

Article

# Re-Territorializing Religiosity in Wholesome Muslim Praxis

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**Abstract:** Despite distorting narratives about extremism, specific individuals and communities of Muslims in America ground themselves in wholesome relationships among people and in the places where they find home. Between 2001 and 2009, Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative designed eco-halal food education and distribution for Chicago Muslims, promoting ethical praxis with local animals, lands, waters, farmers, farm workers, and fellow consumers. Founded and funded by an interfaith non-profit organization, Taqwa generated pluralistic community with an internally diverse Muslim community, local farmers, and interfaith partners. Amidst popular contempt for terrorism, Taqwa leaders reasserted wholesome Muslim identity by re-territorializing religiosity, enhancing care-based relations in local foodscapes. Concurring with religious studies scholarship on ecology, lived religion, and pluralism, Taqwa grounded religious meaning in materially significant, personal relationships in their local community of life. Responding to lived religious meaning nested in an ecologically holistic sense of place, Taqwa leaders crafted a purity-oriented project, inscribing identity through its beneficial relations with land and home, despite instances of migratory displacement, diasporic considerations, and externally produced problematic distortions of what it means to be Muslim in America.

**Keywords:** food; religiosity; Islam; Muslims; halal; animals; Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative; Faith in Place; Chicago; September 11

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“Religion, conceived of as a decontextualized set of norms, can be adapted to any society, precisely because it has severed its links with a given culture and allows people to live in a sort of virtual, de-territorialised community that includes any believer . . . Neofundamentalism refers to an imaginary *ummah* [community], beyond ethnicity, race, language and culture, on[e] [sic.] that is no longer embedded in a specific territory. Geography is as irrelevant as history.” (Roy 2004).

## 1. Introduction

The Arabic word *taqwa* refers to volition with God in mind for daily activities, ranging from fear to awe to mindful awareness. This volitional sense of *taqwa* infused leaders’ intent for Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative in Chicago, Illinois, which spanned the first decade of the millennium from 2001 to 2009.<sup>1</sup> Taqwa’s founding coordinator chose this Muslim notion to be central to organizational identity for the project initiated and funded by an ecologically focused, interfaith non-profit organization Faith in Place in the wake of 11 September 2001, or 9/11. Taqwa leaders focused on cultivating religious wholesomeness through participating in the interconnected health of soil, water, farm economies, farming families, farm and slaughterhouse workers, food animals, consumers, and the relationships between them. Leaders highlighted the wholesomeness of Islamic ethical praxis grounded in lived

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<sup>1</sup> All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Claremont Graduate University (#1363).

experience in real places, in contrast with monolithic, externally defined characterizations of Islam, including those distortions depicting Islam as an inherently violent religion. In the early 2000s, Taqwa reasserted a wholesome, “green” Muslim identity as a powerful counter-narrative to slanderous media portrayals and mounting ethnic, racial, and religious intolerance, intimidation, and violence against Arabs and Muslims both locally in the Chicago area and across the U.S. Although these assertions may have limited influence within or beyond the Chicago area, interviewees demonstrated self-defined, wholesome identity, furthering a sense of religious continuity through ethical, eco-food practices.

Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative provided a clear lens into active, intra-Muslim identity production in conversation with pluralistic, interfaith partners who supported Muslim dignity and wholesomeness. The lay leaders at Taqwa worked to enhance their local food system and educate the local, Muslim community about ethical problems in industrial food, particularly meat production. Taqwa leaders showed the efficacy of embodied, personalized, and re-territorialized relations over simplified, generalized, abstracted, and de-territorialized assertions of categorically reductionist Muslim identity, which dominated media after the events of 9/11.

American media narratives “educated the public” about Muslims, generalizing horrific extremism to represent the whole of the Muslim community, flattening Muslim diversity and ignoring affiliation based on family ties, age group, ethnicity, familial national origins, sect, proximity to immigration, or other identifying specifics. Such media narratives framed and reinforced generalized, psychologically potent, political categories, emphasizing the dramatic narrative of conflict over a more nuanced, studied view. As a wide diversity of people in the U.S. felt the shock and suffering associated with the 9/11 national tragedy, popular media quickly intervened in this mourning with emotionally charged answers, targeting the whole of Islam and all Muslims for the crimes of the few. Notably, such nationalism and religious-ethnic group stereotyping appears to be absent from narratives about crimes committed by Christian or Euro-American people, whereas crimes by religious, ethnic, racial, or other so-called “minorities” were generalized to represent a homogenous distortion of the target group, instead of personalized to the perpetrators in an internally diverse group. Intra-Muslim ethnic diversities were flattened in this process of projecting a global “Muslim as terrorist” identity. On a local level in Chicago, media and police targeted Muslims in the Bridgeview neighborhood, associating charity donations and transnational family gifts with funding terrorism (Butterfield). The “Islam” in media narratives was monolithic, rather than contextual, proposed as overarching and thematic, rather than extremist, rare, and particular.

Specifically, an interplay arises between a reductionist media lens and reinforcing extremism in the global dynamics of representation for extremist Muslims. As such American nationalist drum-beating in 2001 accompanied a call to war, despite a lack of connection between the 9/11 attackers and then leader of Iraq Saddam Hussein, it becomes crucial to consider how belief was and may again be stirred, counter to evidence: “Lacking proof of a connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, Dick Cheney simply took to asserting it repeatedly, which for most Americans was good enough.” (Ruether 2007, p. 203). In the mid-2010s, similar themes are increasingly relevant as many in the U.S. public attempt to discern the importance of evidence-based truth versus compelling, yet false narratives that bypass facts, while simultaneously reducing public trust in journalistic and academic voices. These developments bring into sharp relief the question of who will be trusted to provide the “truth,” which may fall to religious or religiously endowed leaders among some groups, while others prioritize and emphasize the crucial role for empirical rubrics of meaning.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Empiricism is particularly crucial for discussing climate disruption in anthropogenic, or human-induced, terms. False equivalencies between climate scientists and climate change deniers become more clearly politically meaningful, rather than empirically accurate. For accurate scientific information on climate change, please see the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which assembles data for policy makers worldwide. Available online: <http://www.ipcc.ch/> (accessed on 22 June 2017).

In a space of local meaning production, Taqwa leaders reasserted Muslim wholesomeness via their interpretation of Islamic ethics for land, people, and animals, endeavoring to participate beneficially in and for the whole food system. By being attentive to their understanding of God as a merciful, just judge for everyday activities, these lay leaders steered their project toward food practices that attended to compassion for animals, a living wage for farmers and workers, healthy food for consumers, and sustainable land and water practices. This study highlights the centrality of creative, pious laypeople assuming leadership to reinterpret tradition, in order to meet contemporary, context-specific ecological and human community challenges specific to this interfaith, intra-Muslim community project in Chicago, U.S.

Although Taqwa leaders expressed primary inspiration from Islamic principles, another layer of community meaning simultaneously circulated: supporting a positive civic identity as environmentally conscious, potentially allaying neighboring non-Muslims' fears of fundamentalism. Religion and ecology scholar Amanda Baugh studied other Faith in Place projects in the Chicago Muslim community, citing outsider perception of local Muslims as important motivations, alongside values internal to the community. For example, a community member indicated that greening at the Bridgeview Mosque Foundation in the late 2000s assisted with a public perception problem regarding fears of local fundamentalism. Baugh explained that a prominent and respected member of the local Muslim community "believed that the mosque's participation in environmentalism offered self-evident proof that its leaders could not be fundamentalists." (Baugh 2017, p. 80). Baugh emphasized the conversational shift from terrorism to greening enacted strategically by various Muslim Americans. Citing the Declaration of Independence and a sense of freedom beyond a reductionist, consumerist identity, Muslim popular author Ibrahim Abdul-Matin similarly concludes his popular Muslim greening book with an emphasis on civic identity, "How we manage waste, watts, water, and food should reinforce the moral foundations of our communities." (Abdul-Matin 2010, p. 188). For Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative, greening efforts explicitly followed the letter and the spirit of Muslim halal food law, reinfusing halal with a wider Islamic scope of ethical meaning tied to local lands, animals, farming people, and urban eaters.

This article navigates the territory of lived religiosity expressed through direct relationships within a local living community, human and other-than-human. Across a spectrum between purity, purism, and extremism, the Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative asserted a sense of religious and agricultural purity nested in a pluralistic framework, avoiding exclusionary intolerance. Expressing continuity with Islamic tenets on halal, or permissible, meat, Taqwa participants ingested animals carefully selected to be free from exploitative, unnecessary suffering enabled in the factory farming industry, aligned with a larger Muslim critique of secular reductionism. Chicago Muslim Americans transgressed the boundaries of their urban landscape to reintegrate their local framework of meaning to cultivate wholesome relations with agricultural lands and farming people. Taqwa leaders expressed religious meaning through re-territorializing religiosity in their local landscape, their local foodscape, and their local pluralistic communities. Although connection to local lands may not always align with a wholesome and pluralistic framework of meaning, Taqwa participants endeavored to counteract exploitative relations, restoring a sense of cosmic balance grounded in local relations and sense of place.

## **2. Ingesting Purity, Encountering Pluralism, and Living Religious Identity**

### *2.1. Lived Religion and Muslim Ecological Religiosity*

A variety of Muslim environmental voices have associated environmental crisis with colonial and neo-colonial aspects of contemporary life in Muslim-majority regions and globally, including materialism and greed associated with imported secularism, politics, economics, science, and technologies. Generally, these Muslim environmental voices consider the tradition of Islam environmentally blameless and as a primary source, instead, of cures for problems originating in

modernity, identified with Western, secular, scientific, or colonial sources. Concurring with this perspective, scholars of Islam, peace, and conflict studies Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk wrote:

Failure to protect the natural environment does not represent a shortcoming in essential Islamic precepts . . . Disregard for nature follows both from preoccupation with imported models of state, economy, and society and from an incongruity between long-established assumptions about the potential impact of human activities upon nature and the unprecedented power of modern technology (Said and Funk 2004; Gottlieb 2006).

Said and Funk associated problems in Muslim majority countries not with Islam, but rather with external impositions and hybrid social, political structures. Eliding with Lynn White Jr.'s thesis associating environmental problems with Christian tradition, these authors located the problem in multilayered Western imports.<sup>3</sup>

Scholar of environment and religion Roger Gottlieb cited the quotation above to amplify this idea beyond Islam, to encompass all contemporary religions. Gottlieb asked, "If tradition has all the answers we need, why was it so easily sidelined by modernity? If correct ideas didn't work then, what makes us think they will have an impact now?" (Gottlieb 2006, p. 55). Despite these and other credible critiques, Gottlieb concurred with Said and Funk that religions play a crucial part in adaptive strategies for environmental crisis.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Taqwa's founding coordinator Shireen Pishdadi associated environmental problems with imported environmental sensibilities and exploitative worldviews, which upended traditional agrarian and nomadic communities in Muslim majority regions. Pishdadi associated tradition with a pure panacea, a counterpoint to problematic modernity, which she located in an ideal Muslim wholesomeness. This view appears among Islam and ecology thinkers and activists, cited below.

In contrast, French sociologist Olivier Roy located religiosity among a complex set of adaptive strategies for contemporary second and third generation immigrants with Muslim heritage, whose identities cannot be reduced only to Islam. Roy asserted that people in Muslim-majority countries assert religiosity against a secularizing backdrop of political structures that nevertheless claim to represent Islam: "The contemporary wave of re-Islamisation is, even unconsciously, a quest for the autonomy of the religious in an already secularized society." (Roy 2004, p. 4). Taqwa occupied a particular space of burgeoning religiosity embodied in the first decade of the millennium in Chicago without Islamic political structures, but asserting Muslim identity despite prominent secularizing forces, such as industrial food norms and environmental exploitations.

Muslims who express ecological religiosity, deliberately threading together environmental and religious ideas and practices, reflect Islamic studies scholar Kecia Ali's assertion regarding the potential to cultivate non-Islamic (but not un-Islamic) conversation partners to develop contemporary Islamic ethics (Ali 2015). Ali's assertion reinforces Roy's reflection that Muslim cultural-political milieux are complexly interwoven with a variety of influences beyond the scope of Islamic meaning. Against a backdrop of Muslim antipathy or hesitation about Western influences, often codified through questioning the benefits of modernity, Ali clarified the need to assess the merit of influential, yet non-Islamic elements, developing not a hybrid sensibility, but a more inclusive lens on what legitimately can inform contemporary Muslim ethical identities. In the case of Taqwa's leaders, their Muslim ecological religiosity weaves together specific needs in the Chicago landscape with ethical priorities for respectful interrelationships with farmers, workers, animals, landscapes, waterways, and fellow Muslim eaters, who unbeknownst to them, eat halal foods with questionable integrity or wholesomeness.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Although innumerable voices have considered and responded to the Lynn White, Jr., thesis, a 2016 edited volume collects a variety of voices on the subject: (LeVasseur and Peterson 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Though Gottlieb in 2006 concurred with Said and Funk, it is unclear whether he may have shifted his position since that time. (Said and Funk 2004; Gottlieb 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Many examples of questionably halal foods appear in the popular book from Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, *Green Deen*.

The project started as an interfaith bridge from Faith in Place to support environmental stewardship and greening in the Chicago Muslim community. Its inception focused an interfaith desire to provide accurate counter-narratives to deflate dominant media-driven discourse of “terrorist Muslims,” a distortion fueled by ignorance and fear after 9/11. Though such a category remained fallow for some years, it has been reified in the mid 2010s as “extremist Islam” or “Islamic extremists.” Nevertheless, Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative was not limited to an apologetic function, but rather generated a locus for wholesome, context-specific, Islamic ethical praxis led by Muslim laypeople who themselves spoke prophetically, engaged in extensive community organizing, and researched sustainable farming scenarios that matched their vision of well-being for animals, workers, farmers, land, and water. Taqwa linked compassion and ecological balance to Muslim ethical praxis, while keeping consistent with inherited food norms like meat-eating.

## 2.2. Purity, Purism, and Extremism

The spectrum between purity and extremism factors into understanding people, in this case religious people, who shape their material practices with the intent to express purity, for example, through eating, praying, and community-building. Taqwa participants expressed purity through food sourcing and distribution, through education in Muslim, interfaith, and farming communities. Various Americans, Muslim and otherwise, may share purity as a hopeful direction. Taqwa moved toward renewing local economies and purifying the body and landscape. In contrast to purity, purism becomes expressed through intolerant exclusion, prioritizing familiarity or nostalgic memory, while rejecting unfamiliar or feared others. Extremism takes purism in a structurally or literally violent direction, acting out intolerance in destructive ways. Thus, a spectrum exists between expressions of religious purity, which could be benign, pious, or wholesome, in contrast with intolerant purism rejecting others, and dangerous extremism desiring or endeavoring to annihilate others.

Various religious people do purifying practices of prayer to remove obstacles, “impure” thoughts, or other things disliked by the practitioner. Others talk about purification in terms of avoiding differences (purism) or annihilating others (extremism).<sup>6</sup> An example of extremist purism appeared in sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s 2016 book, *Strangers in Their Own Land*: “Dissent is one thing, the implication is, but being American is another.” (Hochschild 2016, p. 224). Among Hochschild’s research participants in Louisiana in the 2010s, a purist sense of American-ness was equated with a mono-vocal, dissent-free space of identity production, lacking significant ethnic diversity, religious difference, and political pluralism. Further, Hochschild related these expressions of American identity with an exciting, emotive satisfaction of unity and religiosity, which French sociologist Emile Durkheim named “collective effervescence.” (Hochschild 2016). Thus, an emotionally satisfying collective identity has formed, characterized by in-group American-ness in contrast with those who question, critique, or otherwise provide dissenting voices. Nevertheless, the American experiment includes critique in its formative matter, such as 18th century revolutionary critique of taxation without representation and the political system of checks and balances. Hochschild’s reference to contemporary desire to squash dissent, rather than seeing dissent as inherent in American identity production, reveals a cross-section of the U.S. where American-ness is not inclusive of families who have lived on local soil for longer than any person of European descent, nor those whose ancestors’ bodies were transported against their will to become enslaved in the Americas. Ignoring or suppressing diverse identity expressions does not erase them, but rather reinforces denial.

A similar strain of American identity politics as Hochschild located in the 2016 election cycle was also present in American politics of identity in the early 2000s, after 9/11, into which the Taqwa project injected an alternative. Purism can be wielded against political, ethnic, or religious others, furthered by labeling them “minority” groups, assuming a homogenous majority. Such a social-political

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<sup>6</sup> A political example of purist formulations is oil-and-water civilizational discord, described in (Huntington 1996).

nomenclature ignores heterogeneity, or internal diversity among people in a geographical region, such as Chicago. Such monolithic, homogenous narratives about others tend not to consider aspects of identity that defy clear description, such as hybrid identities amid multiple migrations, interfaith affiliations, and cross-cultural families. Further, alienation from other people may or may not translate to alienation from local land.

Purism can figure prominently in exclusionary generalizing about others, in religious identity production, and in contemporary U.S. food politics. In the U.S., a variety of purist food practices circulate, including eating locally-sourced, vegetarian, organic, “Paleo,” vegan, pesticide-free foods or cage-free, pasture-raised animal foods, like meats, eggs, and dairy (Zeller 2014). Perhaps in counterpoint to religious and other food purism, eating bacon has emerged as a form of identity production through food practice. Purist food practices can be invoked in nationalism and ethnocentrism, as well as inherited food traditions, associated with cultural, religious, or familial continuity. Purism is particularly present when traditions are asserted as frozen in time and unchangeable, rather than temporal, performative, and subject to variations and adaptive transformations. Understanding tradition in terms of religious purism may be reinforced by scholarship defining religious salience according to a limited lens on the past, in contrast with historiography acknowledging lacunae in what can be known, as well as studies focused on recent and current complexities in religious expressions. Taqwa leaders invoked purity, rather than purism, by asserting a Muslim ethical identity with extremes of compassion and wholesomeness, not violence, for every layer of the food system, yet without challenging the American and Muslim norms of meat-eating.

In the early 2000s, Muslim Americans in Chicago faced a double-edged sword of variable internal identities, contrasting with a stereotyped and over-determined conglomerative identity presented by largely unfriendly popular media, attempting to interpret the terrorist events of 11 September 2001. While institutional representation of Muslim identity from leaders in religious and community centers became important in facing both demonizing and threats, a variety of Muslim identities shaped by interpretive hybridity carefully navigated the line between legitimacy and inauthenticity. Monolithic stereotypes did not match lived experiences of diversity internal to the Chicago Muslim community, consisting of recent immigrants, longer-term residents, Black Muslims, and younger Muslims with a “global Muslim” identity. Rather than mindful of distorted representations, Taqwa’s lay leaders focused on a wholesome sense of purity and religiosity, understanding God as an attentive judge to daily actions.

### 2.3. *Pluralistic Encounter and U.S. Muslims*

Various interreligious goals include achieving tolerance (away from violence) or generating cultural or ideological relativism (a beneficial move from disinterest or hatred). Although such goals can be crucial in situations of divisive conflict, such as purism and extremism, Harvard religion scholar Diana Eck defines pluralism in a community-oriented ethos, valuing divergent perspectives without steering them toward normalizing homogeneity:

- (1) “energetic engagement with diversity,”
- (2) beyond tolerance, an “active seeking of understanding across lines of difference,”
- (3) not relativism, but rather an “encounter of commitments,”
- (4) specific to the U.S., the First Amendment protects the free exercise of religion, and clearly asserts the need for “no establishment” of a political-religious alliance that trumps the free exercise of religion, and

- (5) dialogue-based, “both speaking and listening . . . common understandings and real differences . . . commitment to being at the table—with one’s commitments.”<sup>7</sup>

These five priorities define the contours of Eck’s pluralism, a practical and moral stance on difference that embraces others, encourages mutual well-being, and generates reciprocal conversation toward mutual learning.<sup>8</sup>

Eck’s emphasis on pluralism appears to contrast with other threads of meaning less focused on understanding others, including purist intolerance and conflict-oriented extremist paradigms. Her definition emphasized the need to go beyond tolerance, which is a basic goal when faced with intolerance. Similarly, relativism is inadequate to the task of pluralism, inasmuch as varying views have, in fact, pertinent differences, thus making intent and moral accountability more crucial than difference itself. Eck’s work provides a prescription for a deeper, American problem of fear, intolerance, and exclusion of others, expressed in purism and extremism.

A January 2016 Pew Forum survey found that a plurality (50%) of Americans prefer not to blame the religion of Islam for those who use Islam to explain their violent acts, but a high number (40%) of Americans prefer leaders to “speak bluntly” regardless of whether the whole of Islam becomes generalized and caught in the critique. The main difference between 2016 and 2002, when a similar survey was done, was a significant partisanship in 2016, wherein Democrats are significantly more likely to take the former position, and Republicans the latter. Two-thirds of respondents believed that violent people use religion as justification for their actions, whereas only 14% thought that Islam teaches violence. Three-quarters of the people polled believed that discrimination against Muslims was increasing. Further, Democrats tended to be significantly less concerned about anti-American views among Muslims in the U.S., while over 70% of Republicans believed some to most Muslims held anti-American views (Pew Research Center 2016). Such divergent perceptions represent a variety of inseparable threads, including media amplification of particular political memes such as an association between Muslim people and terrorism (Kearns et al. 2017).

After 9/11, then President George Bush took time to name the importance of distinguishing between the religion of Islam and the people who perpetrated crimes: “The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics; a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam.” (Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation 2001). In this speech, then President Bush showed pluralistic leadership, doing his part to reduce categorical hatred of Muslims, and to direct attention to the difference between the “fringe” and the “vast majority.” In political-religious memes, he named the importance of civil religion in America, one that unites those who believe in the civil sacraments of freedom and justice, over those who enact fear and cruelty: “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.” (Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation 2001). Beyond this interreligious unification language, he also named significant bi-partisan political unification in the face of violence on American soil.<sup>9</sup> This post-9/11 phenomenon contrasts with deepening partisanship in the 2010s.

Taqwa leaders favored a pluralistic lens for their work and worldviews. Reflecting on differing worldviews, founding coordinator Shireen Pishdadi likened worldview to a seed: “We plant a worldview, and out of it society grows.” (Pishdadi 2010, ll. 299, 302). To further explain this idea, she

<sup>7</sup> Although Eck addresses the scholarly study of religion, her work has been popularly available and instructive for those who study and practice religion. Eck’s definitions appear on the website for the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, and derive their defining language from Diana Eck’s 2009 Gifford Lectures, “The Age of Pluralism.” (Eck 2006). The Pluralism Project website definition of pluralism omits the U.S.-based fourth factor, included here, which appears in Eck’s earlier work on the topic: (Eck 1997).

<sup>8</sup> For further interest in dialogical means for developing ethical vision in comparative religious ethics, please see (Oh 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, President Bush initiated a series of wars predicated on divisive rhetoric against Muslims as a homogeneously extremist group, ushering in a period of perpetually normalized violence enacting aspects of Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilizations (Huntington 1996).

named a separation between, even silo-ization, of various social and environmental issues, and how this separation relates to sources of non-profit funding for single-issue causes, as well as animal rights activists prioritizing cage-free animals over small farmers (Pishdadi 2010, ll. 299–316). She critiqued modern, Western economics, where productivity and “job” creation ignores parenting, yet counts net gain with “war and drugs.” She was concerned that “when you pollute the earth, it increases economic productivity.” (Pishdadi 2010, ll. 327–29, 332, 326). Going further, she asserted epistemological concerns about exploiting divisions, while expressing pluralism and biological diversity as God-given:

The Qur’an says that God created us with different faiths, and that’s part of His will. If he wanted us to be all one religion, He would have made us all one religion. He created us in different colors and different languages, all to testify to His greatness. Just like there’s not only one flower or one animal, there’s diversity. So diversity is part of God’s greatness. So, He created us different so we can get to know each other, not to hate each other or think we’re better than each other or whatever (Pishdadi 2010, ll. 383–88).

Pishdadi named economic reductionism as intentionally divisive, and in opposition to Qur’anic worldview, where specificity matters. Her interpretive lens remained God-centered, she said, referring to God and the Qur’an as primary sources of ethical salience. This placement of pluralistic intent gives it the highest value in her context as a Muslim. For her religiosity, problems derive from a false worldview, which ignores God, again invoking the meaning behind the project’s name *Taqwa*. The term *taqwa* can be defined as God-fearing or awe, mindfulness of God (Haleem 2008), or volition in accordance with God (Foltz 2006, p. 151). When moral authority, through secularism, derives from people, instead of God, Pishdadi explained that such power corrupts, enhancing a greed-centered materialism. Drawing the boundary for her pluralistic venture, secularism and corrupting power became equated and rejected in her view.

Pishdadi’s work with *Taqwa* nested religious purity in a pluralistic space, hosted and supported by interfaith, greening non-profit organization Faith in Place. *Taqwa* asserted goals with purity in mind, but these agricultural goals were achievable by people in other religious communities. Recognizing and respecting worldview differences, *Taqwa* leaders endeavored to purify the local food system by enlarging a space for agricultural purity. Despite this distinction between acceptable and unacceptable agricultural practices and foodstuffs, *Taqwa* did not present an exclusionary narrative akin to intolerant purism or violent extremism. Their goals placed them squarely within the fold of pluralistic encounter, understanding, and respectful relations with other religious people at Faith in Place. Despite critiques of secularism’s limited lens on agricultural wholesomeness, *Taqwa* leaders expressed their sense of purity without intolerant malice. Instead, they focused on reducing suffering for animals and farm laborers, reducing polluting harms to waters and soils. Their sense of purity interrupted exploitation, pollution, and other sources of suffering, working toward interconnected human and environmental health and wholesomeness for Muslims and non-Muslims.

From its inception, *Taqwa* Eco-food Cooperative was developed with pluralistic goals. Faith in Place began in 1999, and after September 11, 2001, the Executive Director Rev. Dr. Clare Butterfield responded to amplified Islamophobia by considering interfaith bridge-building opportunities with local Muslims. The Chicago Muslim community encompassed intra-Muslim diversity, including recent converts, immigrants by choice, refugees or asylum seekers, diaspora families, as well as people who grew up Muslim in the U.S., including Black Muslims who traced their ancestry through the era of American enslavement of African people. After September 11th, 2001, Muslim Americans met with a torrent of ill-directed fear, racism, and discriminatory policing.

As a conscientious fellow person of faith, Butterfield was moved to reach out to Chicago Muslims, under the auspices of her relatively new environmental, religious non-profit organization, Faith in Place. She hoped to find leadership within the community and forge interfaith connections to strengthen a sense of solidarity during this key moment in American history when purist intolerance and cruel targeting against Muslims became chillingly commonplace. Faith in Place approached the Muslim community, hoping to build necessary bridges across difference when those differences were

being simultaneously leveraged to dissuade mutual understanding and foment fear. Among some people with no personal experience or relationships with Muslims, individual fears were amplified by over-generalizing media narratives equating all Muslims with a small minority that used religious explanations for their violence.

Faith in Place initiated a collaborative conversation to investigate and to meet environmental goals endogenous to the Chicago Muslim community, thus conversationally producing a project with leadership from among local Muslims. Faith in Place provided funds and logistical support, identifying local leadership to define parameters and name the project. The collaborative inquiry resulted in a focus on widening ethical interpretation for *halal* food, and with both social and environmental significance, challenging industrially produced meat, even when labeled *halal* (Robinson 2014, pp. 274–93). Taqwa leaders sourced and distributed “sustainably-raised halal-zabeeha meat” to local Muslim families, plus other local people concerned with consuming meat produced ethically, sustainably, and with a value for more humane slaughtering practices (Faith in Place 2009, p. 7). From 2001 to 2009, Taqwa coordinators did outreach in the local Muslim community to educate about problems in the meat industry linked to the interconnected health of consumers, farmers, workers, animals and the environment. The founding coordinator Shireen Pishdadi developed relationships with rural Midwestern farmers, some of whom had never met a Muslim, who shared values for practicing humane, free-range, organic, and sustainable methods to raise, for example, chickens, cows, and goats (Ostrow and Rockefeller 2008). Her work developed pluralistic goals through encounter and conversation, as well as identifying complimentary goals.

The broadly inclusive ethical food standard that Taqwa proposed was not financially sustainable in the first decade of the millennium in Chicago, but nevertheless, leaders met eco-ethical, educational, and pluralistic goals. Such alternative meats were not readily available or understood, absent even from high-end grocery stores (Butterfield, transcript l. 263–74). The high cost of Taqwa’s meat created “sticker-shock” for consumers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike (Butterfield, transcript l. 300). Taqwa critiqued the majority-culture, industrial food system at a time when many Muslims were more tentative about challenging US norms, fearing further backlash and discrimination, see (Robinson 2014). Nevertheless, the founding coordinator considered the project successful in its educational scope. In 2009, the third and last coordinator Qaid Hassan and Faith in Place’s board agreed to end the project later that year. He decided, with full support of Faith in Place, to continue the spirit of the project in his own private business, Whole Earth Meats. Thus, the interfaith organization empowered a young Muslim entrepreneur to continue Taqwa’s intent, further expressing pluralistic values, locally and institutionally.

#### 2.4. Purity and Corruption in Muslim Worldviews and Ecological Religiosity

Anti-secular statements appear across the breadth of Islam and ecology writings from senior scholar of Islamic philosophy Seyyed Hossein Nasr to founder of the non-profit organization Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) Fazlun Khalid. Khalid emphasizes Qur’anic passages on the IFEES website and in his writings, (Khalid and O’Brien 1992) such as, “Corruption has appeared in land and sea caused by the hands of people so that they may taste the consequences of their actions and turn back.” (Qur. 30:41).<sup>10</sup> This passage locates an ethical key in human humility to change course when faced with the disruptive results of corrupt choices, and volition (*taqwa*) to choose wisely and in accordance with God. Parallel with Roy’s observations, Khalid critiques modern science, as an aspect of the secular, colonizing, Westernizing ideologies

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<sup>10</sup> This quotation appears at the top of the webpage explaining the work of the organization, showing its prominence in the perception of causes for environmental problems. Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (<http://www.ifees.org.uk/about/>).

accepted by certain Muslim elites (Khalid 2004, pp. 299–321). Khalid and others represent a purist view of Islam, critiquing secularism's discontents.

Aligning with Taqwa coordinator Pishdadi's engagement with the term, worldview has been a key term employed by Nasr toward a pluralistic placement of Islam among the world religions and their commitments to earth care. He wrote of religious pluralism:

The doctrines of the other religions which are now available in the form of sacred scripture, open metaphysical exposition, theological formulation, or inspired literature of one kind or another, convey a metaphysical, theological, and religious significance which must be taken seriously by men and women of good faith. (Nasr 2007, p. 6)

In this statement, Nasr promoted pluralism, but not relativism; he prioritized inherited traditions over what traditional authorities might deem inappropriate innovations or performative transformations. He titled a book on various religions' views of nature, *Religion and the Order of Nature*, highlighting the importance of a God-centered, or otherwise religious worldview in steering people toward ecological renewal (Nasr 1996). Further, Nasr expressed a preference to be hated by a religious person over being accepted by a secular person, highlighting his high value for living in a God-centered, or other traditional religious worldview (Nasr 2007, pp. 3–20). Taqwa did not go so far as to invite hatred, but rather asserted a salient alternative vision against a maligning backdrop of the media-projected generalization of "terrorist Muslims." Taqwa presented wholesome Muslim identity for local people to engage, caring not only for other people, but for animals, landscapes, and waterways.

Critics of globalization's limits offer analytical tools apparent in these voices of Islam and ecology, as well as in Taqwa. These critics are a diverse group, themselves.<sup>11</sup> Politics, economics, science, and technology combine in globalizing pressures toward "development," which in this area of critique wears a "Western" face.<sup>12</sup> Western, or neoliberal, secularism encompasses the priority for economics over other human goals, and thus, becomes subject to critique. When economic goals trump other goals, many Muslim critics read this move as secularizing, shifting a moral framework of Islam out in favor of a greed-oriented framework, ripe for exploitations. Greed is firmly judged in Islam, generally, and Islam and ecology writings, more specifically. In a religious worldview with *taqwa*, or mindfulness of God, central to daily life decisions, such as generosity or charity, *zakat*, is central to practicing Islam, which counteracts greed.<sup>13</sup>

In parallel with critiques of globalization, the reassertion of traditional identity provides a nostalgic motif steeped in modernity. From the present, fallen vantage point, the past is reified as pure, thus reclaiming the past becomes a key identity-building indicator. Pishdadi's statements concurred with both Khalid and Nasr's assertions that secularism is a central problem, particularly as it undergirds greed-oriented materialism and colonizing ends. Beyond its practical and educational relevance, Taqwa provided the opportunity to reassert a pure, pastoral, wholesome Muslim identity in a present-day American landscape, affirming a generous, integrative sensibility in ecological religiosity.

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<sup>11</sup> A great deal of literature was produced in the late 1990s and early 2000s on the topic of globalization, usually spoken of in economic terms associated with global financial institutions: the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund. A few recommended resources on the topic appear among the References below. For an ongoing series in global scope, see the Worldwatch Institute's State of the World annual report book series, Washington: Island Press, 1984–2016. For the importance of globalization around the year 2000: See (Held et al. 1999; O'Meara and Krain 2000). For globalization in Islamic studies and religious studies, emphasizing ethical praxis: (Schaebler and Stenberg 2004; Peters 2004; Moe-Lobeda 2002; Ruether 2005; Brubaker et al. 2006; Brubaker 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Although the term Western has its limitations, it has been indigenized as a crucial term among postcolonial Muslim writers to critique European and North American colonial and neocolonial powers, particularly exerted in neoliberal globalization and problematic development projects that serve external economic interests to the detriment of local concerns.

<sup>13</sup> Similar to the clear requirements of humane slaughter detailed in the Qur'an indicating a need for animal welfare standards, the emphasis on *zakat* may also indicate pressing social needs during the time of the Prophet Muhammed.

### 2.5. Purity and Corruption in Agriculture

Taqwa leaders worked to purify their bodies, communities, local waterways, and landscapes, in contrast with perceived impurities associated with industrial U.S. food systems. Impure elements included pesticides, chemical fertilizers, chemical additives, processing, and “protein” supplements given as fodder or injected into meats, which may contain pork byproducts. Further impurities included the invisible stain rendered by a food system that prioritizes financial gain over the natural lives of animals, the working conditions and fair pay of workers, and the vast pollution from Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs. Religiously, Taqwa leaders saw food industry profit eliding with greed, which is particularly unacceptable in Islamic ethics. Although perhaps less common in Chicago generally, critique of greed arises regularly out of postcolonial locations, including among scholars of Islam and ecology. Contemporary practices in animal husbandry give rise to questionably halal meats from animals who spend their lives in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), or factory farms. In factory farming, animals live indoors in unnaturally cramped quarters, which many people consider inhumane.

Among animals traditionally considered halal when slaughtered correctly, unnatural, inhumane, filthy conditions in factory farms inspire questions about the health and safety of eating these poorly treated animals. Popular food journalist and scholar Michael Pollan described the wide gap between traditional animal husbandry and the strange, market-driven practices common in U.S. beef production today: “The short, unhappy life of a corn-fed feedlot steer represents the ultimate triumph of industrial thinking over the logic of evolution.” (Pollan 2006). In contrast with dualistic, purist thinking separating religion and science, Pollan’s reference to evolution elides with an Islamic order of nature (Nasr 1996), as they both refer nostalgically to a natural existence. Cows are ruminants, grass-eaters, who in traditional conditions would slowly grow to full size over four to five years. Using corn, instead of grass, amended by protein supplements and antibiotics as growth stimulators, CAFO-grown steers can achieve full size in fourteen months (Pollan 2006). Protein supplements in animal feed can include urea (made from natural gas), beef fat and blood, chicken feces, as well as pig, chicken, and fish meal (Pollan 2006). Normalizing bovine meat-eating and cannibalism, this list of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved cattle feed ingredients depicts the unnatural way animals are raised industrially, as well as pointing to the halal problems of any product that derives from pork or blood, both clearly named *haram*, or impermissible, in the Qur’an.

Science, in this case, concurs with religious taboos against corruption, as animal byproducts mixed into the feed for otherwise grass-eating animals has had dire consequences in, for example, Mad Cow disease, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). In response to the rise of Mad Cow Disease in the 1990s, the FDA required that animal feed for ruminants, or natural grass eaters like cows, be free of “most” mammalian protein (Riaz and Chaudry 2003, pp. 140–41). Nonetheless, FDA inspection tests in 2001 revealed a stark reality: 25% of feed was not up to the standard. Such mammal protein supplements may, in fact, contain pork products, which is not communicated to the consumer who eats beef from cows that ate pork (Riaz and Chaudry 2003). The forced cannibalization of cattle cannot be without ethical abhorrence, furthering an argument for avoiding questionable or unlawful, *haram*, meat from factory farms. Many passages in the Qur’an denounce corruption, which are often cited in discussions of ecological renewal within Muslim ethical and theological worldviews. This Muslim notion of corruption relates specifically to going against God’s intent for the order of nature. When humans skew natural systems, such that they diverge from their self-regulating, health-promoting balance, this is a clear example of corruption in a Qur’anic sense. Thus, the Taqwa project attempted to counteract corruption found in CAFOs, and other animal husbandry systems that undermine the interconnected health of animals, consumers, farmers, workers, lands, waters, and ecosystems.

In some cases, religious purism can appear as a distaste or antipathy toward material existence. Numerous writers have described anti-material, religious purism as disassociating from women as birthers and mothers, the earth as the ambivalent location where our bodies eventually will lie in death, other human beings different from a normative ideal, and other-than-human animals denatured as

food.<sup>14</sup> Although much anti-material religiosity threads through history by asserting a purist identity differentiated from material existence, Taqwa asserted their purity religiously and materially through the concept of *taqwa*, making daily life choices within a God-centered worldview and in light of eventual judgement by God in the end on “that day.” In Islam, compassion in daily life can be a key measure of whether a Muslim will be acceptable in God’s Judgment at death.

Further, the material step of acknowledging the life of animals eaten becomes a means of engaging actively with the bodily existence of the animal, in direct contrast to much of “meat”-eating, which obscures this connection and distracts the eater from seeing links between edible flesh and the lives sacrificed for food (Peggs 2012). Normalizing the omission of animal lives is named the ‘erasure of animals’ by feminist scholar Carol Adams, who described this distinction to “eliminate animals as animals; instead they become the bearers of food.” (Adams 1990, p. 68). In contrast, the organization under study cultivated direct relationships between eaters and the eaten, even as they ate animals, increasing clarity about where food comes from and what people are doing when they eat. Taqwa reintegrated Muslim food ethics with animals in direct relations, attempting to ensure wholesome animal lives before slaughter.

Slaughter itself is ethically abhorrent to a smaller subset of Muslims, who eschew acts of unnecessary violence against animals when human dietary needs may be met with other foods (Ali 2015). Despite a vegetarian minority, slaughter is imbedded in Muslim culture in the ‘Id al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice, and occasions marked by slaughtering an animal for food (Kassam and Robinson 2014). Some argue, also, that meat eating is prescribed by the example of the Prophet Mohammed, though he purportedly ate meat sparingly (Ali 2015). Restoring purity through wholesome relationships between people and animals raised for food threads through Muslim heritage, associated with the most well-respected example for human behavior, the Prophet Muhammed himself. Any such association with the Prophet becomes a particularly salient, at times strategic move toward social acceptance of an idea or practice.

## 2.6. Ingesting Identity, Restoring Relationships

Issues of Muslim American identity arise in the larger project of studying religion and ecology. The field of religion and ecology has been shaped by numerous scholars, who delve into treasured religious traditions to re-affirm and restore that which supports a contemporary ecological lens on religious identity in a “greening of religion.” Some scholars disagree with the efficacy of religious environmental intent, examining a gap between words and deeds, critiquing an inherently problematic worldview in Christianity, specifically, that inhibits care for nature.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, food practices provide a particularly salient lens for studying lived religious identity in concrete expressions, and may be a particularly helpful means for establishing efficacy among scholars and practitioners with intent to further “green” religion. French attorney and gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote, “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.”<sup>16</sup> Scholar of religious diversity in North America Rachel Brown repeats Brillat-Savarin’s adage in an essay on Parisian Muslims from North Africa, naming the crucial way that food practices reflect variations in immigrant identities, which in his estimation can fall into four categories: tradition, assimilation, alienation, or bicultural identity.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Taqwa leaders harnessed food as a means to navigate their

<sup>14</sup> Please see works of ecofeminism by Rosemary Radford Ruether, Heather Eaton, Marti Kheel, Catherine Keller, and myriad other writers. See also pivotal feminist theorists like psychologist Carol Gilligan.

<sup>15</sup> In the following article, the authors present findings from a 700-article review of literature on religion and nature, concurring with Lynn White Jr.’s 1967 supposition that Christianity may be blameworthy, in light of environmental destruction under ostensibly Christian peoples, whereas the late 20th and early 21st century “greening of religion” argument has been less salient (Taylor et al. 2016). Popular media: Davis (2016).

<sup>16</sup> “Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es.” (Brillat-Severin 1848).

<sup>17</sup> Rachel Brown categorizes immigrant identity based on the typology of professor of psychiatry Salman Akhtar, M.D. Akhtar’s categories include ethnocentric, hyperassimilated, alienated, and bicultural identities. I would assert that further identity categories must be explored, such as virtual identities on social media, and the gradations of meaning in hybrids of any

own and their fellow Muslims' variable identities, whether immigrant or with multiple generations in the U.S. For example, Black Muslims rendered identity in response to experiences of alienation when projected as "other" in American popular discourse, their bodies and lives contested despite the depth of their family trees rooted in American soil.<sup>18</sup> Baugh and Abdul-Matin noted key indicators of identity expressed by Black Muslims, tracing their historical presence in the United States (Baugh 2017, p. 81, chp. 3, n. 68; Abdul-Matin 2010, pp. 185–89). Despite alienations and distortions, the Taqwa project enabled a heterogeneous group of Muslims of varying identities to assert a religiously meaningful material practice with ecological significance.

Taqwa participants' lived religiosity involved meaningful relations with local people and animals, developing direct, personal relationships in multiple locations: among interfaith collaborators, the varieties of Muslims in Chicago, and with local, smaller-scale family farmers, as well as animals becoming food. Ethicist Marti Kheel wrote about the centrality of personalized care relationships in forming ethical conduct, eschewing generalized, categorical thinking:

When nature ethicists underlined the importance of caring for nature, it is helpful to ask, who is the recipient of care? *Are individual beings included in the concept of "nature," or only larger wholes?* Similarly, when people call for "saving tigers and lions," do they mean individual beings, or only species? The philosopher Margaret Urban Walker also suggests that we evaluate moral values by asking "Who's quiet?" and "What's left out?" in the telling of lives. These are important questions for assessing our interactions with nature (Kheel 2008, p. 227) [emphasis mine]

Rather than accepting reductionist, general categories of being for other-than-human animals, Kheel asserted the importance of direct interaction with specific animals, which in the case of Taqwa referred not to wild animals, but animals in agriculturally curated settings outdoors in family farms and indoors at the slaughterhouse.

Kheel's analysis is relevant for locations where life takes place, attending to realities above categories. Seeing individuals is crucial for understanding internal diversity, not only among various living animals, but also holistically and wholesomely recognizing diverse human lives, rather than externally constructed homogenized groups, such as singular ethnicity, monolithic race, homogenous religion, species of animal, or nature as wilderness, dubiously devoid of human activity despite the everpresent human lens shaping the optics of interpreting nature in word and deed. Similarly, Taqwa leaders expressed their religiosity as "Faith in Place," mirroring the intent encompassed in the name of the environmental non-profit, which invited their participation in generating context-specific, eco-religious resources to meet needs identified and defined within Chicago's heterogeneous Muslim community. In fact, other Chicago Muslims prioritized other needs, such as halal food categorization and certification, while Taqwa emphasized education and participation in local, sustainable food systems with specific, small family-owned farms.<sup>19</sup>

Interviews with leaders of Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative revealed identities grounded actively through restoring relations with local people, places, and animals, defining the term re-territorializing religiosity. In so doing, Taqwa's leaders navigate their religiosity in dynamic conversation with the markers of Muslim tradition (the example of Prophet Muhammed, the universal reach of Islam,

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of these categories, depending on practical, self-asserted aspects of identity (food, religion, politics, clothing, language, interactions with nature, and more) (Akhtar 2011; Brown 2015).

<sup>18</sup> The Movement for Black Lives, or Black Lives Matter (BLM), has coalesced to assert the value and dignity of African American or Black people, defining an intersectional 2010s social movement particularly in response to incidents in which police officers killed unarmed Black people. Islam intersects with the Black Power movement of the mid-20th century with the leadership of Malcolm X, mentioned in a 2016 publication on the BLM movement as a reference to Black American history. During the mid-20th century, a variety of Black Americans converted to Islam, though in the early 21st century, the majority of Muslim Americans are immigrants (Edwards and Harris 2016; Lipka 2017).

<sup>19</sup> For further study of heterogeneous identities and resulting intra-Muslim dynamics within this local community, please see (Robinson 2014).

the unicity of God, Qur'anic halal specifications), nested together with contemporary movements for local, sustainable food (prioritizing land, water, animal, worker, farmer, and consumer health and community/ecosystem well-being). Their work contrasted with a broader, global trend of religious de-territorializing, as underscored by Roy and discussed below.

The term re-territorializing emerged as salient in contrast with Roy's de-territorializing turn, an increasingly abstracted, alienated, sometimes virtual space of individualism, reducing others to fear-based projections subject to annihilation, a perspective vulnerable to neofundamentalism. In defining re-territorializing, the term names the amplification and appreciation of place-based relationships between people and their local human communities, other-than-human living communities, and the landscapes, waterways, and weather patterns that shape living existence in a place. Further, scholar of lived religions and secularism Elizabeth Drescher uses a parallel term, emplacement, to describe a parallel to embodiment in terms of connection to place.<sup>20</sup> Although Drescher's particular terminology may differ, the terms emplacement and re-territorializing appear to have common structures in mind.

### 2.7. Lived Religion, Religiosity, and Globalized Islam

From the 1990s, scholarly attention on the notion of 'lived religion' has amplified (Hall 2007; Fredericks 2014, p. 70). Academic emphasis on leader-driven creeds, texts, and traditions has not been displaced. Nevertheless, laypeople's experiences and perspectives and the function of religion in daily existence have received greater attention. Focused on Muslims living as religious minorities, Roy emphasized the crucial distinction between religion and religiosity, in light of contemporary Muslim identity production in the so-called "West." Roy cites "the predominance of religiosity (self-formulation and self-expression of a personal faith) over religion (a coherent corpus of beliefs and dogmas collectively managed by a body of legitimate holders of knowledge)." (Roy 2004, pp. 5–6). Hence, the study of religiosity here aligns with parallel work on lived religions.

Religiously, the current historical moment resembles less the Protestant reformation (driven by a re-reading of core religious tenets by new leaders) or scientific secularizing (driven by Enlightenment notions of progress), as much as a widespread, globally relevant individualizing of religious formulation (Roy 2004). Religious interpretations vary by locality and are subject to multiple, intersecting levels of human meaning, such as economic status, ethnicity, race, religious sect, age and ability, family constellation, marital status, gender and sexual identity, locality, and nationality. Further local religiosities may be influenced by regional and individual access to, and censorship of, the internet, interacting in virtual communities via online transnational or a-regional linkages, which mediate and curate a globalized identity with a perceived ability to virtually travel to "see the world."<sup>21</sup> These identity-shaping forces represent potential variations in religious understandings, which mix together in individualized, intersectional ways.

Religiosity, in Roy's sense, has become a formidable subject of religious studies discourse, particularly useful for studying a wide range of individualized religious identities, from a more benign "spiritual and not religious" person to an extremist distorting and weaponizing any of the major world religions against perceived others. Roy illuminated the linkage between "neofundamentalism, spiritualism, and liberal Islam," conjoined by the "crisis of social authority of religion" through a growing individualization of religious interpretation (Roy 2004, pp. 8–9). This linkage also belies the porousness of some categories in light of other identity frames, which Roy explored among second- and third-generation immigrants from Muslim-majority regions to Europe and the U.S.

<sup>20</sup> Conversation with Elizabeth Drescher at Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California, USA, on 15 May 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Problematics of elite travel become further confounded in virtual spaces of cross-cultural exchange. Nevertheless, resources for responsible scholarly endeavor across differences may assist, such as (Mohanty 2004).

The notion of a stateless Muslim identity has been reinforced by globalizing trends, both within and outside of the Muslim community. Over ethnicity and national origin, religious affiliation cohered some groups via external means that became indigenized. Roy and others write about cultural transformations via migration from Muslim majority regions to the so-called West. Roy proposed that integration of Muslims into Western societies occurred less by assimilation or an idealized “multicultural society,” but rather via categories of identity presented as individual choice. Although these categories might reflect a pristine notion of cultural continuity, they also are subject to change, social adaptation, and overlap (Roy 2004, p. 102). Therefore, a traditional marker of Muslim identity, eating halal meat, is also subject to global transformations when traveling from Muslim majority, where all meat is assumed to be halal, to territories in Europe or the Americas where halal meat becomes a salient identity marker for Muslims as minorities.

Globally, Muslims reinscribe a universal sense of Muslim identity in a variety of ways. The universal sense of “tradition” extracts ethnic variations, sectarian differences, and other social motifs that shape local identities. Instead, from the unifying work of the Prophet Muhammed to the globalized sense of the Muslim *ummah*, Muslims find “Islamic” continuity and cohesion in the sacred text of the Qur’an, as well as stories and traditions of the Prophet Muhammed and his companions, found in the Sunnah and Hadith. Nevertheless, different hadith are highlighted for different meanings in distinct communities, based on variable community histories and geographies, which recombine uniquely among immigrant Muslims who settle in North America or Europe, some of whom find eating halal food to be an important expression of identity, visible in Chicago’s Taqwa Eco-foods Cooperative and beyond.<sup>22</sup>

The larger Chicago Muslim community had varying food priorities, family flavors, and grocery habits, which sometimes conflicted with the goals and activities of Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative. For example, the Muslim Consumer Group (MCG) emerged as a significant global interpreter of halal, or permissible, food needs for the U.S. and Canadian markets, organizationally located in the greater Chicago region, both via halal certification and halal products lists.<sup>23</sup> First published by MCG in 1991, and with editions in 2000, 2003, 2005, and 2009, *A Comprehensive List of Halal Food Products in U.S. Supermarkets* provides a compendium precisely detailing and indexing the vast U.S. product landscape with regards to halal status. Charting products from meat tenderizers to salsa, from artificial sweeteners to baby foods, the book begins with defining halal criteria based on a familiar open-ended interpretation of sharing food among “people of the book.” After this brief reference to equivalencies between halal, Jewish Kosher, and Christian foods, a sizeable section charts caveats, interrupting the inclusive, pluralistic statement with contemporary fine print. For example, gelatin is not halal, due to possible pork content, and “ethyl alcohol is used as a solvent in natural and artificial flavors,” thus rendering them *haram*.<sup>24</sup> The book does not attend to the ethical principles evoked by Taqwa leaders, such as wholesomeness and a general sense of Islamic ethical commitments to land and water stewardship. Instead, MCG and its book does not critique, but accepts and reinforces American norms

<sup>22</sup> Eco-halal appears in North America in a variety of farming and education projects, though Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative in Chicago was among the earliest of these projects. Interestingly, eco-halal has appeared as an identity marker in Russia, celebrated at the 7th Moscow International Exhibition Halal Expo in 2016. Available online: [http://www.emergingearthcommunity.org/innerfeed?source\\_site=fore&page\\_title=Eco-halal+becomes+fashion+trend&article\\_id=2&feed\\_type=news&news\\_url=news/item/eco-halal-becomes-fashion-trend/](http://www.emergingearthcommunity.org/innerfeed?source_site=fore&page_title=Eco-halal+becomes+fashion+trend&article_id=2&feed_type=news&news_url=news/item/eco-halal-becomes-fashion-trend/) (accessed on 22 June 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Although some scholars choose to italicize the term halal, due to its Arabic origin, the term continues in transliterated and translated usage for U.S. and other non-Muslim majority regions and contexts, including halal certification, halal markets, and halal processed foods. I do not italicize halal for this paper, reflecting terminological ingestion into hybrid spaces of meaning, both connected to its Arabic and Qur’anic designations and leaning into its extra-Islamic locations. Similarly, the term eco-halal appears without italicizing.

<sup>24</sup> The first edition emerged in 1991, and the current online version sports 4000 entries, ranging from anti-perspirant to aspirin to soy sauce (Ahmed 2009); Muslim Consumer Group. Food Product List. ([http://www.muslimconsumergroup.com/products\\_list.html](http://www.muslimconsumergroup.com/products_list.html)).

of industrially produced foods, favoring those that comport with the “letter of the law” to avoid pork, alcohol, and other things mentioned directly in the Qur’an.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative

#### 3.1. History, Structure, and Leadership

Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative was named through the founding coordinator Shireen Pishdadi’s assertion that Muslim religiosity required a wider sense of pious attentiveness related to agriculture and food. Central to her work with Taqwa was her commitment to serving God as a Muslim: “In everything we do, whether it’s sleeping or working or eating or anything, there has to be that kind of God-fearing [aspect], so that’s just part of me and my life.” (Pishdadi 2010, transcript ll. 129–30). In this vein, Pishdadi actively infused her life’s activities with attentiveness to God, or *taqwa*. Thus, she worked in tandem with pluralistic, interfaith interlocutors who encouraged and funded her work sourcing ethically raised animals for Taqwa and educating the community about the need to participate in a more just, kind, healthy agricultural system, which in turn strengthened her religiosity.

Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative leadership passed through the hands of three local, Muslim lay leaders, whose job title was Coordinator. Leading through community organizing, education, and logistics coordination, Pishdadi organized Taqwa from 2001 to 2007, followed by Zainab Khan,<sup>26</sup> and lastly Qaid Hassan from spring 2009 until its closure transition later that year. Hassan had been involved as a volunteer and slaughterer from 2004, and continued after Taqwa’s transition from a non-profit project into a private business called Whole Earth Meats. Hassan initiated and directed Whole Earth Meats, a sustainable meat business built on Taqwa’s model of care for consumers, farmers, workers, animals, water, and land.

In addition to Taqwa’s coordinators paid by Faith in Place, Taqwa involved a consumer cooperative structure, requiring regular work hours from those buying meat. Cooperative members offered time to support the organization, for example, packaging and distributing food. The organization depended on member labor, which resulted in an unwieldy structure for those familiar with simply buying things at a store and unfamiliar with the operations of a member-run cooperative. New for many participants, the consumer cooperative structure unfortunately depended on what was perceived as unpaid labor for basic organizational functioning. Although this constituted one of the organizational benefits to provide the local community with education and participation in economic alternatives, this choice was ambitious compounded with other factors, such as higher pricing. Although the cooperative structure varied in active membership, it sustained Taqwa for some years. The cooperative aspect was among the challenges that threatened its long-term sustainability.

Various factors contributed to the eventual closing of Taqwa. First, the cooperative structure was generally unfamiliar, and thus, involved significant training to implement. Further, after education and training, the cooperative model required greater time commitment and community-orientation than grocery shopping. According to Hassan, although many participants found that the products were excellent and consistently upheld shared wholesome values, largely people did not have time to fully participate in running the organization as a member-operated cooperative. The non-profit organization Faith in Place provided ongoing funding for the coordinator position, and the project only briefly emerged as financially self-sustaining. In 2009, the Faith in Place Board of Directors worked actively with the final coordinator to transition Taqwa into a private business run by Hassan, Whole Earth Meats.

Despite Taqwa’s 2009 closure, in 2010 interviews with the author, leaders spoke of their satisfaction with the community-building and educational efforts and reiterated goals as largely met through the

<sup>25</sup> Not unrelatedly, the author lists his former employer as Kraft Foods, an industrial producer of foods. Also see (Robinson 2014).

<sup>26</sup> During my research visit, Butterfield, Pishdadi, and Hassan were no longer in contact with Khan, who had moved.

project. According to the founding coordinator, “I didn’t start it as a business to make money; I started it as a community project to educate people, so from that aspect it was very successful.” (Pishdadi 2010, transcript ll. 625–27). After she left the project, she continued to offer invited lectures at schools and community events about the importance of supporting local farmers in growing food that supports human and ecological health and sustainability. Hassan cited the generosity and encouragement he received from the Faith in Place Board during the transition. By privatizing, he hoped to adapt business strategies toward a wider Chicago audience, while maintaining the farmer, slaughterhouse, and consumer connections and commitments from Taqwa. Pishdadi and Hassan saw personal and community benefits continuing, despite Taqwa’s closure.

### 3.2. Eco-Halal Meat in Chicago

Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative leaders found factory-farming animal husbandry practices abhorrent, compounded by additional justice concerns in the contemporary U.S. industrial food business. Taqwa’s website prominently displayed a multilayered commitment to care ethics, grounded in ecological religiosity and expressed through work sourcing and distributing halal meats:

TAQWA Eco-Food Cooperative serves four communities: consumers, food production workers, animals, and Mother Earth. The cooperative aims to restore Islamic ethics in the raising of livestock and poultry. It does so by replacing inhumane farming practices with healthy and ecologically respectful techniques, thereby improving standards of food production.<sup>27</sup>

The above statement clearly delineated the ethical concern for those bodies that eat, bodies being eaten, people working with the animals, and the landscapes supporting all of those human and animal bodies. By using terms like “restore” and “replace,” leaders envisioned the project as a return to an ideal, pre-industrial past with “respectful,” humane farming methods. Taqwa successfully educated the local Muslim community about hazards in industrial food production, while providing among the first sustainable alternatives available at that time. Taqwa’s statement of eco-religious intent located wholesome “Islamic ethics” at the forefront of the project, quite literally at the top of their website homepage, critiquing and improving on standard, industrial food norms and asserting a religiously inflected alternative.

Slaughter is a key element defining halal meat, and Taqwa drew from Qur’anic techniques, which purportedly avoid unnecessary suffering for the animal. Taqwa’s website detailed necessary slaughter standards according to Qur’anic *zabiha* requirements: naming God, using a pre-sharpened blade, avoiding needless suffering and excess fear in the animal, and attending to the animal’s hunger and thirst and offering soothing before slaughter.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, these basic, more humane techniques are absent from common practice in industrial slaughter, and may have been codified in contrast with more cruel practices in the Prophet Muhammed’s time (570–632 CE) (Ayoub 2004, p. 17). For example, the Qur’an expressly prohibits eating meat from animals killed by abusive human hands, such as bludgeoning an animal to death. But industrial slaughter commonly involves horrors.

Taqwa coordinators eschewed contemporary industrial practices, associated negatively with modernity, secular materialism, greed, and Westernization. Further, Taqwa leaders described a lack of attentiveness or insensitivity, the opposite of a God-oriented worldview described in the term *taqwa*. Instead, they associated their project with an idealized, pre-modern agricultural model similar to the time of the Prophet Muhammed, who is described as eating everyday food and drink with

<sup>27</sup> Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative website: <http://taqwaecofood.org/moved/>.

<sup>28</sup> As mentioned above, despite a small Muslim vegetarian minority that object to slaughtering animals for food, the wide majority of Muslims eat meat. When in non-Muslim majority regions, many seek halal meats as an aspect of maintaining their religious practice and identity.

his companions.<sup>29</sup> This legitimizing turn toward the primary revelatory voice in Islam is common in works of religiosity, adding significant weight to a claim. Thus, Taqwa leaders described their endeavors as following the primary model of Muslimness, the Prophet Muhammed himself. Rather than fully digesting the pull of modernity, Taqwa, like many other Muslim ecological projects and voices, asserted a critique of problems in modernity, preferring a valorized, historically nostalgic, agricultural method to live out presently.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.3. “The Grass Is Always Greener”: Agricultural Ideals from an Urban Lens

Taqwa leaders refreshed the meaning of environmentally significant work in a U.S. landscape, identifying more with an agricultural, or pastoral, ideal than a wilderness ideal. The American environmental movement sings the echoing praises of nature writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir, who idealize a vision of nature lacking indicators of human existence.<sup>31</sup> Such human absence follows Western cosmological constructions lifting humanity, or more specifically elites, out of and above the whole of nature, a vision extracting people from ecological relationships within which they are practically nested. Real ecological and human relationships remain, while the cosmological vision resides elsewhere.

Numerous scholars critique apparent dualisms excluding elites from the realm of nature, yet keeping a garden fantasy as wilderness or agricultural harmony. Scholar of religion and nature, researching North India, A. Whitney Sanford names a categorical difference between perspectives among people in the West and, in her research, Indian Vaishnava devotees, in their approaches to an idealized environment: “the idealized nature is pastoral whereas in Western environmentalism, it is wilderness.” (Sanford 2012, p. 163). Highlighting presuppositions in ecological discourse that contour religion and ecology scholarship, Sanford’s example highlights a larger potential to identify landscapes integrated with human communities into the fold of ecological or “nature” reflection. Despite religious, geographic, and other distinct differences between Sanford’s site and Taqwa, Sanford’s claim, specific to a contemporary community in India, is relevant to analyzing human-agricultural interactions beyond a vision of humanity divorced from wild nature. Instead, for Taqwa, Muslim Americans in Chicago integrated urban living with local farmlands, recognizing food as ecologically relevant in a larger landscape of meaningful integration.

The Euro-American nature-human binary obscures agriculture as a site for environmental consideration, slowing its corollaries in religious contexts. Major exceptions to this binary appear in the mid-20th century, for example, in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, and the late 20th and early 21st century sustainable, regenerative food movement. Carson’s pivotal book focused environmental attention on post-World War II shifts in agriculture, in which biological weapons transitioned into use as pesticides and chemical fertilizers, rendering tended and wild landscapes less liveable. Further attention to sustainable agriculture appeared between the 1990s and 2000s as the “foodie” movement, popularized by journalist Michael Pollan and others, gave way to a local, sustainable farm-to-table aesthetic among urban elites with the financial wherewithal to choose food ethics above and beyond meeting nutritional, hunger, and culturally meaningful food needs. Further, in 2010s parlance, the term regenerative agriculture amplifies ecological needs for biodiversity, soil health, and climate resilience.

<sup>29</sup> Although some mystical traditions locate the Prophet Muhammed in continuous fasting, Qur’an passages include some critique for his practice to visit the market and walk, eat, and drink as a common person would. (Hoffman 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Although the term pre-modern appears here in order to describe agricultural methods prior to industrialization, this term should not be mistaken for an acceptance of an inevitable sense of progress from pre-modern to modern. Contemporarily, multifarious forms of agriculture are used, of which many are efficacious, productive, and grounded in local perspectives, priorities, and traditional ecological knowledge. Nevertheless, postmodernity depicts a variety of critiques of the modern, including reductionist approaches to life forms, such as monetizing pieces of animal flesh divorced from animals’ lives.

<sup>31</sup> This human absence has been problematized particularly as the national park designation occurred alongside the removal of indigenous peoples from their home landscapes. Thus, the wilderness ideal translated into land use policies restrictive for indigenous North Americans, or First Nations peoples, and involving less visible management of “wild” lands.

Against this backdrop, Sanford's assertion may have a wider reach; the pastoral ideal may be erected by urban elites whose concrete knowledge of the pastoral can be ephemeral and limited at a romanticizing arm's length (Sanford 2012). Elites may remain at a comfortable distance from the grit, hunger, sweat, and death in agricultural existence, even when sustainably fashioned. In the case of Taqwa, the local landscape spans ethical notions and direct, embodied interactions, integrating sustainable agriculture ideals with Muslim religiosity through Islamic ethics for water, land, people, and animals and the practical realities of butchering individual animals for food. Despite its urban location, select Taqwa participants did animal slaughter, facing their role as takers of animal life, supported by Qur'anic norms for eating animals, and attending to reducing pain and suffering during the animal's life and during slaughter. Though this attention may not satisfy those who eschew animal slaughter, the contrast with standard, industrialized animal husbandry and slaughter is significant. Renewing a holistic and wholesome sensibility for the lives of animals bound for slaughter served the consciences of those who accepted the extremely common Muslim practice of meat eating, while hoping for a more humane life and death for individual animals slaughtered for Taqwa.

An urban vantage point for a pastoral-agricultural ideal appears in Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative, founded in one of the major urban centers in the U.S., Chicago. Yet, the pastoral ideal, in their case, related their renovation of agriculture to the pre-modern world of the Prophet Muhammed. For Muslims, the Prophet embodies exemplary behavior, practices, and teachings for Muslims to endeavor to inhabit, which Taqwa leaders emphasized enthusiastically in relation to the work of Taqwa toward a more natural, local foodscape. Thus, a pre-modern pastoral ideal more generally circulating in the sustainable food movement becomes planted firmly in the heart of Muslim ethical idealism through Taqwa lay leaders' religiosity. Islam's Prophet, then, becomes associated with ecological wholesomeness in the contemporary U.S. Further, a more prayerful, less industrial method of slaughter concretizes the lives and deaths of food animals in more direct relation to the people eating them.

#### 3.4. *Tayyib, Wholesome*

Taqwa provided a place of meaning where participants could re-affirm a particularly pure, wholesome (*tayyib*) Muslim identity. According to research by Mufti Shaykh Abdullah Nana and his organization, Halal Advocates of America, American Muslims consuming halal meat ingest questionable meat approximately half of the time, despite halal labeling that attests to its permissibility (Abdul-Matin 2010, pp. 146–49). Taqwa faced such discrepancies with a willingness to challenge agricultural norms that fit an otherwise secular U.S. ethos, but failed to meet Muslim ethical requirements delineated in the Qur'an regarding halal animal slaughter and meat eating.

Taqwa's coordinators showed thoughtful critique and vision regarding food and agriculture concerns integrated together with Muslim religiosity and identity. They were not trying to establish formal, legal precedents, nor did they pose themselves as religious leaders. Rather, as religiously committed laypeople, they cited aspects of Islam to explain their commitments to the following agricultural goals:

- 1) Protecting consumer health by emphasizing sustainable agriculture methods,
- 2) Questioning industrial farming methods when exploitative and destructive to land, water, animals, farmers, and farm workers;
- 3) Supporting smaller-scale, local farms that raise animals with kindness and nourish the land's regenerative capacity;
- 4) Paying small farmers a living wage; and
- 5) Living faithfully by acting wisely within God's creation in accordance with divine law. (adapted from (Robinson 2014, p. 282)

Pishdadi and Hassan explained the centrality of the Muslim notion of *tayyib*, or wholesome, food. They emphasized not only values for halal, but for multilayered health benefits of eating with spiritual integrity, which for them was grounded in care ethics for people, animals, water, and land.

For Taqwa leaders, industrially raised animals and factory-farmed meat were questionably halal, and not wholesome, or *tayyib*, which was arguably the legal foundation for halal foods. In the 2004 book, *Halal Food Production*, Riaz and Chandry concurred: “The underlying principle for halal is that food has to be *halalun tayyaban*, meaning permissible and wholesome, or good.”<sup>32</sup> Taqwa defined *tayyib* this way, “Wholesome foods, *Tayyib*, are those that are conducive to goodness and well being [sic.] and free of harmful effects.”<sup>33</sup> Abdul-Matin defined *tayyib* meat as deriving from “animals that were raised properly, fed properly, allowed to graze freely, and permitted to act in the most natural way—the way God intended. In the early years of Islam, there was no factory farming industry. Therefore animals were automatically raised properly.” (Abdul-Matin 2010, p. 174). Arguably, the humane slaughter guidelines set in the Qur’an appeared in contradistinction to possible exploitative relations with animals in pre-modern agricultural contexts familiar to the Prophet Muhammed. Additionally, other Islamic literature indicated ongoing debate about appropriate ways to interact with other-than-human animals, likening their treatment to slavery (Kassam 2009, pp. 160–69). Nevertheless, Abdul-Matin valorized a natural life for animals, critiquing industrial reductionism of animals to meat. Further, he objected to the centrality of profit-making in animal agriculture, concerned that if animals are “raised and treated” improperly, that “they may not be meeting our Islamic guidelines.” Questioning the wholesomeness of meat based on animal treatment paralleled perspectives explained by Taqwa leaders, part of a larger conversation defining eco-halal.

Whole Earth Meats, the private business born from Taqwa after its closing, self-defined on its 2011 website:

We use the term “whole” to refer to the notion of being complete; something in its entirety. We also use the term “whole” to refer to the notion of wholesomeness, lusciousness, full of quality and substance. When we couple “whole” with “earth” we get the naming arrangement that conveys: the dynamic and good food establishment that prevents physical diseases and hopefully broadens the opportunity to embark on spiritual healings, improving the whole earth.<sup>34</sup>

The Whole Earth Meats nomenclature infers the first pillar of Islam, the wholeness or unicity of God, in addition to meat quality, plus potentials for food practice to influence “spiritual healings,” also found in Islamic mystical traditions.<sup>35</sup>

It is notable that bodily health is equated with both personal and earth “healing,” as food practices of prescribed eating and fasting figure centrally in Muslim practices, both through halal restrictions and through periodic fasts. Hassan explained the Ramadan fast as the summation of ethics in Islam. Hassan described fasting as giving a visceral sense of what hungry people endure, if only temporarily for fast-takers. This direct exposure to hunger, he explained, supported contemplation, compassion, and charity, see (Robinson 2015). The 2017 Whole Earth Meats website features the term *tayyib* in a purist sense, defined as “free from ever[y] [sic.] imperfection and defect,” listing priorities: local, sustainable, humane, high quality, low environmental impact, and supporting small farmers.<sup>36</sup> The purist notion of *tayyib*, or wholesome food figured centrally in Taqwa’s project goals and Whole Earth Meats’ mission, asserting a Muslim ecological vision underlying education and food sourcing goals.

<sup>32</sup> *Halalun* and *tayyaban* are derivations or variants of the words *halal* and *tayyib* (Riaz and Chaudry 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Taqwa Eco-Food Cooperative website: [http://taqwaecofood.org/faqs/faqs\\_islamtwo.html](http://taqwaecofood.org/faqs/faqs_islamtwo.html).

<sup>34</sup> Whole Earth Meats: <http://wholeearthmeats.com/who-we-are/>.

<sup>35</sup> Qaid Hassan described his experiences in Mauritania with a Sufi Shaykh Murabit al-Hajj, which may serve to reinforce the notion that Hassan’s religiosity expressed through food has religious roots in Sufi Muslim religious asceticism and concern with questions of *halal* and *haram*, or unlawful. (Reynolds 2000)

<sup>36</sup> Whole Earth Meats Website: <http://www.wholeearthmeats.com/about-us/>.

### 3.5. Wholesome for Farmers and Workers

Taqwa became a means by which farmers came into contact not only with a consumer base for their products, but also a cross-cultural educational opportunity with Muslims. One farmer reflected that he and his family had no prior experience with Muslims, except through the media's fear-inflected lens (Ostrow and Rockefeller 2008). Taqwa's leaders helped to humanize Muslims for rural farmers through pluralistic conversation and shared goals, providing wholesome interactive spaces for learning—a reciprocal opportunity for building respect and understanding. Although educational efforts were made largely within the Chicago Muslim community, this additional layer of education further humanized Muslims in rural regions near the city.

Taqwa coordinators expressed concern about the wages and working conditions for farming people, including farm workers and small farmers. Interviews showed a high value for farmers, choosing to pay the farmers a living wage even as Taqwa's finances were not fully self-sustaining. Hassan continued similar work in Whole Earth Meats (Hassan 2010, transcript ll. 1133–50). Although a living wage may seem uncontroversial, farmers are subject to fluctuating prices from market forces, as well as customers and distributors that push for lower prices. In this way, it was significant, even revolutionary to prioritize “paying the price that the farmer is asking for and not trying to get a lower price.” (Hassan 2010, transcript ll. 1140–41). Pishdadi expressed concern about the working conditions of farm workers more generally, citing instances of slave-like conditions for migrant workers on farms and in slaughterhouses. Hassan's experience with slaughterhouses gave him first-hand experience with the problems for people that work in the meat industry, which he tried to address. These concerns were also allayed by working with small farms that gave their animals and their workers a healthy living environment. Investing in family farmers, Taqwa leaders committed practically to farmers, attending to farmer and worker health and safety, as well as small, local farming viability.

Pishdadi found objectionable the hazardous working conditions, mistreatment, and low pay for workers and farmers. Pishdadi asserted, “halal is not just about how you slaughter the animal, right? I mean, if you are exploiting people, right, enslaving people to grow your food, how is that halal?” (Pishdadi 2010). Pishdadi pushed past what she perceived as assimilationist halal certification issues that gave a rubber stamp to factory-farmed meat, and widened her scope for Qur'anic lawfulness to unethical treatment of people working in the industrial food system. She critiqued larger-scale food producers that tend to keep a financial bottom line primary, which unfortunately can result in exploitative conditions for farm and meat-packing workers. Pishdadi spoke enthusiastically about the work of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a social movement counteracting contemporary virtual or actual enslavement of vulnerable migrant workers in the U.S., organizing exploited farm workers in Florida.<sup>37</sup> Although modern-day slavery is rare in the U.S., worker exploitation occurs with more frequency. To avoid injustices structurally built into larger-scale food production, Taqwa cultivated professional relationships with smaller-scale, local, sustainable farmers, reflecting a contemporary Muslim ethics for justice against exploiting and enslaving people, as well as providing a living wage for small farmers.

Taqwa and Whole Earth Meats practically embodied ethics by paying a living wage to farmers taking on economic risks in a relatively new eco-business model before sustainability gained broader appeal. Taqwa leaders enacted commitments to support the small, local, sustainable, family-farming way of life not only in theory, but asserting their financial commitment to support small farming when industrialized food was considerably cheaper.<sup>38</sup> In an inter-religious crowd assembled by Faith in Place and Taqwa, a local chicken farmer—a tall, light skinned American man of apparent European descent—attended his first *iftar* feast, breaking the Ramadan fast together by eating chickens from his farm (Ostrow and Rockefeller 2008). This warm celebration cohered community in one of the

<sup>37</sup> Coalition of Immokolee Workers Website. (<http://www.ciw-online.org/>).

<sup>38</sup> This sentiment was thematic in all three interviews by the author with Shireen Pishdadi, Qaid Hassan, and Clare Butterfield.

most ancient ways to celebrate, sharing a meal. The wholesomeness of Taqwa's food extended to the wellbeing of specific local farmers, the soil, land, and animals, as well as an interfaith, pluralistic community, recognizing and supporting Muslim wholesomeness.

### 3.6. Wholesome for Animals

A primary concern for Taqwa was humane treatment of animals, even as they chose to adhere to cultural continuity or other reasons to eat them.<sup>39</sup> Animal studies scholar Paul Waldau estimates between 50 and 100 billion animals are slaughtered annually for human consumption (Waldau 2001). In the U.S., factory farming is common practice for livestock. Viewing land, crops, animals, and workers with a denatured, factory-oriented mindset was unsettling for Taqwa leaders. Pishdadi contended:

Agriculture *is* our society . . . that our agriculture today is so industrialized is telling about our society and us as people, you know? It's a factory—industrialized, highly destructive system—so we can look at our agriculture and this is us, this is a reflection of *us*, what is it saying about us? (Pishdadi 2010, ll. 539, 543–45)

Pishdadi contended that agriculture held up a mirror to American society at large, showing a penchant for reductionist efficiency that dehumanizes people, denatures land, and treats animals unjustly. Instead of focusing entirely on the victims of industrial agriculture, as some animal rights activists might, she focused on who people are to perpetrate such acts. Again, Pishdadi asserted her critique of a secular, reductionist worldview that reduced farmers and workers to labor and animals to meat, ignoring moral responsibility to enact care ethics.

Taqwa complied with regulations for animal slaughter not only from the Qur'an, but also from the State of Illinois and the U.S. After years of volunteer work prayerfully slaughtering animals for Taqwa and a year of managing his own meat business, Hassan spoke hopefully about designing a slaughterhouse with a maximal opportunity to protect animals from seeing or expecting harm, in line with Qur'anic injunctions against unnecessary harm for animals facing slaughter. Recalling his first slaughter, he described making "a lot of *dhikr*, which is like a type of prayer. We remember to say 'God' in prayer, and [I] just took my time and had deliberateness about it and intentionality, or I hope the right intention." (Hassan 2009, ll. 470–72). After expressing humility about his experience slaughtering animals for Taqwa's meat cooperative, he followed immediately with a description of how he would go about changing the slaughterhouse environment to optimize kindness to animal well-being in the path to slaughter, water efficiency, and safe working conditions for slaughterhouse workers.

Although some would argue that slaughter of any kind is inhumane, the industrial model of animal slaughter dehumanizes working people, denaturalizes animals, and optimizes for economic efficiency at the expense of wellbeing, according to Taqwa's coordinators. Hassan acknowledged the tension in talking about humane slaughter, speaking about being able "to really offer the right type of humane experience, if I could call it that." (Hassan 2009, lines 469–79). Although the violence of slaughter cannot be extracted from meat-eating, at least the social and ecological problems and the animal's experience until the time of slaughter can be mediated with social, environmental, and humane redesign toward greater kindness to workers and animals, and conserving water.

Although his training in Islamic animal slaughter techniques (*zabiha*) took place in Illinois, Hassan observed a slaughter during a visit to a nomadic community surrounding the renowned teacher Murabit al-Hajj in Mauritania. After months of living near the herd, he observed a friend engaging a cow toward slaughter. The person avoided jostling or sudden movement and took time—approximately a half hour—to assist the animal to become "ready" for sacrifice, according to Hassan: "you wouldn't even have known that an animal was being slaughtered."

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<sup>39</sup> As mentioned above, Islam scholar Kecia Ali offers a contemporary Muslim ethical stance against eating animals in (Ali 2015).

(Hassan 2009, ll. 420–21). By this, he implied that the animal was treated humanely to avoid fear or excess, unnecessary harm, thereby meeting Qur’anic goals.

Witnessing the cow slaughtered in Mauritania offered Hassan direct learnings to develop his sense of Muslim environmental ethics: seeing a closed circuit for local food, interacting personally with food animals, and counteracting a modernist notion of inevitable progress through industrialized living. This direct experience of slaughter also closed the gap in food production for Hassan: “food doesn’t just end up in the supermarket . . . it doesn’t just end up on my table, and it can feed a lot of people, a cow. And I’ve seen these cows, this one cow, I’ve seen this cow or I’ve seen the herd from which this cow belongs, walking past my tent for the last couple months.” (Hassan 2009, ll. 456–59). The personal, local context for relating to animals influenced his perspective change from denatured meat removed from its natural context and even its animal-ness, and toward seeing meat as linked to a living being in an integrated human and other-than-human community sharing regional place. Further, the contemporary existence of a nomadic community using apparently humane techniques for raising and slaughtering animals contrasts with the modern paradigm privileging “progress” achieved through industrialization, which for animal husbandry has avoided individual relationality integrated into the small-scale nomadic community.

Oddly, in the early 21st century, a general American blindness to cruelty in industrialized animal husbandry contrasted with the fear projection of “Muslim terrorists,” despite considerable internal diversity among largely peace-loving Muslim American communities. While all but ignoring people’s cruelty to animals, Americans were steeped in a media soup of anti-Muslim rhetoric, furthering structural violence against animals and tacitly encouraging anti-Muslim perspectives and actions. Taqwa leaders implicitly challenged both notions, educating local non-Muslim Americans simply by exhibiting Muslim ethics and worldview supporting not only respect for other humans, like consumers, farm workers, and small farmers, but extending care ethics to animals, land, water, and living systems. The optics of cruelty focused on the violent “other,” while ignoring systemic violence against animals, farm workers, and meat production workers, dehumanized and denatured in commodifying industrial systems that reductionistically treat animals as products and people as exploitable labor.

### 3.7. Wholesome for Water and Land

Founding coordinator Pishdadi found coherence between the Muslim value for maintaining water purity and avoiding industrially produced meat. Due to a lack of adequate regulations, larger-scale meat producers, such as Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs, are not required to provide a sewer system for animal waste. The resulting lakes of excrement are detrimental to local waterways, polluting land and water with a concentration of animal waste comparable in scale to human waste produced in a city. She explained:

It’s not *halal*, it is *haram* to pollute water, it is explicitly *haram* to pollute water, so if the food we’re eating was raised in a way that pollutes water, is it *halal*? (Pishdadi 2010, ll. 818–20)

Pishdadi drew connections between aspects of Islam not traditionally associated with defining halal meat, such as water pollution, offering fresh interpretation of traditional commitments.

The degradation wrought by factory farming animals is not limited to water, but pollutes land. A 2006 report from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization showed that in the U.S. alone, “livestock are responsible for an estimated 55% of erosion and sediment, 37% of pesticide use, 50% of antibiotic use, and a third of the loads of nitrogen and phosphorus into freshwater sources.”<sup>40</sup> Animal waste contaminates freshwater, salt water, and land both nearby and downriver, introducing not only feces and urine, but also antibiotic and pesticide residues. Land issues are compounded further by overgrazing and pesticide-heavy crops for animal consumption, including cotton seed

<sup>40</sup> (Food and Agriculture Organization 2006; Cited by Waldau (2001)).

and hulls in cattlefeed. Cotton has among the highest applications of pesticide of all food and fiber crops, regulated not as a food, due to its primary use in clothing fiber. Animals that eat cottonseed concentrate pesticides and other toxins in their fat and flesh, called bioaccumulation, which develops across the animal's lifetime of eating.

Taqwa's critiques of industrial agriculture were rare in the local Muslim community, but the message offered a larger view of permissibility, and subsequent religiosity and ethical action to avoid buying meat produced industrially. In this way, Taqwa participants learned to abstain from excessively polluting animal agriculture, through providing both education about the problem and a Muslim ethical solution. Such a view could be considered in tension with a Qur'anic injunction against declaring something inadmissible or illegal. Such arguments may de-authorize interpreters that express religiosity without ties to formal religious leaders. Yet, these distinct interpretations are found across the global Muslim *ummah*, or community, where sectarian differences include varying interpretations of the "spirit" of the law, like Taqwa, versus stricter assertions of legal precedents, the "letter" of the law.

#### 4. Re-territorializing Religiosity in Community and in Place

##### 4.1. Counteracting Exploitation, Restoring "Cosmic" Balance in the Real World

Ignorance allows for exploitation of workers, animals, land, and water, but largely out of view of consumers, according to Pishdadi. Factory farmers attempt to fill high demand for cheap meat, but do so at the expense of sustainability, humane animal treatment, and community cohesion. Pishdadi spoke of scarcity as a key modern economic assumption, but she emphasized God's abundance visible in small-scale farming, again referring to the importance of God-centered worldview in Islam, as well as a valorization of smaller scale, pre-modern agricultural techniques associated with the time of Islam's Prophet.

Reflecting on agricultural health, Pishdadi described Qur'anic images of abundant land as part of cosmic balance, which can be achieved by people applying themselves wisely. Pishdadi reflected that, using *'aql* or intellect, people can participate in restoring God's balance, or *mizan*:

In the Qur'an it tells us that the earth is abundant . . . the whole universe has created a balance, there's justice, it's a balance, right? The orbits, everything—everything is a balance and if we . . . were to use our *God-given gifts of intellect* and all the things we have to understand and to get *real knowledge* instead of trying to maintain a false system we're living in, then we would be in *balance* with the earth, and therefore the earth would be abundant. *If we're living right, the earth will provide abundantly for us.* (Pishdadi 2010, transcript ll. 195–205) (emphasis mine)

Muslim notions of *'aql* (intellect) and *mizan* (cosmic balance), both explained as deriving from God, support her focus on sustainable agriculture within Muslim worldview. Balance may be achieved through wise consideration and action to avoid corruption and false wisdom, and build on the wisdom visible in natural rhythms, again made by God, according to Pishdadi. Nature's balance is visible particularly in the example of a steer's longer life outdoors with a natural diet of grass, rather than short, confined, corn- and filth-fed, indoor existence in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, CAFOs.

Hassan reflected on the spiritual dimension of his work with Taqwa:

Looking at sustainable agriculture, looking at food access, food production, eating, living, healthy living. And so it's definitely made my faith stronger. It makes me smile. It makes me think critically. It makes me sad sometimes. It might get me upset, but at the end of the day I always feel that my spiritual progression is that much better because of the work that I've done. (Hassan 2010, transcript ll. 1326–30)

Just as Hassan's participation and leadership in Taqwa comingled with Muslim principles, similarly working at Taqwa strengthened and developed his religiosity by practically integrating wholesomeness

through food practice, community education, and service.<sup>41</sup> A re-territorialized ecological religiosity in practical expression, through faithful work, contributed to his sense of “spiritual progression.”

Hassan offered a profound image for reconsidering Muslim ethics for ecological and human health, summarizing a Qur’anic *surah* on God’s existence: “If you think that God doesn’t exist, then leave this earth. Then go somewhere else. If this thing that you live on is just here, and you’re just here, then find another one to go to.” (Hassan 2010, transcript ll. 1293–95) Implicit in his statement is the sense of appreciation for the Creator of the Earth. This land, though contested, and a cross-section of its people, though misled by distorted representations of Muslims, remain the location of home. Despite these contestations, Hassan’s commitment showed considerable moral courage as he endeavored to embody kindness, decency, dignity, and wholesomeness, renewing relationships among many local Muslim Americans, interfaith players, farmers, animals, and local landscapes.

Hassan expressed his religiosity through his commitment to conserving and protecting earth’s valuable resources of land and water, and respecting fellow creatures, each one of which shows proof of God’s existence and intent. Similarly, sustainable animal husbandry and food production methods prioritize long-term health for agricultural viability, valuing the preciousness of local earth. Hassan emphasized the need to reflect on God’s eventual assessment of each person’s piety after death:

There are many things that we are given control over . . . and we have to answer for those things. One of them is walking on this earth, drinking from this earth, eating from this earth, breathing from this earth, excreting on this earth. You think that these things are just going to happen and you don’t have to answer for it? We should have some devotion to it [earth], some love, right, some love for what keeps us grounded, literally. (Hassan 2010, transcript ll. 1311–17)

Hassan wove practical commitments to the earth together with his understanding of what God will judge in the end. He asserted an ethical supposition that love and devotion to the earth are an extension of love for God, and that God will judge at each person’s reckoning how well that person concretely expressed love for the Earth through concrete, ecologically significant actions. His compelling example clearly summarized the importance of lived religious identities expressed in real communities and local places, re-territorializing religiosity in present and future homes, attentive to God.

Pishdadi employed multiple metaphors to express the importance of a Muslim worldview of belief in one God as a starting point for embodying ethics that reflect care for consumers, workers, farmers, animals, water, and the land:

You can’t build a society without a worldview. The foundation of everything is the worldview. So what’s our worldview? This is the seed we plant. We plant a worldview, and out of it society grows . . .

It’s like a bird with two wings, so we are spiritual beings and . . . we’re earthly beings and we’re both. We’re not one or the other . . . and we have to maintain this balance, but we’re so unbalanced in this society, we’re highly materialistic. (Pishdadi 2010, transcript ll. 300–2, 349–52)

Pishdadi posed God as the answer to greed, critiquing secular materialism, and its exploitative expression for people, animals, land, and water in factory farming. Instead, she integrated religiosity with sustainable approaches to local animals, environments, and community. Beyond the logistical and educational support for local families to source high quality meat, Taqwa also involved opportunities for interfaith bridge-building and community *zakat*, donating food and volunteers for a local soup kitchen (Ostrow and Rockefeller 2008).

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<sup>41</sup> For further discussion of mutually reinforcing examples of agricultural religiosity, see (Robinson 2015).

For people exposed to the Taqwa project unfamiliar with Islam, the worldviews described by Hassan and Pishdadi refocused attention on real, lived existence in the local community of Muslim Americans as pious, compassionate people. Taqwa participated in envisioning, educating about, and logisticizing alternatives to systems dependent on abuses, such as cruelty to animals, unraveling small farming communities, mistreatment of farm and meat production workers, unsustainable concentrations of animal excrement in land and water, and unbalanced approaches to land management. Their leadership asserted the capacity for them as individuals, and as potent representatives of Islam in Chicago's interfaith community, to reframe the way local people thought about the earth, animals, and fellow human beings. In so doing, they also managed to affirm their own humanity and wholesomeness during a particularly dehumanizing time for Muslim Americans, instead directing a steady rudder through Islamophobic storms.

Faith in Place Director Butterfield reflected on experiences at a nearby lake, where she experienced "hierophany," which Mircea Eliade defined as a sensory experience of God's manifestation (Eliade 1987). In this context, she said:

Love is specific, that's what I tell students in seminary, you don't love things in the abstract, you love specific things. So you need to know specifically where you are if you're going to love it and take care of it. (Butterfield, transcript ll. 673–75)

Butterfield explained that personalizing a sense of place is directly related to ethical actions and interactions with that place, environment, or biosystem. I would extend this interpretation, as Taqwa concretely shows, to personal interactions with other people and with daily foods as potential locations for hierophany. Particularly necessary for accurate reflections on real people, places, and other-than-humans are personal, informed, care-based relations re-territorialized in local places and peoples. Similarly, Butterfield reflected on her overarching intent beyond her non-profit work, "I am utterly a religious pragmatist, my only question is: it is helpful?" . . . And then there are some further tests of course because helpful to do what? To commit global hegemony and slaughter people, then it's not a good thing, you know, that's bad!" (Butterfield, transcript ll. 911–12, 914–16). Butterfield named a commitment to generating practical, material results from religious notions, expressing religious, ethical praxis. She steered the organization toward supporting re-territorialized religiosity, pluralistic understanding, and respectful interrelations among people, places, and other-than-human beings eaten as food. Her skillful combination of vision and pragmatism infused the interfaith non-profit Faith in Place, which sought leadership from within the Muslim community to both serve context-specific community needs and to endeavor to deflate distorted representations of her Muslim neighbors. Instead of accepting dominant narratives, she worked to empower people and co-create alternative narratives of local, Muslim wholesomeness.

#### 4.2. De-Territorializing or Re-Territorializing Religiosity

As mentioned above, French sociologist Roy defined two directions of religious meaning production: religion and religiosity. Religion reflected the views of traditionally appointed authorities who take responsibility for longer-term management of religious institutions. Religiosity, on the other hand, represented an individualistic turn in religious meaning. Roy's religiosity related to what in the West may be called "spirituality," but Roy narrows his meaning away from "spirituality" as a broadly used, vague term, toward the term "religiosity" that identifies specifically with personal interpretation of religious tenets. Roy placed strange bedfellows in the category of religiosity, including fundamentalism, "spiritual nomadism . . . [, and] self-appointed religious leaders," locating varying kinds of religiosity, some of which fit into a larger New Age movement, specific to Islam. Although Roy used this explanation and the term religiosity largely to discuss violently extremist interpreters of Islam, who represent a small portion of the global Muslim population, Roy named a global phenomenon of individualistic spiritual engagement, which, separated from traditional community needs expressed through a tradition, can veer toward a reductionist, fragmented interpretation of religious meaning

separated from traditional roots, such as place-based community, attentive to local history, landscapes, and weather patterns. Roy claimed that shifting Muslim identity production from specific communities in Muslim-majority locations into a global, migration-inflected, at times virtual, “de-territorialized” sphere has tangible, material impacts. For example, de-territorialization, he contended, impacted the draw of neofundamentalism, an extreme religious interpretation that favors censorship and moves toward augmenting or replacing the state in governing (Roy 2004). Thus, Roy explained the fundamentalist turn in terms of displacement from a sense of place, away from coherent, settled social and material relations in a particular region and its people’s sense of place.

In contrast with the majority of Roy’s subjects of study, my qualitative data reflected Muslim identity expressed in religiosity, inasmuch as leaders were not traditionally appointed. Nonetheless, Taqwa’s leaders contrasted with dangerously extremist purism. Instead, their version of Muslim purity appeared in thoroughly peaceful, pluralistic, pastoral visions of spiritually meaningful, physical wholesomeness for the whole of nature and humanity. They identified such purity with an idealized, pre-modern landscape inhabited by Islam’s Prophet. Taqwa leaders affirmed that animals slaughtered for food were not subject to reductionism or corrupting greed, but rather were respected as individual beings worthy of a good life and a relatively painless death. By greening Islam in the early 2000s, this eco-halal movement asserted an antidote to externally defined conglomerative projections of fear, encapsulated in media memes projecting monolithic categories that erased internal diversity and steered public opinion toward distorted understandings about Muslims and Islam. Rather than resolving religious identity through a-geographical, globalized notions about Islam, Taqwa leaders reaffirmed religiosity by rooting relationships in a heterogeneous local Muslim community, connected with local farmers and animals becoming food. Thus, a wholesome religiosity and identity emerged simultaneously with a re-territorializing rootedness in a quotidian, lived religiosity, attentive to ingesting purity in daily life.

Ecologically virtuous Muslim food ethics infused the Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative’s leadership and literature, despite practical limitations. Taqwa was successful in educating about sustainable, healthier food, but was not a financially sustainable project for the long term. Nevertheless, Hassan spoke of the opportunities for widening the scope of Muslim ethical food practices among Taqwa’s participants:

None of us really had a panacea for re-setting the food system as it relates to the Muslim community and the larger community. But there are a lot of, there is just an abundance of opportunity for us to explore, for us to unpack all those things, whether it’s sourcing raw milk or making your own bread. So it definitely got outside the whole aspect of *tayyib* [wholesome] meat, humane slaughtering practices, the Islamic method of animal sacrifice, and it allowed us to delve into other areas. For folks who are affiliated with Taqwa Eco-foods and who are Muslim, I think you find a similar type of self-development, culture development, social development, when you look at young families . . . young couples who are having children. There is home schooling happening, and the mom might stay at home or work part-time . . . the same value commitments that I think help inform that type of practice, we found did occur also with people who tried to—who wanted to be a part of Taqwa Eco-foods or at least what Taqwa Eco-foods espoused, it was the idea that Taqwa Eco-foods attempted to espouse. (Hassan 2009, ll. 1492–505)

Hassan named the parallels between a Do-It-Yourself or “DIY” approach to child education, food preparation, food production and processing, as well as interpretations of daily Muslim lived religiosity. Participants shaped local food systems, actively expressing values for greater wholesomeness. Taking education, food production, and religious meaning into their own hands, these families constructed a meaningfully renewed Muslim identity in contrast with myths of modern progress, the backdrop of industrial halal, and projections of terrorist others. Roy’s definition of religiosity reflected a parallel DIY sensibility. Further, Taqwa leaders’ systemic analysis and participatory social change

aligned with a justice orientation in civic engagement, a crucial contribution to American civic life. (Westheimer and Kahne 2004)

Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative provided a salient example of a re-territorializing Muslim religiosity, in contrast with the de-territorializing problematics described by Roy, though neither direction retains an entirely positive or negative connotation across diverse expressions. Roy associated de-territorialized religiosity with neofundamentalism, marking the potential for misuse of tradition when taken out of literal context. A distinct territorial meaning appears influential in exclusionary, purist or extremist tribalism, or a tribalistic interpretation of nationalism, which can result in further problematics of over-generalizing others in contrast with in-group peoples and priorities. Similarly, various religious groups laud the internet as a space for relationship building and connection despite geographical distance. In some cases, de-territorializing compounds extremism or purism, but may also factor into cases of virtual community valuing and spreading pluralistic intent. Pluralistic intent becomes important for navigating multiplicity in real and virtual spaces of meaning. In the case of Taqwa, the re-territorializing turn gave participants a sense of connection with one another, the wider interfaith community, the lands where their food grew, and the creatures who became food. Wholesome expressions of re-territorializing threaded through interviews with Taqwa leadership.

A sense of connection to specific territory does not inherently create the conditions for such re-territorialization as Taqwa leaders inhabited. Through pluralistic leadership as lay Muslim leaders and interfaith partners, Taqwa re-territorialized religiosity in morally and materially productive ways. Through the lens of American pluralism, Taqwa represented a location of identity production that, by its inherent integrative plurality, represented an example of the American democratic experiment at work.

#### 4.3. Conclusions

The Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative was an early 21st century, post-9/11 effort to apply Muslim ethical religiosity to respond to contemporary problems in the U.S. industrial food system, serving greening hopes among Chicago Muslims and interfaith partners. Taqwa coordinators Qaid Hassan and Shireen Pishdadi were committed to providing a living wage for farmers, a respectful life and humane slaughter for food animals, an integrated view of land and water quality, promoting health and well-being for all participants in the food production system, human and other-than-human. Taqwa catalyzed material needs for food with Muslim ethical principles, expressing daily devotion to God through community education and organizing to provide local, sustainable, grass-fed, free-range, halal meats. Muslim American religiosity emerged in ethical threads, which when taken together, produce a purity-oriented tapestry of Muslim identity with an ecological ethos grounded in Islamic traditions. Drawing from a specific example of Muslim lay leaders in Chicago, Illinois, USA, in the years 2001 to 2009, this research locates religiosity in a contemporary context of urban relationship to agricultural meaning, rooting a place-based perspective in local lands and communities through the eaten bodies of sustainably raised, humanely treated animals.

Lay Muslims coordinated the project and emphasized Islamic ethics for food and agriculture, based on ultimate responsibility to God at the end of each person's life, hence the importance of daily expressions of *taqwa*, or mindfulness of God. Taqwa leaders asserted an extremely kind and wholesome approach to agriculture and to interfaith community, contrasting with common, yet inaccurate external portrayals of Muslims oversimplified in the post-9/11 terrorist motif and reinscribed in the mid-2010s politicized meme of "extremist Islam." By embodying an alternative to non-pluralistic, ethnocentric, Islamophobic media portrayals, Taqwa leaders renewed not only the local Chicago food system with *tayyib*, or wholesome, meat, but refreshed a variety of local non-Muslims with examples of real, wholesome Muslims engaging in humble, courageous work of kindness, service, and vision toward pluralistic understanding and ethical living. Further, Taqwa provided a location for participants and leaders to embody Muslim, eco-ethical meaning in re-territorialized religiosity.

When considering the import of Taqwa Eco-food Cooperative, it is crucial to focus on the project's location in time and place, which are also nested in communities and narratives that inform Taqwa's meaning for its participants and for the study of religion. Taqwa occupied a pluralistic place in the post-9/11 Chicago religious landscape, initiated and funded by an interfaith non-profit organization dedicated to greening communities in context-specific ways. Despite its pluralistic inception, Taqwa leaders reflected both antipathy and embrace for non-Muslim others. They expressed antipathy toward a secularizing pressure toward what they perceived to be greed-inducing materiality, associated with cruelty to food animals, agricultural workers, and small farmers and misuse of landscapes and waterways. Nevertheless, Taqwa leaders expressed materially their *taqwa*, a volition to live according to God's instructions in daily activities, like eating and working toward their own and others' greater ethical embodiment, grounded in local relations with land, water, animals, farmers, workers, and eaters.

Taqwa leaders made dedicated efforts to provide Muslim environmental education and distribute ethically sourced meats, which functioned also to produce a wholesome Muslim identity, distanced from overgeneralized and denigrating media narratives that glossed over nuanced, intra-Muslim diversity, and contextual particularity. Asserting a wholesome identity through wholesome foods, then, coincided with an expression of religiosity, inasmuch as Taqwa leaders were not in traditionally recognized religious leadership roles, yet found themselves in tradition-interpreting leadership both among local Muslims and in interfaith circles. Taqwa provided nourishing food for both Muslims and non-Muslims who hungered for a way to engage in local, mutually beneficial relations, bringing community wholesomeness to the forefront. While U.S. media narratives echoed with a fear-inducing *din*, a greening *deen* (religion) resonated with specific Muslim Americans to live ethically, volitionally, and mindfully in awareness of God (*taqwa*). Taqwa leaders reasserted their Muslim identity as wholesome, placing religiosity in a heterogeneous and pluralistic, care-infused local landscape, integrating people with other-than-human lives, waters, and lands where they found home. Taqwa leaders endeavored to restore greater wholesomeness and purity through the intimate relationship of ingesting food, reinvigorating a sense of re-territorialized religiosity in local communities of life-giving meaning.

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