research was to collect stories from Muslim immigrants about public places in Knoxville.

Low studied two plazas, the Parque Central and the Plaza de la Cultura, in San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica. She used various methods for data collection, including interviews with plaza users, plaza business owners, and directors of local institutions, local historians, architects, and municipal officials. She also used newspapers and magazines to obtain information on the history and uses of these places. She collected

design guidelines as part of her quest to understand the processes of design, planning, and construction. Photographic documentation was another method she used that enabled her to record physical changes over the years. Documenting physical changes made it possible for her to perceive changes in the uses and meanings of these public spaces more clearly. She also did observations and behavioral mapping. All these different methods of data collection helped her to gather stories and to figure out how the meanings associated with a place had been shaped over the years. Her research was longitudinal, covering 25 years of numerous visits. She aimed to understand the historical and contemporary designs of the plaza and the ways those affected the uses and meanings of these public places for people, as the contemporary design discouraged the presence of people and people recall their memories of the previous design of the plazas. My own study is much smaller, and as a master's thesis, was conducted over a much shorter time frame. After reading Low, initially I considered trying to include interviews with Knoxville city officials and planners, but primarily due to time limitations, ultimately chose to focus on interviewing Muslims immigrants about the meanings that they assign to public places in Knoxville, including Market Square (which is similar to a plaza) as well as various urban parks.

Carolyn Whitten and Susan Thompson (2005) conducted qualitative research on Muslim immigrant women in Sydney, Australia to find out if their needs were satisfied by the public places. Data collection methods included five individual interviews and two focus groups, in addition to eight interviews with community service staff. In total, 23 women who wore hijab were included in the study. The study was conducted in the

western region of Sydney, which was an area where many Muslim immigrants resided. Participants indicated that they felt a sense of otherness and not belonging to the Australian community as they have encountered aggressive and subtle forms of discrimination when they are in public. Furthermore, they indicated frustration with not being able to find culturally and religiously appropriate spaces in public parks, such as shelters that provide more privacy. In addition, the researchers found out that some parks had inadequate design and unsuitable placement of facilities such as outdoor eating areas (Whitten & Thompson, 2005, p. 1). Their study shows that experiences of discrimination affect how Muslim women perceive levels of comfort in public places. In addition, the negativities associated with public places were magnified after 9/11. Furthermore, the women indicated that male dominated public places gave them feelings of discomfort in public places. Moreover, they reported receiving poor services in public places.

The study focused on the uses of public places by Muslim women for activities that involved friends and families. The findings showed that equality regarding using public space is not the same as providing equal access, and that equal access is not just about the idea that the domination of one group over another that limits access of minority groups, rather equality is about accommodating the needs of different groups to make public places more inclusive. However, in spite of feeling discomfort, since existing parks were the only options available, the women participating in the study did not avoid using these public spaces.

As mentioned earlier, Miles and Mohammadi Johnson (2014) examined the spatial practices and urban experiences of Muslim women of Arab descent in New York

who were considered observant because they wear hijab. The authors investigated how they interpreted the accessibility of urban spaces. The authors explained how gender-related dynamics affected their uses of public places, and how in Islam and patriarchal societies, women's mobility in public spaces is restricted, due to norms that prohibit sharing space with members of the opposite sex. Their research participants were recruited in the Mossab Mosque in Bay Ridge in Brooklyn. They either lived in that area or commuted there to work. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine observant Muslim women. The results of Johnson and Miles' research showed that openness of space and being visible were essential characteristics that participants mentioned frequently. The authors found out that appropriate lighting was necessary. Walkability was also considered an essential factor for the participants. What this meant for them was that they did not tend to go to places that were male-dominated or to places where their respect and dignity might be violated by an anti-Muslim atmosphere. Furthermore, they felt uncomfortable and tried to avoid places where there were police or surveillance cameras. Johnson and Miles (2014) concluded that police and cameras in public spaces represented practices of power that "exclude" and "repress" people rather than being inclusive and welcoming to everyone. These places felt less public when they were controlled by police or by cameras compared to other places.

My research investigated how Muslims participate in city life in Knoxville, Tennessee. My study explores various aspects of several public places, including their physical characteristics, the range of activities happening in those places, and the meanings that the male and female Muslim immigrants associated with those public

places. As several of the studies discussed above have suggested, in Chapter Four, I will describe how the research participants used public places to spend quality time with family and friends. As the literature suggests, the Muslim immigrants that I observed and interviewed in Knoxville also used public places mainly to interact with people in their own ethnic/cultural/religious groups. However, they also organized activities for the wider community and they attended political events organized by other groups to assert their identity as Muslim immigrants who are members of the wider Knoxville community. In my interviews, I asked the research participants about their experiences in public places, their perceptions of those places, and the frequency with which they visited public places. I also asked the participants to identify the public places that they regarded as being more inclusive for Muslims and asked them to elaborate more about the ways that they feel these places facilitate their integration, interaction, and engagement in city life. As several of the studies discussed above have suggested, the research participants mentioned positive experiences that they had had in public places, but they also talked about experiences that they perceived as discriminatory, and at times, even threatening. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, they also talked about how those experiences have affected the ways that they perceive and use public places.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODS

Ethnography

This study utilizes qualitative research methods with an ethnographic approach. Qualitative research is based on observations that helps the researcher understand the circumstances and experience of individual research subjects (LeCompte and Schensul 2010). Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw (2011) explain that ethnographic research is "the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives." Ethnography makes it possible for a more in-depth immersion into people's experiences and behaviors (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011). According to Margaret Le Compte and Jean Schensul (2010), ethnography gives researchers the chance to see what people do and learn about their reasons for doing things and a chance to interact face-to-face with participants. The methods used for the ethnographic fieldwork of this study consisted primarily of participant observation and personal interviews. I also wanted to do cognitive mapping and street interviews, but as I will explain, it turned out the former was not suitable, and the latter was not feasible.

Data Collection Methods

Participant Observation

Participant observation includes attending events and integrating within the community under study. H. Russell Bernard (2017) explains that participant observation is about getting close to people to capture the essence of what they do and why they do specific things. Participant observation is about the immersion of the researcher in the new culture.

The Muslim population in Knoxville is a mix of diverse origins and backgrounds. There are two main divisions of Sunni and Shia in Knoxville. The Sunni community center (also known as the Muslim Community of Knoxville, MCK) or the Annoor Mosque is located in the Fort Sanders area, near the University of Tennessee and downtown Knoxville. Other centers run by the Sunni community include the Annoor Academy of Knoxville, which is an elementary school located in West Knoxville, and the Tayseer Seminary, which is an adult religious school that attracts individuals seeking to learn more about Islam. As one of my key informants describes it, the Annoor Mosque, the Tayseer Seminary, and the Annoor school are sister organizations and they run in coordination with one another. There are centers in Maryville and Gatlinburg and the Musalla (an open space for prayers) in east Knoxville, which are also run by the Sunni community. The Shia center, called the Ahlulbayt Islamic Center (AIC), is located in West Knoxville. As a Shia, I had gone to the Shia center before starting this research. The center used to be located on Chapman Highway in South Knoxville, and then about a year ago they moved to a new place in West Knoxville near West Town Mall.

When I was in the initial stages of planning this research project, I got to know about the Muslim Community of Knoxville when I attended an event at organized by the University of Tennessee at which representatives of many different religions were representing their faiths and inviting people to learn more about their religions. I noticed the Muslim booth from the green banner with the Arabic words, which can be traslated into English as "God is the greatest, peace be upon the Prophet Muhammed". I approached the booth, and started talking to one of the representatives. I told him about my research and asked him about the ways that I could receive updates of events and keep up with everything that is going on in the Muslim community. At the time I was not yet aware of the various centers associated with the Muslim community in Knoxville. He added me to the Muslim Student Association (MSA) listserv and told me about the Annoor Mosque. He further explained that they are a part of the Annoor Mosque and that they had weekly sessions on campus, which I eventually decided to attend as part of the research.

A few days later, I had the chance to meet some Muslim individuals at a vigil against the Trump administration's Muslim Travel Ban in Market Square, organized by Bridge Refugee Services, which I attended with my advisor Dr. De Ann Pendry. There, I briefly talked with some Muslims and non-Muslims, explained my research and obtained some contact information. After the vigil and after I attended the Friday prayer for the first time at the Anoor Mosque, I officially started this research and started contacting the Muslim community's social media webpages. The messages were private; I explained the study and asked about attending the mosque. As an insider (an immigrant from Iran who

is a Shia Muslim), there were some challenges as well as benefits for me, which I will explain below. The next week, I attended Friday prayer at the Annoor Mosque as I wanted to get to know the context and start meeting people and making connections and letting them know that I was looking for people who would be willing to be interviewed. This was also part of my participant observation.

I also had several individual meetings with members of the Shia community. For example, through a mutual connection, I was introduced to one member of the Shia community. We met at a coffee shop near the university and talked for about two hours. At first it was easier to meet and talk with members of the Shia community since I was a member of the community and I had attended several events held by Shia. Some of these events were held at someone's home, where around 30 to 40 Shia would gather, have food, do some rituals, and recite verses of the Quran. These are some of the ways that I began to participate in events organized by both communities. During the study, I attended Friday prayers at the Annoor Mosque regularly and several celebrations and religious events organized by both communities. If it were not for this research, I might never have known that a mosque was located within walking distance from my home.

For this study, I participated in activities organized by these two Muslim communities as well as a few large public events organized by the city of Knoxville or other non-Muslim community organizations. I took notes during these events, and audio recorded myself describing the setting of the events and the details that I observed. This method helped me to be more precise when describing my observations in notes that I wrote up shortly after the events. It also helped me to better remember the types of

activities that I participated in or observed. Later, I expanded the field notes. As recommended by several fieldwork guides, the notes were descriptive (Bernard, 2017; Emerson et al., 2011), and my primary sources for taking field notes were from watching and listening (Bernard 2017, 397).

My field work officially started from August 2017 to June 2018, as I attended prayers, events and get to know more individuals from Muslim community. More precisely, I regularly attended Friday prayers or *Jumu'ah* prayers which happens at noon every Friday and occasionally attended the daily prayers at the Annoor Mosque. I also attended Ramadan dinners every night during the holy month of Ramadan at this mosque as it was closer to my place, and I attended a few Ramadan dinners at the Shia center. The Ahlulbayt Islamic Center does not host Friday or daily prayers, so I mainly attended events organized by the Muslim Community of Knoxville. I also attended the weekly sessions or *halaqa* on campus, which helped me better observe the community, and particularly young adults who were both first-generation and second-generation immigrants.

After I finished conducting the research, and examined my participation observation data, I categorized the events that I attended into different types. The large-scale events hosted by Sunni-led Muslim Community of Knoxville (MCK) included the International Food Festival at World's Fair Park, the International and Arab Food Festival at the University of Tennessee, Ramadan dinners every night during the holy month of Ramadan at the Annoor mosque, the 8th Annual Iftar Festival at The Mill and Mine in downtown Knoxville, and the Eid Fitr celebration to end Ramadan at World's

Fair Park. The small-scale events hosted by MCK included a Muslim open house at Annoor Mosque and a back to school ice cream social at West Hills Park, and the small-scale events hosted by Shia-led Ahlulbayt Islamic Center (AIC) included Ramadan dinners. The events organized by Muslim Student Association (MSA) included an end-of-school-year potluck in Concord Park in West Knoxville and weekly sessions of *halaqa* in addition to private events like a celebration for birth of the Prophet Muhammed (in a residential house), a celebration for birth of Fatima -Daughter of the Prophet-(also in a house).

The larger community events I attended included the HoLA Hora Latina Festival and Rossini (Italian) Festival. At these activities, I observed Muslim immigrants as they participated in activities organized in public places firsthand, built connections, and had the chance to introduce myself to people.

As mentioned above, the Annoor Mosque is one of several religious centers for Sunni Muslims. It is located about a 10-minute walk from the University of Tennessee. The Friday prayer is held in the afternoon. It is a religious obligation. Muslims are advised to attend Friday prayers if they have the ability, which means that old people, women, children, travellers and people with specific situations do not have to attend Friday prayer. Friday prayer has to be done with a congregation; it cannot be done individually. There are always two Friday prayers, but individuals only need to attend one of them, so I have seen different groups of people for the two prayers every Friday. There also needs to be more than five people to do the Friday prayer, and the Imam delivers two sermons before each prayer. Friday prayers at the Annoor Mosque in

Knoxville are at 12:30 and 1:30 p.m. The two sermons before each prayer may take 30-40 minutes, and the prayer lasts about 5-8 minutes.

During the research, I attended the Friday prayers regularly at the Annoor Mosque, arriving before they started the first one and waited until after the second prayer. I usually went to the Mosque around 12:00 p.m., so that I had enough time to sometimes initiate small talk with individuals, or I just sat and waited for the prayer to start. Being in the mosque and reading the Quran and listening to the Athan (the call for prayer) reminded me of my childhood and my youth. It was fortunate that I can read Arabic, because all available Qurans were in Arabic. During the sermons, I was cautious enough not to interrupt people or approach them during the sermons. At first, I was not familiar with how I should behave during sermons in a Sunni mosque, so I did some research using the internet beforehand and I considered everything in order to respect the rules. Many of my observations took place at the Annoor Mosque because the prayers were held there regularly and it was easy for me to walk there. I never recorded or photographed any of the prayers or activities that I attended in the Mosque or any other places. While I was there, I learned that the Mosque hired a security police to be present during the prayers and other events to prevent occurrence of unwanted tensions and dangers and protect the safety of individuals. Later, I learned from one of my key informants, Negarin, that they have the security both for Friday prayers and for Ramadan dinners.

The Annoor Mosque also held daily evening prayers. Those prayers take place at sunset, so the starting time ranges from 7 p.m. in the Fall and Winter to 8-9 p.m in the

Spring and Summer. Based on my observations, more people attended daily evening prayers during the weekends. During Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar and the first time of revelation of Quran to the Prophet Muhammed), the schedule was different as people were fasting, and the mosque served dinner. At the fast-breaking time or Ramadan dinners (*Iftar)*, there was a high chance of making connections with people because I was given the opportunity to sit with people and talk over food. I started talking to people in small groups, explained my research, gave them flyers, and shared my contact information with them.

I also attended prayers at the Ahlulbayt Islamic Center in West Knoxville, which is the Muslim Center for Shia Muslims in Knoxville, and serves a smaller number of Muslims in Knoxville. As a participant observer, I took part in helping with the services, cleaning, and organizing services for Iftar during Ramadan. The Ahlulbayt Islamic Center did not have weekly or daily prayers. Gatherings at the center took place every night during Ramadan and for specific religious events such as the birth or death of the Prophet Muhammed or the successors after him. During this participation, I developed more connections. As I did with the Annoor Mosque, I contacted leaders of the Shia community and explained my research. At first, I was unable to find Ahlulbayt Islamic Center at the old location, and later learned that they had changed their location. Therefore, I approached some people that I knew to get the address of the new location.

I attended the weekly sessions/*halaqa* organized by Muslim Student Association (MSA) at the University of Tennessee-Knoxvillle (UTK) during Fall 2017 and Spring 2018. Those sessions were held at Hodges Library, which has meeting rooms that student

groups can reserve free of cost. Snacks were provided by the Annoor Mosque, and a lecturer */Imam* from the Muslim Community of Knoxville joined the students to give a talk. These sessions were opportunities to delve into issues that young people face in everyday life. The sessions offered suggestions to students to help them manage difficult situations in everyday life and stay close to God. The discussions centered around a specific topic each week, such as education, travel, marriage or relationships, discrimination and racism, and other topics that students brought up. The first time I was there, I introduced myself and told the group about my research. A girl sitting next to me was also a first-generation immigrant like me. We had a little talk, and she added me to a group of the Muslim Student Association on the GroupMe mobile application, where I had the chance to publish flyers and explain my research. From all these events, celebrations, sessions and prayers that I attended, I talked to over eighty people and managed to recruit fifteen participants for an interview. In the following section, I will explain the way I conducted the interviews and the types of questions I asked.

In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to participant observation, I conducted fifteen in-depth interviews that made it possible to capture the meanings and experiences in the participants' own words, as Catherine Marshall (2010) puts it. I used semi-structured interviews to explore how often Muslim immigrants participate in activities in public places in Knoxville and what their experiences were like in these places and explore the reasons that they use/not use public places.

Each interview took place in a quiet and comfortable place based on the participant's preference and lasted from 17 to 255 minutes. Several interviews took place at Hodges Library, University of Tennessee; one, at my place; two, at the participant's house; four, at Starbucks; two, at the Annoor Mosque, and two, at businesses run by Muslim immigrants. The participants were given the consent forms approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Tennessee; in which I provided clear and brief information about the research, including the aim of the study, risks, and potential benefits to the community. Thirteen out of fifteen participants agreed to be audio recorded. The other two did not agree to be audio recorded, so I just took notes during the interview as specified on the consent form.

During an eleven-month period of attending various events, I met many different members of the Muslim Community. I recruited some of my participants from the two Muslim centers and the Muslim Student Association. I also was introduced to other members of the community by Negarin, Aslan, and Mahboob, who served as my key informants, and even by my other participants. Several of my participants encouraged their friends to participate and spread the word wherever they could. Attending prayers and other events enabled me to start interacting with members of the community before and after the prayers and events, which helped me find participants who were willing to do the semi-structured interviews. However, in the end it was not easy to obtain interviews with fifteen individuals. Many of the people with whom I chatted did not agree to be interviewed, and several interviews had to be rescheduled a few times before we finally conducted the interview.

The fifteen interview participants were first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants, eighteen years old and above, and both male and female. Three were also my key informants. Variations in age provided me with perspectives from people at different stages of life. We talked about how they see public places, what kinds of meanings they ascribe to public places, and which public places in Knoxville they preferred. The racial and ethnic diversity in this small sample was high. Of the fifteen participants, four were males and eleven were females. Of the four males, three were first-generation immigrants and one was second-generation. Of the eleven females, five were first-generation immigrants and six were second-generation. Duration of stay in the United States for first-generation immigrants ranged from three to 24 years. Of the second-generation immigrants, the one male and four of the five females said they were Knoxville locals.

Most of the interviews took place in English, since I did not speak the first languages of several interviewees. Most of the participants ranked their abilities to speak English from 9 to 10, out of 10. One interview took place in Farsi, which I do speak.

I took field notes during the interviews as well as recording what people said. I analyzed the interviews and the field notes from the interviews and the participant observation to uncover significant and recurring themes that are discussed in Chapter Four.

Conducting Ethnography As An Insider/Outsider

As a Muslim, I faced challenges as well as benefits or advantages while doing this research. In cultural anthropology, there has been considerable discussion about how

being an insider affects the research process. I believe that sometimes I was an insider and at other times, I was an outsider. I am Muslim. I was a member of the Shia community, but not an active member, and I am not a member of the Sunni community, so the boundary between insider and outsider was not always very clear.

As mentioned earlier, I was not aware of the various Islamic centers in Knoxville until I started doing research. Before this thesis, I had only gone to the Shia center which used to be located in South Knoxville. After a year, because it was a rental place and they were attacked several times, they moved their center to West Knoxville. As I found out from my key informant Aslan, they bought the building, and the funds were provided by members of the community. Being a Shia attending a Sunni Mosque, I was concerned about how Sunni Muslims might react to me as a researcher that was going to be observing and recording their behaviors. There are some differences between Shia and Sunni in the ways they do prayers, including hand and finger positions. Sunni Muslims fold their hands during prayers while Shia do not fold their hands. Sunni Muslims point their fingers during prayers, and Shia do not point their fingers. Because these differences are observable, people could have noticed me. I knew that this should not be a problem, as in Islamic school of thought, all individuals regardless of their sect, age, gender, race/ethnicity and social class are welcomed to Mosque as it is believed to be a safe place that is the home of God, which means that everyone is welcome, but I was not comfortable the first few times I attended the prayers at the Annoor Mosque. However, I learned that it was not a big deal, and after going there several times, I began to feel more comfortable, and people also got used to seeing me there for prayers.

Doing the prayers with members of the community benefited me as a researcher because I was able to listen to different talks. By talks, I mean both the sermons and the small talk that I had with people. Because of my background, I could understand what the sermons were about. Although they were in English rather than Farsi, it was similar to everything I was taught in Iran. For me, the process of attending prayers, listening to the talks, and communicating with people was a great experience. I both enjoyed the process and learned through the process. It helped me with my research and gave me a feeling of personal satisfaction.

The small talks with individuals in the mosque were informative. It is important to know that I did not approach people only to recruit them for interviews. Sometimes I initiated talks just to get to know people, something that every individual might do when they are new to a community. I had the chance to talk to several converts. Some were married to Muslims and after a few years decided to convert to Islam. Several of these conversations began with them introducing me to Islam and what they do in mosque and prayer, if they thought I was not familiar with Islam. In those cases, I immediately noted that "I am also a Muslim", but I wanted them to continue the conversation. Then we continued on to the level of their religiosity and how they keep up with Islamic rules like wearing hijab and doing prayers.

During this research process, I had to overcome some of my struggles. At first, I was dubious if it would be a good idea to start talking to people, introducing myself and telling them about my research. In some cases, I brought up that I am a Muslim, thinking that people might feel more comfortable listening to me. This was an advantage; being a

Muslim insider gave me the benefit of feeling more comfortable and confident when talking to people. As an insider, I did not go through any culture shock or surprise about strange things that often draw the attention of researchers who are outsiders. Since I was an insider for the most part, I could participate easily in many events and do almost everything without being worried about making mistakes or doing something wrong. I also already knew some members of the Muslim community, so it was easier to start connecting with people and build relationships in the community, which might have been more difficult for someone who was not Muslim.

Sampling Frame and Procedures

For the fifteen interviewees, the sampling strategy was convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Bernard 2017, 162). In addition, I interviewed key informants, or what LeCompte & Schensul (2010) call "gatekeepers" who control access to a community. In particular, some of the key informants were actively involved in organizing events in public places for the Muslim community. Two of my key informants are from the Sunni community and one is from the Shia community.

The research flyer was distributed in the primary Muslim centers in Knoxville, the Sunni-led Annoor Mosque, and the Shia-led Ahlulbayt Islamic Center in West Knoxville, and the Muslim Student Association at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville campus. The flyer was in English. I handed out printed copies to people I met, and I also sent flyers to Muslim groups on social media.

Cognitive Mapping

Cognitive mapping was another method for data collection that I planned to use as part of the in-depth interviews. Cognitive mapping was used by Kevin Lynch (1960) to elicit mental representations of the spatial environment in his research investigating the elements of urban form. This method provides a way for participants to talk about the ways that urban spaces are experienced. When I formulated my research proposal, I thought cognitive mapping would have the potential to collect multiple subjective experiences of different public places in Knoxville.

I did use this method with the first few people I interviewed. For this method, basic maps of Knoxville were provided to participants, and they were asked to mark the public places that they usually visit. The basic map provided a simple structure of Knoxville as a city, and respondents were asked to mark the places they often visit, whether for having fun, spending quality time with families and friends, or attending events organized by the Muslim community as well as other types of activities. This process was to be accompanied with questions to elicit stories about those places. This method is like participatory mapping, in which people draw maps and locate key locations on the map (Bernard, 2017).

However, the first few participants could not entirely relate to this method. When I asked them to mark the public places they usually visit, for any purpose, they had a problem locating the places on the map; the spatial characterisitcs of cognitive mapping was the issue for the few that did the cognitive mapping. When the first participant had trouble marking locations of places on the map, she started to make a list of places she

used. I tried using cognitive mapping for the second and third interviews, but they also had problems relating to it, so I asked them to make a list. Then, I asked participants to talk about the places on their lists, and what they liked and disliked about the one on top of their list. Participants felt more at ease with this method, and eventually they did remember the location of the places and more details about the places. The listing worked well, so I continued to use that method with all of the subsequent interviews.

Street Interviews

Another method of data collection that I planned to use was street intercept interviews, as Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman (2014) calls them, or as Kevin Lynch (1960) refers to them, street corner interviews. Informal street interviews are about having short conversations with people during public events in public places if they are willing to talk. This method did not work very well for this research, because people were not inclined to talk much while they were attending an event. In addition, it seemed weird to some Muslim individuals as I approached them and asked them questions. It seemed that I was pointing them out and wanting to make a difference between them and other people. So, I decided to focus my research on the in-depth interviews and the participant observations.

Data Analysis

This study produced several kinds of data, including audio recordings and field notes. data analysis files were also created. The information from the interviews in the format of audio recordings was transferred immediately after each interview to my personal computer which is secured by password. The notes from the interviews were typed immediately after each interview. I backed up the data on a weekly basis and stored it on an external hard drive and one online storage drive. I also stored a data analysis file on my personal computer. Audio recordings were transferred from my device to an external hard drive after each interview. Also, transcripts from the interviews and interview notes were added to the hard drive on a weekly basis. Folders and files were labeled based on the date of the interview, and a number was given to each participant. Field notes were kept in a secure folder.

To maintain privacy and security and confidentiality of the data, I was the only one who had access to the files stored on my personal computer and hard drive. Other materials like detailed notes will be destroyed six months after defending my thesis. To assure the confidentiality of participants, the names and identifiers were removed and replaced by pseudonyms for all participants, I decided to use first names as some Arabic last names are similar to one another and I wanted to protect confidentiality.

Analyzing Interviews

I used the traditional method of data analysis in cultural anthropology, which includes development and analysis of codes. Lofland and Lofland (2006) explain that

coding helps sort the data into various categories; it is the process that leads researchers to understanding what the data are about and how to interpret them meaningfully. Bernard maintains that coding is a cognitive process and that meanings can be classified, and categories and subcategories can be organized and understood (2017, 166). I used NVivo software to analyze the codes derived from the interviews. The major themes were derived from the most common and meaningful experiences in this thesis. Collins Zamawe's (2015) research showed that NVivo helps to increase the accuracy of data as it helps the researcher to understand how often similar ideas occur in the data. The literature review in Chapter Two helped me identify major themes that I expected to see in the data I gathered among Muslim immigrants in Knoxville. Other themes emerged from the data. In Chapter Four, I explain and discuss these themes.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of first-generation and second-generation Muslim immigrants in public places of Knoxville, Tennessee. This chapter reports the findings of the study; it not only presents descriptions of their experiences in public places but also identifies which public places they regarded as their favorite public places as well as the underlying reasons for favoring or avoiding some public places.

For this analysis, Muslim immigrants used public places as a community and as individuals with family or friends for leisure activities. Community events include large-scale events organized by the Sunni-led Muslim Community of Knoxville (MCK), such as religious holidays and public festivals; small-scale events organized by the Muslim Community of Knoxville or the Ahlulbayt Islamic Center (AIC); and events organized by the Muslim Student Association (MSA) including regularly scheduled religiously oriented meetings, periodic social events in public parks, and participation as a group in activities organized by the university or other groups at the university. As individuals, or as representatives of the Muslim community, people also attended cultural and political events in public places organized by other community groups. People engaged in general leisure activities in public places, such as going for walks, having picnic, eating out, or spending some quality time with family and friends.

The list of leisure activities mentioned by the people I interviewed that took place in public places was longer than the examples just mentioned. The types of activities are

defined by the opportunities that particular place provide. For example, some participants favored parks with sheltered areas for picnics or group potlucks, while others valued public places that were kid-friendly. It mattered whether events were attended primarily by families with small children or by groups of young unmarried adults. Some places with large open spaces are ideal for group sports. The range of possibilities that a place provides affects the way people see the place and use it. This was suggested by Karin Peters (2010) in her study when she discussed the reasons that people choose or do not choose to go to specific places. She found out that Muslim and other immigrants prefer urban green spaces that provided them with space for playing volleyball and football (soccer). Therefore, as will be discussed, based on the literature and my observations and interviews, the reasons for choosing or not choosing a place vary based on the type of place, the range of opportunities that the place has to offer, the types of activities preferred by users, and the characterisitics of users.

Characteristics of the Interview Participants and the Participant Observation

My findings are based on the analysis of interviews with fifteen Muslim immigrants, of whom three also were my key informants (two women and one man). All the interviews were conducted from August 2017 through June 2018. Of fifteen participants, four were men and eleven were women. Of the four men, three were first-generation immigrants and one was second-generation. Of the eleven women, six were first-generation, and five were second-generation immigrants. Their ages ranged from

eighteen to 48 years old. For confidentiality purposes, when quoting participants, I provide an age range, so readers can distinguish younger participants from older ones. Except for the second-generation immigrants who were born in Knoxville, the other participants have lived in Knoxville anywhere from three to 24 years. The participants came from diverse racial/ethnic and national backgrounds, including Arab, Pakistani, Kurdish, Iranian, and Somalian. The sample included mostly Sunni Muslims (since they also represent the majority of Muslims in Knoxville), and some Shia Muslims. I did not include questions about household income in my interviews, but based on their education levels, my guess is that the majority of the participants were middle-class. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms are given to all individuals. These characteristics of the interview participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Total Number of Participants=15	Male	Female
First-generation	3	6
Second-generation	1	5
Duration of stay in the USA in years (for first-generation immigrants)	5-12	3-24
Knoxville local	1	4
Level of speaking English (1-10)	9	10
Married	1	7
Have children	1	4
Wear hijab	-	8
Used to wear hijab	-	3
UTK student	3	5

In addition, the analysis is based on my participant observation from August 2017 to June 2018 at various events in public places and semi-public places organized by the Muslim Community of Knoxville (which is the Sunni center), the Muslim Student Association (which is a branch of Muslim Community of Knoxville), and the Ahlulbayt Islamic Center (which is the Shia center), in addition to attending more private events held by community members from time to time.

Although my thesis illustrates experiences of a small number of Muslim immigrants in Knoxville compared to the whole population; I believe that my contacts and connections with the Sunni and Shia Islamic centers gave me a good understanding of the underlying reasons for using or not using public spaces and of the experiences of individuals and groups. In addition to the Muslim centers that I mentioned, there is also Turkish Cultural Center (which is funded by the Turkish government and is relatively small). I have been there once, but did not attempt to recruit any research subjects through them. There also is the Ismaili center located in Farragut (a western suburb of Knoxville), but I was unable to make an appointment with them. Overall, I believe my research participants represent a diverse sample of Muslim immigrants in Knoxville, which can help us understand better how public places serve Muslims as minority group and how they perceive public places. The following section is a detailed description of my participant observations and events that I attended during the fieldwork. Later in this chapter, I will elaborate on the reasons why people used public places and the experiences they had in public places followed by an explanation of the major themes that emerged from interviews.

Uses of Public Places

As mentioned in the literature review, public places play an important role in city life as they are platforms for a wide variety of positive and negative experiences.

One interesting finding of this research that was not mentioned in any of the literature that I reviewed is that Muslim immigrants in Knoxville have begun to use public places for some of their large-scale religious celebrations and have organized large-scale activities in public places to which they were inviting the general public. They also used public places (especially neighborhood parks) for smaller-scale intra-group activities, such as picnics which were attended primarily by members of either the Sunni, Shia, or university-based Muslim communities. Then there are activities and experiences that Muslim individuals (usually with family or friends) have had in public places. The experiences affect the ways people perceive the overall environment in public places. As will be discussed, certain types of public places were more popular than others for leisure activities.

It was actually the category of holidays and festivals in public places organized by Muslim community that sparked my interest in this research topic. On the day after the Eid Fitr which marks the end of Ramadan (the ninth month of Islamic calender and the holy month of first revelation of Quran to the Prophet Muhammad), I was in Carl Cowan Park, located in West Knoxville near Northshore with some others members of the Iranian community of Knoxville celebrating Tirgan, which is mid-summer Iranian celebration (a Zoroastrian and Iranian festival). A Muslim woman approached us and gave us a greeting for Eid Fitr as she understood that we were from Iran and that some of

us were Muslims. She told us about the Eid Fitr celebration that had happened the day before at World's Fair Park. Eid Fitr is the most significant holiday and celebration for Muslims and consists of doing the Eid prayer followed by a group breakfast to celebrate the end of one month of fasting. I was surprised to hear that as I had no idea that Muslims hosted such events in public places like World's Fair Park, a prominent public place in Knoxville, located near the downtown area.

As it turned out, I later learned that the Muslim Community of Knoxville (MCK), which is led by Sunnis, has organized other types of events in public places. I was more accustomed to the types of events that were hosted by the Shia community in Knoxville, which are much smaller, and typically are organized in a more private manner, at least the ones that I had attended. These variations in uses of public places have led me to propose what follows as the major categories of using public places by Muslim immigrants in Knoxville.

Holidays and Festivals (organized by the Muslim Community of Knoxville)

Public places have the potential to accommodate large populations and to attract many individuals regardless of their race, age, gender, and religion. Hosting events in public places helps the Muslim Community to make themselves more visible as a group that belongs to Knoxville. The Sunni-led Muslim Community of Knoxville (MCK) announces events on their Facebook page. According to Negarin, one of my key informants, for the last eight years the MCK has been organizing the Eid Fitr prayer in Knoxville Convention Center, and for the last three years (2016, 2017, 2108), they have

served the breakfast at the Tennessee Amphiteatre in the World's Fair Park. World's Fair Park was built in 1982 for the World's Fair, formally known as the Knoxville International Energy Exposition. The Park consists of different areas, including the sun sphere (which provides a free 360-degree view of Knoxville for those who take the elevator to ride up into the sphere), a festival lawn, a play fountain, a children's playground, a performance lawn, the Tennessee Amphitheatre, and the East Tennessee Veterans Memorial.

The Convention Center and World's Fair Park are both located near the downtown and within walking distance from one another. The Knoxville Convention Center is used for various civic events.

Negarin saw religious holidays as opportunities to strengthen the bonds within the Muslim community and also to be involved in the city. According to her, having celebrations and events in public places like World's Fair Park is both informative and interactive, as non-community members also get a chance to participate in the events and communicate with members from the Muslim community. These locations are depicted in a map in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Map of World's Fair Park (2018)
Retrieved form URL (www.worldsfairpark.com)

In 2018, when I observed the Eid Fitr celebration, it was the third year of having the breakfast and some fun activities for children in World's Fair Park and it was the first year that they held it in the Tennessee Amphitheatre. Negarin explained more about the places where they used to have the breakfast prior to 2015. According to her, prior to using the World's Fair Lawn and then the Amphitheatre for Eid breakfast, they used to serve breafast at the Annoor Academy of Knoxville, which is the elementary school run by the Muslim community located in West Knoxville. Over the years, as many were not able to make it to Annoor Academy for breakfast after the prayer in the Convention Center, the MCK decided to make it more convenient for particpants. It is about 20-minute drive from the Convention Center to the Anoor Academy and there were not enough parking spaces at Anoor Academy. In addition, MCK leaders were eager to host the celebration where they could accomodate a larger population and make the event more public and visible to everyone rather than having it in more private places. Therefore, the MCK event organizers (who at the time were mainly volunteers) decided

to have the prayer and the breakfast in locations as close as possible to one another. The Tennessee Amphitheatre, depicted in Figure 2, has many seats and spaces, and it also provides shade, so it is a great choice for a large public event and allows space for setting up various activities for all ages. The Tennessee Amphitheatre is available for reservation through the World's Fair Park website; and the rental price rate varies from the price for commercial uses of $300 a day to non-profit uses for $200 a day (the Muslim Community of Knoxville would be classified as a non-profit).

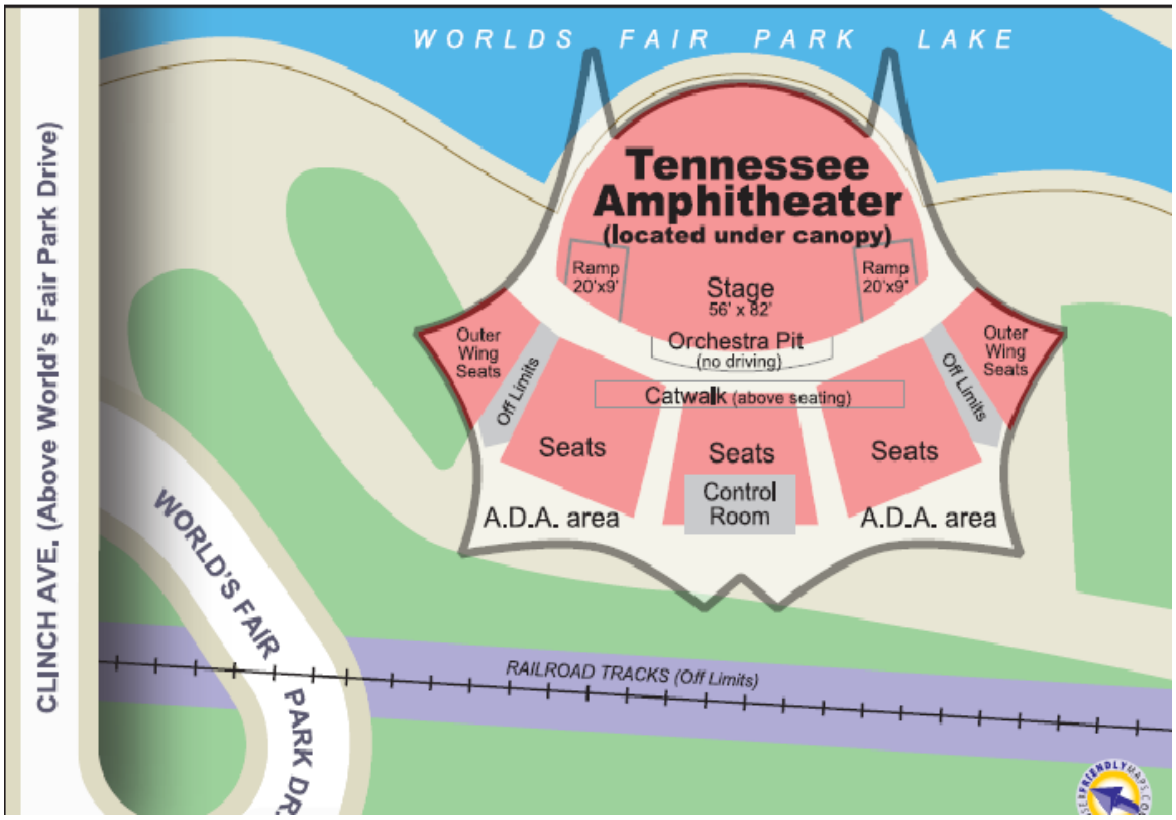


Figure 2: Map of Tennesse Amphitheatre (2018).
Retrieved form URL (www.worldsfairpark.com)

Another key informant, Mahboob observed that the Muslim Community gradually came out of its shell and decided to be more visible, to make an appearance whenever possible to help them to be seen as residents of Knoxville, and not as strangers:

> *"When I was a teenager they used to have events at a place on Sutherland Avenue, which was again just like a big open space. Um, or like large gym areas they would have events at, but more indoor spaces… where I think now we are, you know, wanting to have sort of spaces [than] where we, people who are interested in and our community are coming and checking it out, seeing what we're doing, if they feel like it's accessible to them as well, and they can come and look into what's the benefit of this approach for me like as a community leader .*
>
> _Mahboob_

Mahboob believed that it was crucial for Muslims to be seen as part of the city, as Knoxville residents and not as "the others". She believed that the leaders of the Muslim Community of Knoxville are eager to represent the Muslim community and give non-community members a chance to get to know Muslim community. In this way, events like Eid Fitr help Muslims maintain their identity both as Muslims and as part of the city. However, this desire to be involved and advocate for more involvement in the Knoxville

community is more observable among second-generation Muslims who are actively involved in Muslim community:

> *"Many of us grew up in Knoxville, and we consider ourselves part of the Knoxville community. We don't have any home outside of Knoxville, ummm, for, for us, for I think in my generation, it's sort of trying to integrate our Muslim identity with our identity as Americans and Knoxvillians that we're like, okay, our events are not so distinct all the time, that we are happy for people to know about them and be involved and even publicize them on Facebook for anybody to come and be a part of it as well… I feel like it's important for me that we are more integrated into the community."*
>
> _Negarin_

An important factor in using public places for substantial religious events was the size of the place. As mentioned before, the Tennessee Amphithetre area offers enough seats and also space to set up tables and to have different activities for children, such as face painting or installing air slides. A considerable number of individuals, about 500, attended the 2018 Eid Fitr celebration. In addition, there were several information tables to help answer questions about events, the Muslim Community of Knoxville, Islam or any other questions.

Negarin explained that hosting an important event in one of the iconic places inside the heart of Knoxville is a great opportunity to represent the Muslim community.

In other words, this type of representation is an attempt to make Muslims more visible and to invite others to get to know Muslims and see what is going on inside the community in order to raise awareness about Muslim community and Islam. My key informants believed that this type of representation balances the negative image of Muslims often portrayed in the media, and it helps people to be able to see who Muslims really are:

> "*So… ummm, you know, it is sort of… there's a lot of open space, but it's not so separate from everything else. Um, so it's kind of nice. I think World's Fair Park is nice because it has open space but still close to the city and so you feel a little bit more integrated into the city. I think in the past, we hadn't really thought about integrating more into the larger community and just sort of having our events separate and apart and just we would have them often in schools"*
>
> _ Negarin_

In sum, the critical factors for choosing public places for religious events were needing a large enough space to accommodate a good-sized crowd, endeavoring to make the Muslim community more visible for other Knoxvillians, and organizing an event that would be open to the public in addition to considering the needs of all individuals including elderly people and children.

Another example of a public event hosted by MCK is the International Food Festival that takes place annually in October. In 2017, it took place on the Festival Lawn of World's Fair Park, which can also be reserved through World's Fair Park website. The rental price is $750 per day for commercial events, and $550 per day for non-profit events. The MCK organizes this event as a fundraising charity to help with the costs of the Annoor Academy. After I decided to study the uses of public places by Muslim immigrants for my thesis research, I began following public, semi-public and private events of Muslim Community more. In October 2017, I attended this festival. The event was planned to start at 10 a.m. and end at 5 p.m. Unfortunately, it had been raining heavily. When I arrived at the park, it seemed that they had to skip many of their scheduled programs such as dancing, singing, and entertaining activities for children. I purchased my tickets -every ticket worth one dollar- there were a variety of foods, and the prices were low given the quality and the amount of the food. For example, dolmeh (stuffed vine leaves) cost a dollar for three pieces, and Arabian chicken and rice cost $10. As I was a fan of Arabic style dolmeh, I used three of my 1$ tickets to buy nine pieces. However, they were small in size, maybe the size of the tip of my finger. Most of the vendors were women, some were wearing hijab and some were not wearing hijab. Each of the tables were used by vendors who represented a different country, which added up to more than 18 tables and countries. It was interesting to see the number of American people who attended the Festival despite the rainy weather. I would estimate that about 40% of the people there were non-Muslim American people and that 60% were Muslim immigrants. This event was also held in World's Fair Park, and it also was a showcase to demonstrate the

involvement of the Muslim community in the city. The festival was open to the public which gives people from other ethnic groups the chance to taste food from Muslim origin countries.

These two examples of using public places for significant events emphasized the intention of accommodating large populations, being involved in city, and being visible as a strategy to assert Muslim identity as a part of the larger community of Knoxville.

Small-scale Events Organized by Sunni and Shia Muslim Communities

There are also some small-scale events happening around Knoxville, that are organized by the Muslim Community of Knoxville. The MCK has used public parks such as West Hills Park and Concord Park -both located in west Knoxville- on several occasions. These parks provide a more private area for having small events and gatherings. For example, a back-to-school ice cream social is usually held in West Hills Park in one of the quiet picnic areas with the capacity of accommodating about 30 people. This event is more popular with families with school-age kids. Concord Park is also well-liked for organizing small events, as it has some natural elements like water that attract individuals and it has open spaces for sand volleyball, restrooms, picnic areas and walking trails.

The small scale events organized by Shia community are usually held at residential houses, as the Shia community is smaller compared to the Sunni community. Their events are more private and are separated by ethnicities. In many cases, immigrants from each country have events in their own homes and interact with people within their

own community. The main inter-ethnic interactions during events happen at the Ahlulbayt Islamic Center during prayers or Ramadan. In this way, opportunities for interaction and involvement within the city of Knoxville appear to be lower for the Shia community, as they have not been as publicly visible as the Sunni.

Events by Muslim Student Association at the University of Tennessee

The Muslim Student Association (MSA) at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville (UTK) is a small branch of the Sunni-led Muslim Community of Knoxville (MCK). As it is a part of MCK, I assumed that the majority of attendees were Sunni; this was confirmed when doing the prayers during *halaqa*, the Arabic word for meeting. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Sunni fold hands while doing the prayer while the Shia do not. Furthermore, in the Shia Islamic school of thought, it is compulsory to use soil or clay for prayers which symbolizes the earth, while Sunni do not use the clay; that is how I came to underestand that all attendees in the *halaqa* sessions were Sunni. The group meets every Thursday during the school year at UTK campus. The meetings take place at Hodges Library, where it is possible for student groups to reserve rooms free of cost. During the fall of 2017 and Spring 2018, the number of attendees varied from 15-40 individuals, and the largest attendance was for the Fall 2017 end-of-the-semester *halaqa* session. The *halaqa* is a good place to get to know the community and to be introduced to the community since there is enough time before the lecture and discussion to walk around the room and talk to people. The *halaqa* is a time for communication and building connections, making friends, and getting to know other Muslims on campus. The *halaqa*

starts in the afternoon around 5-5:30 p.m and lasts for 60-90 minutes. The sessions aim to raise awareness among Muslim students about Islam and help them to underestand their identity as Muslims. Usually, an *Imam* or lecturer from MCK gives a small talk on different daily life subjects and the proper way to handle issues as a Muslim, followed by doing the evening prayer in the same room. If the room is not large enough, the group moves to one of the silent rooms on the fifth floor in Hodges Library for prayer. The evening prayer is the fourth of the five daily prayers. There is no gender split in doing the prayers on campus, men and women stay in straight lines (with men in the front line), facing the *Kaaba*, which is located at the center of the most important mosque and most sacred site in Islam, the Al-Masjid Al-Ḥarām, located in the Hejazi city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. As I mentioned earlier, I did not see anyone using clay in prayers, so it appeared to me that I was the only Shia there. The first time that I attended *halaqa* was in Fall of 2016. As I was on the listserv, I received emails from the Muslim Student Association (MSA). When I attended *halaqa* for the first time, I did not know about evening prayers, so I went there without having a scarf and I could not do the prayer, as wearing headscarf is required for women when doing prayers. Attending *halaqa* was informative both for my research and for myself, as I had the chance to be in an environment with people with whom I share similar underestandings, thoughts and concerns.

The MSA has organized several events on campus. For example, on the World's Hijab Day in 2017, volunteers from the MSA attempted to raise awareness about wearing hijab. This activity took place on the pedestrian walkway, which is at the heart of UTK, where the MSA had representatives and volunteers; they encouraged students passing by

to try on the hijab and see how it feels. The MSA respresents the youth of the MCK. Activities like this also help make Muslims more visible in the American context. This also confirms that the younger generation of Muslims attempts to be visible and represent aspects of Islam as part of Muslim identity, not as something that is weird or strange.

Another event that MSA organized was an end-of-the-year barbecue party held in Concord Park, which was funded by MCK. Concord Park is a favorite for the MSA community as they can have a variety of activities there, such as playing volleyball, swimming, and of course, feeding the birds. Using parks for barbecues and group gatherings is in accordance with the findings of Karin Peters (2010) in the Netherlands, is which she found out that immigrants in the Netherlands enjoyed using urban green spaces for picnics and preferred places that provide enough space to do outdoor activities.

These examples show that the MSA events have different types of activities, ways of publicizing events, and types of socilaization among Muslims. For example, the *halaqa* sessions are open to public but individuals would need to be on the list serve to get information about the exact time and location. In addition, the activities associated with the *halaqa* are primarily religious with some socializing, whereas the events in public places such as Concord Park are used primarily for socializing within the community, doing outdoor activities and relaxing, in other words, it is more for non-religious purposes. The findings confirm what Karin Peters (2010) mentioned as use of public parks by Muslims for group activities and gatherings. However, Peters did not mention activities like the World's Hijab Day where Muslim immigrants were intentionally engaging with and attempting to educate non-Muslims.

Assertion of Rights

Attending political events and supporting social causes is another example of making appearance in public places by Muslims. The data from the interviews revealed that the individuals who are more involved in the Muslim Community were the ones who were more inclined to attend political events. Of the fifteen participants, four mentioned attending political events in public places. They believed it gives them a pleasant feeling as they stand for the right thing side by side with people who have similar ways of thinking, regardless of religion, skin color and language, and standing for the right thing is the only thing that matters most. However, attending political activities in public places was not very popular among other research participants as not everyone was aware of the different political events that occurred in Knoxville or they were not interested.

As mentioned, individuals who are actively involved in the Muslim Community of Knoxville intentionally participate in events to support social and political causes. According to my key informants, over the years the MCK has built a strong connection with other interfaith groups and different groups in Knoxville, which helps them to represent the Muslim community for many occasions. In previous years, the Muslim community was not very visible in Knoxville, but as they started attending more civic events, they represented themselves as individuals who care about whatever happens in the city, country and around the world and assert that they are a part of Knoxville community. For example, for several years, the MCK has participated in Knoxville's annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day march through East Knoxville, the predominantly African American side of Knoxville. Through participation in events like this, they paved

their way to be involved more and more in city life. These are the reasons why the four individuals chose to be present at events that are mentioned:

> *"So being invited to participate in things like that is helpful... Um, I think it's helpful in general too, just having diversity in events and I think that is many reasons people do come out and reach out to us and the event organizers seeking more diversity in their events."*
>
> _Negarin_

The interviewees attended events such Black Lives Matter, the Women's March, and events organized by Bridge Refugee Services.

> "*We're part of that community that they are, you know, there's not a lot of distinction between the Muslim community and Knoxville… So that's important for us especially… you know… um,"*
>
> _ Negarin_

As can be seen from these quotes, through their participation in political events and through organizing the public activities mentioned earlier, several of the second-generation Muslim immigrants are trying to assert their identities as Muslims and as Knoxvillians.

General Leisure Activities

Individuals favored parks and green areas for leisure activities, such as spending quality time with family and friends. Compared to public places like Market Square (a plaza in the downtown that has a stage and is surrounded by restaurants, bars, and stores); the Muslim immigrants that I interviewed preferred to spend their time in public parks because they were less populated, had more open spaces as well as trees and greenery which provide a pleasant view. Concord Park (located out west near suburban areas), Ijams Nature Center (which has walking trails and activities for children and is located just south of the downtown near the river), Tyson Park (which is located near the University of Tennessee) and Lakeshore Park (located west of the downtown) were among the most popular public places cited by individuals, when I asked them: What is your favorite public place? Which one did you visit recently? The top choice for several participants was Ijam Nature Center, as it offers a wide variety of activities, including walking and paddling, and it also usually is not crowded, or the crowd is scattered around a large park, so Muslim women get less starings as everyone is out there to enjoy nature, so there is a lesser chance of being offended or insulted or confronted negative attitude. Concord Park was also popular for individual and group activities:

> *"there at Concord park…I visit for like relaxation. My kids like to play there"*
>
> _ Akbar, male, age range 40-48 years old_

It was interesting that Muslims pick parks and places that are located in areas mainly associated with the white middle-class, like places close to the university or places located in west Knoxville. The north and south parts of town have substantial areas that are predominantly white working class, and the east is predominantly African American. In the interviews, no one mentioned why they do not choose public parks and other public places in south and north Knoxville, however, the majority of them lived in west Knoxville or they were students living close to UTK. As I mentioned, it appeared that most of the people I interviewed were middle class. In addition, they chose places where they predicted that people would be more accepting toward diversity and they would be less at risk of being poorly treated. As Ahmed put it:

> *" Concord Park is more of a quiet and relaxing area, we can do a lot there, and you will see nice people out there, not bad strangers"*
>
> _Ahmed, male, age range 22-30 years old _

Another use of public places was for social gatherings, such as going to cafés or restaurants with groups of friends to get food. In this case, Market Square was a popular choice for men. Women preferred to go there with a group of friends. However, Market Square was not a top choice for women.They preferred other places such as Turkey Creek (a major shopping area that also has restaurants located in Farragut or the far western suburbs) as it is less crowded.

Competing Public Places

Public places attract individuals based on what they have to offer to meet the needs of visitors. In adition, there are community places that can attract community members, who prefer to use those spaces rather than go to public places. For example, the Annoor Mosque is popular with middle-aged Muslim females as they have monthly sessions and weekly sessions which allow members of the community to participate in activites within the community like food preparation for homeless people. One participant mentioned how attending activities and lectures in the Mosque help them to be involved in the Muslim community and help the community carry out activities that benefit the wider community of Knoville such as preparing food for homeless people. Thus, several individuals, families, or groups of individuals used community spaces for their leisure activities rather than public spaces::

> *"I attend a lot activities, I go to mosque for Quran recitation sessions, we are also active in preparing food for homeless, I do not ususally go to any other places as I know everyone in masjid [mosque]and we have a lot to talk about"*
>
> _Zinat, female, age range 40-48 years old_

In the next section, I elaborate on the experiences of Muslims in public places in Knoxville through an explanation of the themes that emerged from the interviews. As the literature reviewed in Chapter Two suggests, these themes include the challenges that Muslims face when they are in public. The discussion of these themes will enable me to

to answer one of the main questions of this research: Are public spaces really open to everyone?

Themes

Several themes emerged from the interviews with Muslim immigrants and from my field notes, which included observational data and information gathered from key informants. The themes were identified through the repetition of their occurrence in the interviews and notes. The themes include discrimination with the subthemes of (a) visibility as a trigger (b) wrong image of Muslims and (c) perceived danger associated with public places. The second theme is social interactions and integration. The third theme is assertion of identity. The fourth theme is enjotying socializing in public places. And the fifth theme was feeling comfortable in public places. Now, we turn our attention to several quotes from participants, in which they discussed their experiences with discrimination.

Discrimination

Visibility As A Trigger

Several people that I interviewed, both men and women, mentioned the visibility of Muslim women (wearing the hijab) as a trigger to becoming target of discrimination. In my study, the women who wore hijab or the other men and women who were with someone who wears hijab indicated the frequent incidents of getting strange looks. The

findings confirmed what Arjoan (2011) found with young boys and girls in school setting, as girls wearing hijab were more at risk of being discriminated outside school.

Following the distinctions made between blatant and subtle discrimination made by Joe R. Feagin (1991), who investigated anti-black discrimination in public places, strange looks fall within the category of subtle discrimination, which is the way that Jasmin perceived it:

> *"And nothing has happened to me. Like thankfully nothing. No one has ever hurt me. No one has ever tried to take like try to touch me, like take off my hijab or like try to assault me."*
>
> _Jasmin, female, age range 18-22 years old _

She continued, with an example that illustrates that she has been subjected to verbal attacks, which is a more blatant form of discrimination:

> *"but like at Market Square the other night, some guy was like saying… he was badmouthing the Prophet Muhammed and he was just kind of attacking me for it… He was like, oh, well what has the Prophet Muhammad done for you? Huh? I just ignore it because I feel like some people are just out here to attack just to fight you and just to kind of embarrass you in public"*
>
> _Jasmin, female, age range 18-22 years old_

Feagin (1991) classified responses to discrimination range from careful assessment to withdrawal, resigned acceptance, verbal confrontation, or physical confrontation. In my interviews, I had participants who ignored the situation or verbally confronted the situation in a friendly manner. For example, one participant mentioned how she responded to a white man when walking in the park:

> *"I was walking down the trail alone… there was this young man on his way back… as he saw me he told me you Muslims are going to choke us by your hijab…it sounds funny to me... so I just answered I never thought that I can use my shal to choke people, you are so creative…and I just went on my way"*
>
> _Zinat, female, age range 40-48 years old_

As already mentioned, staring falls within subtle discrimination, and almost all participants and mainly women mentioned being stared when they are in public. The reactions to staring varied based on participants' personal characteristics and the situation. For example, the more outgoing people took some type of physical confrontation like staring back until the person would just go on his or her way. Some participants reached out to people who were staring at them and asked if there was something interesting or something wrong with them; this is what Diba did:

> *"I attended a festival in Market Square a few years ago, I got a lot of strange looks and staring, then I decide to go to the person right*

away and ask what he thinks is wrong with me or if he has any question I can answer that"

Diba, female, age range 20-28 years old

Besides the types of responses that Feagin classified when encountering discrimination in public places, my findings uncovered another type of response, as some participants mentioned the burden and responsibility that they felt to be super friendly, always laughing, helping others, ignoring discriminations just to make a good face of Muslims. One participant believed that this could be a way to balance out the ways that Muslims are being portrayed in the media and in American society. She believed being "super nice" helps people see that "Muslims are not hostile".

Other female interviewees also mentioned incidents they associated with wearing hijab. Many times, women who wear the hijab said that these incidents can happen everywhere and many factors are involved. The women (as well as men and women who did not wear hijab) cited some factors such as the type of places, whether it is crowded or not, and whether they are alone or with others. Feagin (1991) found that the majority of acts of discriminations happen in the streets. However, streets can be crowded or not so crowded. Some participants in this Knoxville study thought that negative experiences were more likely to happen in less populated areas:

"*Usually the bad strangers… they don't show up because they're too scared to show up in public places where there are lot of*

people. Usually the person who wants to say something about, about you, he doesn't really know you and it's most likely scared of you. And so those people don't want really to approach unless they feel empowered enough…and that's, that's a very rare situation that happens."

Jasmin, female, age range18-22 years old

Just as the previous research participant suggested that well-populated public places discourage blatant acts of discrimination, another participant felt that some people feel more empowered to act in discriminatory ways towards Muslim women in less populated public areas, such as a walking trail:

"Once I was walking down on a trail in Tyson Park [near the university], and there was a guy shouting at me 'go back to your country, I believe in less populated places people have more courage to attack you, because no one see[s] what they are doing, they just feel more power when no one is around"

_ Karime, female, age range 22-30 years old_

However, the majority of women wearing hijab preferred not to be in crowded places such as Market Square. Several people mentioned that it is more comfortable to be in less populated places, even if there is a higher chance of having negative experiences. They thought that starings were more likely in populated public places like Market

Square. That is more bothering. In addition, if someone were to offend them in Market Square, it would be more embarrassing compared to being insulted or discriminated in a less populated place. When women made these kinds of comparisons, they were comparing Market Square to Turkey Creek (a shopping area in West Knoxville) or to public parks, at times when they would be likely to be socializing with family or friends. However, some of the participants mentioned feeling unsafe and being discriminated against in places like trails or the woods or staircases in public buildings:

> *"You know, the US is kind of unsafe place, I like going to nature places, but when I am here in this country I don't feel safe, to be a woman to go out in the woods by yourself, I usually don't go out by myself. There was just one time that two creepy guys followed me, that was it… I don't know if it's the gun culture here, when I am oversea…s I feel safer to be out, those people don't have guns. If I want to choose to go somewhere I go to Northshore Park or Ijam Nature Center. Otherwise, I go out to go to the movies, go to restaurants and I usually go with others."*
>
> _Amal, female, age range 22-30 years old _

I do not wear hijab, and when I first started formulating this project, I was particularly interested in how Muslim immigrants were using Market Square and World's Fair Park, and I had yet not read much of the literature about Muslim immigrants that I reviewed in Chapter Two, so I admit that initially, I was surprised to learn that Market

Square (a popular public place for many Knoxvillians) was not a favorite place for Muslims and Muslim women wearing hijab. This is where I felt like more of an outsider as I had not experienced the same thing because of my appearance. In these cases, they believed that their identity as a Muslim woman plays a huge role in being noticed:

> *"Wearing hijab, makes us easily observable, I used to wear hijab, but after the presidential campaign in 2015, I experienced a lot of problems, everywhere, in restaurants with waiters, in crowded public places, at the airports, and I also didn't feel safe anymore in this country. As gun culture is pretty common here (in the US), not only me, but my husband and my family were also concerned about my safety... I wasn't sure if I go out wearing hijab, I'll come back home alive. So, I decided to take off the hijab, and I am not observable anymore, I do not get staring like I did before and no one is suspicious or assume that I have done something wrong, no more inspections at the airport and no more disrespect in restaurants. I didn't have many friends at that time, but then I took off my hijab and changed my place to a new location, now I can have a normal life"*
>
> _ Nina, female, age range 28-30 years old _

Another participant also mentioned the difficulties of being noticed for wearing hijab, and how Muslim women are carrying the burden of the negative climate against Muslims:

> *"You know what, no one can recognize you as a Muslim if you are a man or if you are female but you don't wear hijab, I don't say that for sure they don't recognise your identity, they might guess that you're Arab or Pakistani, so whatever challenges and difficulties Muslims face in public, it's because of their visibility"*
>
> _ Amal, female, age range 22-30 years old _

Male participants also believed that visibility brought issues for Muslim women. Akbar has had some experiences of discrimination when going out with his wife (who wears hijab) and kids to get food:

> *"We were sitting in a restaurant when some guy asked my wife to go home, he says go back to your country"*
>
> _Akbar, male, age range 40-48 years old_

In these quotes (as well as similar statements made by others that I have not included here), the research participants were linking these different experiences to visibility. Visibility has a huge impact in shaping the experiences of women who are observant, as well as experiences related to being a member of a group who is observant or is accompanied by someone who is observant. These situations bring up different

experiences for individuals; the intersectionality of various factors like being women, looking different, and wearing hijab makes them more vulnerable:

> *"I was in the Market Square in here, like in downtown, um, I was walking with my friend and… this has happened multiple times, but this was like the last time and they, some guy was just kinda like following us, and I felt very uncomfortable. Like just because I was like for my safety, like I was like, what is he doing? So what I was, I don't know whether or not it was because I'm a woman or because I'm Muslim. So, you can't tell"*
>
> _Jasmine, female, age range 18-22 years old_

This concurs with what literature suggest that women wearing hijab are more vulnerable to acts of discrimination as their appearance makes it easy to identify their religion and express presumptions about them, while the same is not true for males and those females who do not wear hijab. According to Abu-Ras et al. (2009), in their investigation of the perceived discrimination after 9/11in New York, they found out the Muslim women wearing hijab were more vulnerable than Muslim men and they preferred not to go out in public as they were more susceptible to be the targets of hate crimes and discrimination. This reaction confirms what Feagin (1991) defined as withdrawal in response to being discriminated. Abu-Ras et al.(2009) results indicated great fear and anxiety of being in public for a number of the Muslim women and my findings confirmed

it. However, other studies show that women, both those wear hijab and those who do wear hijab, are more vulnerable to becoming targets of attacks more than males because of gender (Abu-Ras et al., 2009). The intersectionality of gender and religion results in being affected in multiple ways. The line between gender base discrimination, religion base discrimination and race/ethnic base discrimination is blurry, but there are still many experiences that are specific for Muslim women. The next quote contains an interesting observation about levels of visibility within a group. For example, one woman who wore hijab explained:

> *"I notice this a lot…my younger sister does not wear hijab. So, it is usually me, and she will go out and people will not stare as much then. However, if I go out with another person who is wearing hijab then we get stared at more… and then when it is me and one other person who does not wear hijab it is just kind of like it is like that we balance each other out."*
>
> _Habibe, female, age range 22-28 years old _

Wrong Image of Muslims

Throughout the interviews, participants mentioned presumed identity and wrong image of Muslims as reasons for having negative experiences in public places. The presumptions shape how people treat Muslims in public places are often based on the images that the media has provided about Islam (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Macdonald, 2006;

Saeed, 2007). This is illustrated in the next two quotes from two of my research participants who were both second-generation Muslim immigrants:

> *"I do get a little bit more cautious when something like… some kind of attack happens. Like something like we always, whenever there was like some kind of terrorist attack… I feel like we always have to be the first ones to say, oh, we are sorry… it is not even our fault… they are not even those people that do these attacks. They're not even Muslims"*
>
> _Zeynab, female, age range 18-22 years old_

In the media and among non-Muslims, wearing hijab is often associated with having less human rights and being oppressed. However, the reality is much different as mentioned by one participant:

> *"But I think like when you wear hijab people think that you are oppressed and because of that when you are with a man, with your father or brother they tied you to him…when I go out with my grandfather, people think that he's my husband…when I go with my brother people think he's my son…while the same is not true for my sister who does not wear hijab"*
>
> _ Zahra, female, age range 18-22 years old_

Participants believed that the general understanding toward those who wear hijab is centered around being forced to wear it by family or by their culture. They believed that no one try to understands the underlying reasons of wearing hijab and the value of it. In this sense, wearing hijab to Muslim women was associated with being spiritually prepared to represent Islam. On the one hand, some participants mentioned taking off the hijab not because of social pressures in America; rather because they felt that they are not ready and prepared enough to represent Islam. On the other hand, some participants continue wearing hijab even though they do not fully believe in hijab; rather they see itas a tool to resist the social pressures of accusing Muslims of any attacks that happen all around the world, especially after 9/11. One participant discussed her experience with hijab as follows:

> *"I started wearing hijab the day before 9/11; I was not a hundred percent sure if I want to wear hijab or not, then 9/11 happened, my parents insisted that I took it off for my safety… I resisted, I continued wearing hijab even I did not believe in it completely, but I continued wearing it to resist all the pressures, to prove that I will not take it off just because American society call me terrorist or just because I get offended wherever I go"*
>
> _Amal, female, age range 28-30 years old_

In addition to being discriminated in public places, as several of the people quoted above mentioned, Muslims also feel unsafe and in danger in public places, because of gun culture as mentioned by some participants and also because of becoming visible residents after 9/11.

Perceived Danger Associated with Public Places

Safety and the probability of being in danger were concerns for Muslim women wearing hijab, feeling unsafe and in danger causes Muslims to always be cautious and aware of their surroundings, to evaluate situations, to predict possible incidents and to think ahead just to be prepared for potential danger, as illustrated in this quote:

> *"You know it's just like you always have to think about that suddenly and that moment of course now every time every floor I go in library I have to think …am I sitting next to the nearest exit staircase like the emergency staircase … It makes you more cautious about what I'm wearing… like is my scarf too bright today in a way that if I hide in the library, they see me very easily. And you know… stuff like that. It's just the main thing that bothers me about it… it's not like I don't want it to be public. I think it just scares me how public it is"*
>
> _Fatima, female, age range 18-22 years old _

As it can be seen, being visible is associated with discrimination and possible danger in public places. This made Muslims consider many possible factors when they are in public. Sometimes it leads to avoidance or withdrawal from public places, as Feagin (1991) mentioned. The quote above shows how being cautious was present in every aspect of her life when she decided to go to public places.

Social Interaction and Integration

For the participants in this study, being in public places, especially for social, cultural and political activities, helps them to integrate into American society. The integration within the city happens through attending events organized by the city of Knoxville, the Muslim Community of Knoxville (MCK) and other interfaith communities and civic groups. The levels of integration and social interaction were highly related to many characteristics such as gender, age, first-generation or second-generation, involvement in community activities, personal characteristics such as being introverted or extroverted, and social networks. My findings showed that young second-generation women were more inclined to get involved in activities that represent the Muslim community to the city. For them, Knoxville was their home, and because English is their first language, they do not have problems like language barrier or an inability to communicate appropriately like some of the first-generation immigrants. In addition, the types of social networks to which these individuals belong are important factors that define how people interact and integrate into the community and the society. For

example, the Sunni Muslims, have built a more extensive and more public social network that the Shia Muslims. The Shia are more centered around socializing within their own community. The level of integration and social interactions with non-Muslims differs among these two groups. The Sunnis have higher chances of being asked to represent Muslims in public platforms organized by other community groups due to having higher levels of community involvement and more visible uses of public places compared to the Shia who typically held their events in more private places.

Enjoying Socializing in Public Places With Other Muslims

Some participants, both men and women, preferred to go to public places where they can spend time or be a part of leisure activities with a group with whom they share similar characteristics. The next comment agrees with the findings of the studies by Karin Peters (2010) and Karin Peters et al. (2010) in the Netherlands:

> *"I like to surround myself with Muslims, we congregate in the library, go out to eat, and we share the same experiences"*
>
> _Mana, female, age range 18-22 years old_

Feeling Comfortable in Public Places

Comments by the people I interviewed, suggested that discrimination affects the ways they react to negative incidents and the level of comfort they feel in public, as one participant explained:

"I don't feel much different. Like I said, I'm like… living in America my whole life being involved in the community and intertwined social fabric of communities. Like I've never really felt like I was an outsider unless like specific incidents happen. However, those are very, very rare to happen. So, like in general, I usually feel comfortable. I don't feel like I'm singled out"

Habibe, female, age range 18-22 years old

Feeling comfortable in public places is related to criteria, such as how crowded the place is or whether there are people in the group who are not wearing hijab as a counter-balance. In the quote above, Habibe said that negative incidents are rare, so that overall, she feels comfortable in public places. Furthermore, although most of the Muslim immigrants I interviewed had experienced stares or other incidents in public places, it seems that the negative experiences may have become normalized, so they ignore it and go to public places anyway.

Assertion of Rights

As mentioned earlier, some individuals use being in public places to assert their identity and represent themselves as a part of the whole Knoxville community. It helps them to not being singled out from the city. As Fatima put it:

"I really love the feel of being in a protest, standing up for something, being surrounded by a lot of people who kind of share your, your belief systems and they're also willing to stand up for those beliefs and do more than just talking, about it"

Fatima, female, age range 18-22 years old

These themes have revealed that public places in Knoxville were associated with both negative and positive experiences for individuals. The negative experiences do not always deter Muslim immigrants from participating in activities in public places. However, they might react in different ways such as ignoring discrimination, withdrawing from public places, or verbally or physically confronting perpetrators of discrimination.

In summary, the findings show that Muslim women wearing hijab experience more negativity in public places compare to their male counterparts. This concurs with the literature discussed in Chapter Two. Male participants did not notice negative experiences, but they all agreed that it is because they are not observant. The fact that men are Muslims is less visible to strangers on the street, unless they have phenotypical features that mark them as Arab or Middle Eastern or "foreign". In the next and final chapter, I will recap and discuss the conclusions based on these findings and important points raised by the literature.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has explored the experiences and views of first-generation and second-generation Muslim immigrants in public places of Knoxville, Tennessee. The study was carried out using face-to-face in-depth interviews with fifteen participants, eleven women and four men, mostly Sunni and some Shia, who were mainly middle-class, but were from a variety of racial/ethnic and national backgrounds. Participant observation was also used by the researcher at several events organized by Muslim communities in Knoxville, and a few events organized by other organizations.

In the first chapter, I set up the idea that public places can be places for integrating immigrant minorities within the whole community. Ideally public places should function as neutral places that welcome individuals regardless of race/ethnicity, age, gender, skin color, appearance and any other defining factors. However, the literature review in Chapter Two I discussed that the ideal notion of public place does not exist. The literature clarified that Muslim immigrants have had to deal with the anti-Muslim climate in America and in other countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Australia which affected how they are treated in public places and therefore how perceive being in public places. My results confirmed that indeed most of the immigrants that I interviewed had had experiences of discrimination. Consequently, several of them associated negative experiences of discrimination with busy public places like Market Square, and like the immigrants in the Netherlands, tended to prefer neighborhood public parks where they could enjoy picnics with family and friends who were also Muslim.

However, they also had experiences that can be classified as positive experiences in public places, which can be seen as contributing towards the integration of Muslim immigrants within the Knoxville community. Indeed, in particular, some of the second-generation immigrants chose to attend events organized by other community organizations in order to represent the Muslim community. In addition, for the last three to eight years, the Sunni-led Muslim Community of Knoxville (MCK) and the Muslim Student Association (MSA) at the University of Tennessee (which receives support from MCK) have made efforts to celebrate important Muslim holidays and sponsor festivals in large visible public places, not only to accommodate larger crowds who are Muslim, but also to be able to invite non-Muslims to attend and learn more about Islam and Muslim cultures and food.

This literature suggested that experiences in public places for people of minorities and Muslims can be perceived as positive and negative. My findings confirmed that positive experiences in public places in Knoxville happens through socializing and spending time with others -usually members within the ethnic/culture group- and also by representing Muslims through attending social and political events. The negative experiences literature suggested are more associated with being discriminated against and feeling uncomfortable in public places. In addition, responses and reactions were similar to what other studies have suggested; my findings showed verbal confrontation, avoidance or withdrawal, isolation, and ignoring discrimination were among the common responses. It also showed that being intentionally friendly or nice was another response. The literature also suggested that men and women experience

public spaces differently. This was confirmed by my findings. Furthermore, previous research suggested that Muslim women wearing hijab are more vulnerable as they are the target of attacks in public places. All of the participants, both men and women, confirmed the vulnerability of Muslims women and how wearing hijab makes them more visible to perpetrators of discrimination who try to blame them for the tragic events that happen all around the world. In contrast to the study in New York, the findings of this study showed that Muslim individuals and specifically women feel safer in public places with police officers present there. This may be a reflection of Knoxville being a smaller city, and of efforts by the local police to protect the public from harassment. However, like the study conducted in New York, some of the research participants in Knoxville mentioned that surveillance cameras made them feel uncomfortable and caused them to withdraw from the place.

As just mentioned, nearly all participants in this study had experienced varying degrees of discrimination, but also had had social interactions that helped contribute to their social integration in the community. Four were actively participating in events where they asserted their identity in public places. The majority of the participants were Sunni, and eight out of eleven women participants wore hijab. Nine out of the fifteen participants were first-generation immigrants, but the study also included second-generation immigrants who grew up in Knoxville. The Muslim women who were wearing hijab reported having experienced subtle forms of discrimination such as staring and more blatant forms of discrimination such as hate speech in public places. Even men and women who did not wear hijab reported that they got different attitudes from

strangers in public when they were part of a group that included women wearing hijab. Along these lines, one of the participants decided to stop wearing hijab and reported that she immediately noticed the difference.

Interestingly, one of the female participants who wore hijab mentioned how here experiences are different when she is in a group or goes out in public with someone that does not wear hijab. It seems that this makes her less threatening to would-be perpetrators of discriminatory acts. As she put it, it helped "balance out" the negativity associated with hijab and made her become less noticeable and more acceptable in public places.

As mentioned, men and women have different experiences, and there was also a significant difference between the experiences of women who wear hijab compared to those who do not. Muslim men were not able to recall any adverse incidents related to their Muslim identity in public places in Knoxville, and they made it clear religion is not recognizable when you look like others. They usually did not get bad attitudes from others because of their identity as Muslims. All four male participants mentioned that even if something happens in public places, it is because they look or sound different than Americans, due to their skin color or their accent.

As reported by the immigrants in the study conducted in New York (Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009), Muslim women in Knoxville talked about experiencing varying levels of anxiety when they are in public. Muslim women wearing the hijab indicated experiencing high levels of anxiety and rumination which confirms the finding of Abu-Ras et al. (2009) study in New York. Out of the eight participants who wore hijab, five indicated that they exercise considerable scrutiny when choosing their dress, so they become less

observable or visible, for example not wearing bright clothing. In addition, that they try to avoid going to places that increase the risk of being in danger like being in crowded places or they avoid going to places that are open to almost everyone. The other three participants all had experiences of having worn hijab at some points in the past in their lives and then decided to take it off for reasons varying from not being spiritually prepared to represent Islam at its best to feeling of being in danger and not feeling safe. Muslim women who do not wear hijab and men reported less discrimination when they were within a group in which no one was wearing hijab compared to being accompanied by women who wear the hijab.

The interviews suggest that those individuals who are active members in Muslim centers have created an extensive network of Muslims around them who are regularly updated about events going on in the community through involving in social media platforms. This includes Muslims who are active as a part of Muslim Community of Knoxville and also are regular members. All four of the politically active participants believed that they had had positive experiences being in public places, as they try to be friendlier and extroverted and attempt to represent a right image of Muslims to counteract all the negativity about the Muslims.

Public places that were popular by Muslim immigrants included more natural areas and green open spaces like parks and riversides as they provided more open space and the population was considered to be more scattered in addition to providing scenic views and opportunities to obtain peace compare to other types of public places. Participants favored Concord Park, Ijams Nature Park, and West Hills Park, Concord

Park and West Hills both for individual and group visits. Ijams Nature Center was popular more for individual visits, while public places like Market Square and World's Fair Park in downtown area of Knoxville were not regarded to be as favorable for individual recreational activities. Market Square was mentioned as a busy place, in addition to being dominated by stores and shops with low levels of diversity in activities that it offers. Furthermore, some participants believed that it is not kid-friendly except during some festivals when entertaining activities and facilities are provided for kids. It was also seen as being crowded, which caused some Muslim immigrants, especially women, to avoid going there, because they were concerned with their safety and they were uncomfortable thinking about the possibility of being stared at or attacked in front of crowd, besides being gentrified and a white-dominated place.

However, Market Square was one of the places favored by single first-generation and second-generation men for getting food or drink, hanging out with friends or spending time at lounges on Gay Street near Market Square. World's Fair Park was not a choice for almost all of the participants. In fact, many of the participants could not remember the last time they visited the park. They believed that there are attractive parks around town that offer more facilities and activities for personal and family recreation, and World's Fair Park is not one of them. A few of participants mentioned being in World's Fair Park for Community events hosted by Muslim Community of Knoxville like International Food Festival or Eid Fitr Celebration. MCK leaders liked the large size of the park and being close to downtown, so the community has more chances to be integrated into the city and become more visible.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was finding participants. Even though I attended events regularly, I was unable to contact members of two small Islamic communities. I also had difficulties recruiting all fifteen participants. I talked to more than 80 individuals in person and explained my research and exchanged contact information with over 50 individuals, but many of those never turned out to be willing to participate. Out of 21 potential participants I had to reschedule three, which never worked, and then they preferred not to participate, and for three others who initially agreed to participate, I never received any response after calling and sending messages to set up an appointment.

In addition, in some of the Islamic centers, people mainly spoke Arabic, and their level of English was fair. Therefore, I was unable to properly communicate with some of my potential participants, even when it was about explaining my research. The Ismaili center is a Shia center located in West Knoxville, but I was unable to contact them to set an appointment, despite making several phone calls and sending many emails. However, I had a meeting with one Ismaili on campus, but I did not get to interview her. Another limitation to this study for me was the location of the Ahlulbayt Islamic Center. It was in West Knoxville, located in a hidden place covered all around by trees. A few times I tried to go there during the evenings for prayers during Ramadan, but I could not manage to walk there. As a student researcher, I had problems with transportation as I do not have a car. In fact, I also found that in some cases transportation was also a defining factor for how some Muslim immigrants use public places. Nevertheless, with this research, I was

able to reach a diverse community of Muslims to see how they have experienced being in public places and what reasons they have when they choose to go to a place.

Conclusion

The literature about Muslims in America, their life experiences and their experiences in public places mainly discussed the experiences of female participants. This study did gather information from both first-generation and second-generation immigrants, and from males and females about their uses of public places and their experiences. One of the most significant findings is that this study documents attempts by the Muslim Community of Knoxville, and especially by second-generation immigrants who were active in the organization, to be more visible in Knoxville and claim their identity as Muslims. This is a theme that was not mentioned much in the literature that I reviewed on the uses of public places by Muslim and other immigrants.

The findings suggest some factors that can improve the accessibility and welcoming aspects of public places for poor people, ethnic minorities, and immigrant populations. The Muslim immigrants I interviewed did enjoy using urban parks, but also were concerned about safety. The Muslim women, for example, appreciated having areas of the park where groups could socialize in relative privacy. Young immigrants enjoyed having areas to play group sports. The City of Knoxville charges rental fees for large public parks that a group like the Muslim Community of Knoxville (which has a number of middle class members) was able to afford. At least the small group of mostly middle class Muslim immigrants that I interviewed did not feel uncomfortable seeing the city

police patrolling public places. Nevertheless, some of the immigrants perceived Market Square to be a white-dominated place. There udoubtedly are other ways that planners, designers and managers of city and public places could help make public more inclusive for immigrants, minorities, and low-income residents of Knoxville.

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APPENDIX

Sample Interview Questions:

General Questions:

Can you introduce yourself?

How long have you lived I Knoxville? How long have you lived in the United States?

What do you like to do in your free time?

How do you feel when you are in public?

Can you give me an example?

- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- What was your reaction?
- Did it affect you to go to that placeless/more?

Map questions

Can you please mark the public places that you usually visit?

Can you name or list the public places that you regularly visit? (If not on map)

- Which one do you go the most?
- Which one did you visit recently?
- Why did you go there?
- Was it just a regular visit or was it a special event or festival?
- Do you go there often?
- How did you feel when you were there?
- If the participant says felt comfortable/uncomfortable what was the reason?
- How do you get there?

- Do you get there alone, or do you go with somebody else?

When you go to events who do you go with? Who do you socialize with?

What is about this place that you usually visit?

If you want to suggest making it more of a place for everyone what would it be?

If you can change one thing about it what would it be?

If the respondents have not already discussed these two significant public places in Knoxville, I will ask them about these places

Have you ever been to market square? World's Fair Park?

- What did you do when you were there?
- What events have you attended there?
- If you could name one thing you really like about this place, what would it be?
- If you could name one thing you dislike about this place, what would it be?

Key Informants:

Why did you choose to organize X (specific events) in Y(specific places)?

What was the process of organizing events?

How many people attended these events?

Do you regard the event as successful? Why / why not?

Do you have plans to organize similar events in the future? What places do you regard as well suited for these events? Why those places?

What about other public events does the Muslim community participate in?

What is the purpose of participating in public social events for the Muslim community?

Informal interview questions:

Why did you decide to come to this event today?

How do you like it?

In general, how do you feel about (this particular place)?

How often do you usually come to this place? Who do you come with?

Questionnaire:

The survey questionnaire aims to obtain demographic information of the participants.

1. Where are you originally from?

2. What languages can you speak and understand?

3. What is your highest level of education?

4. What is your marital status?

5. For women: Do you (always, sometimes) wear hijab?

6. For men (if married): Does your wife wear hijab? (always? Sometimes)

VITA

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