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Sacred Privacy

I am interested in culture, identity, space, and how they interact with each other. My thesis is about building private spaces within public spaces such as university buildings. While the project initially emerged as a response to my religious needs on an individual level, it later evolved into a bigger question on a social level. I attempt to reverse the conversation about Muslims who are associated only with terrorism. Islamophobia and xenophobia have been on rise in the past few years as the growing numbers of attacks on mosques prove.

From January to July 2017, there have been 63 publicly reported incidents of vandalism, threats or arson to the mosques.<sup>1</sup> There's an attack once in two weeks and nine every month. There are "efforts to block or deny necessary zoning permits for the construction and expansion of other facilities".<sup>2</sup> When I first started this project, the incidents barely made it to the headlines. North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Delaware, District of Columbia, and Alaska are the only states where anti-mosque incidents did not take place since 2005.<sup>3</sup>

However, the past six months, the scale of some incidents were too deadly to ignore. Moreover, not only mosques, but also synagogues and Black churches, in other words, any sacred place that doesn't belong to a pure white culture, is under the risk of hate crime. The Pittsburg synagogue

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Coleman, "On Average, 9 Mosques Have Been Targeted Every Month This Year," *CNN*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/20/us/mosques-targeted-2017-trnd/index.html>. Accessed January 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> "Nationwide Anti-mosque Activity," *ACLU*, accessed May, 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/national-security/discriminatory-profiling/nationwide-anti-mosque-activity> .

shooting which left 11 killed, the Christchurch mosque massacre in New Zealand with a death toll of 51, and the synagogue shooting in California with one casualty are among these incidents. Thus, this project doesn't only strive to create a private space to pray but also aims to make it an integral part of a larger space.

Despite the fact that the goal of this project is creating a private space for prayer, it also functions as an opportunity of privacy. There is no other notion that is breached not only forcibly but also voluntarily. While big companies are able to trace our thoughts through the artificial intelligence technologies, many people willingly share and display the most intimate moments of their lives. #privacyisdead.

My constructed space is open for the use of all, however, it carries certain elements of an Islamic sacred space. The constructed space has repeated forms and designs derived from the Islamic art. The installation is built from a wooden shed-like structure with a dome-like roof made from steel. Handmade paper is used as a significant element with which the sacred text was transmitted. Even the use of light is intentional: light "conveys the mystic aspects of religious deities."<sup>4</sup> It reveals the hidden; it performs as an antagonist to darkness, bringing truth to the fore, arousing hope and erasing fear. In my work, one can see that light creates shadows on the interiors of the installation, reviving the design on another surface and in newer forms for the audience to explore.

Sacred spaces are for spiritual cleansing and refuge, yet, they are also vulnerable in nature as open targets. The urge of finding refuge and the notion of vulnerability are deeply connected to my second project, which is about refugees and immigrants who died while trying to reach

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Schielke, "Light Matters: Sacred Spaces," *Arch Daily*, 28 March, 2014, <https://www.archdaily.com/490781/light-matters-sacred-spaces>, accessed March 2019.

Europe. This acrylic installation is an etching of a portion of the list first published in *Der Tagesspiegel* in 2017. More than 34,000 refugees and immigrants have died on their escape to Europe: escape from poverty, escape from death, war, and persecution. With their lives and the loved ones, the stories and dreams of these people sank in the waters of the Mediterranean. Now they have no names, no identity, and no trace: all we see is statistical figures in some media report.

In a way, this project is also about humans' pursue for refuge, shelter and a safe place. It also questions the very notion of safe space as many other people died after they reached Europe. The same question of what a safe space is could be applied to the sacred spaces of minorities. Both installations are related to the notions of the "othering", "vulnerability", "refuge", and "recognition".

Overall, there are certain elements that connect my different projects such as identity, the "othering," space, and repetitions, as well as dealing with traditional patterns using contemporary tools and language.

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