

Field report

On November 22, 2016 my class and I went on a field trip to the Jamaica Muslim center in Queens. The class and I met up in the lobby in Laguardia community college to discuss the agenda for the day and the the class , the professor including myself walked to the train station on 33 Rawson Street to catch the Queens bound 7 train. We got off on 74th street Broadway and transferred to the Queens bound F train and we took that train to 169th street. As we were walking up stairs we met a guy named Sair, in front of the train station. He was going to be our guide during the visit. We stood near the train station for about two minutes. Sair started to talk about the area, telling us that the majority of the people living there are from Bangladesh and that there are many businesses owned by them. After the class and I introduced ourselves to him we walked to the Muslim center. It wasn't a long walk, it took about two minutes to walk there. As we walked in we were told to remove our shoes. After we removed our shoes we walked in and sat down in a area where Muslims pray. We were waiting for our tour guy to arrive, the room that we entered was very simple, it was a carpet covered floor, arabic writings on the wall, and a shelf filled with Qurans. I seen a few people praying so I was trying to be very quiet so that I did not disturb them. Five minutes later the tour guy arrived. He introduced himself, he was very welcoming. His name was Shamsi Ali he is from Indonesia and he's the director of the Muslim Center.

Ali began to talk about the definition of Masjid, he told us that it is an Arabic word for a mosque. And then he started to talk about Islam. One thing that stuck out to me was when he said that Arabs were minorities, because I see them everywhere in New York city, there's only about 16 to 18% Arab muslims. The Muslim center also has their own school which is about a

few blocks away. In the school, they have the children write in the Quran. There's also an elderly home which is the first time ever in the muslim community, from what Shamsi told us. The Bengali community is very large, 90% of the people in the area are Bengali. Shamsi began to talk about the area, telling everyone that Jamaica Queens used to be less secure, because there was a high crime rate of drugs. Things have changed, businesses are expanding- mainly Bengali Businesses. The Muslim Center also has a good relationship with the Police department, The commissioner of the NYPD has visited the center a few times. I wasn't sure what a Quran was, from what Ali told me and the class , It is a holy book for the Muslim people. Ali also mentioned that there are 1.5 Muslims worldwide, which is a large number. He discussed the purpose of ramadan. It is a time to purify the soul, refocus attention on God, and practice self-discipline and sacrifice. That means no eating, drinking during the daylight hours and no engaging in physical activities for 30 days .

Ali, began to discuss the pillars of life, Muslims acknowledge diversity, gender disparities, they believe that we are all one family. After he talked about the pillars of life, he paused for a moment to answer any questions we had, I asked him what is a Imam and he told me that an Imam is similar to a priest or a leader. A person can be an Imam in many ways, leading a prayer or being a community leader. To qualify to become an Imam, you have to graduate from college with a bachelor's and master's degree and be well known in the Muslim community and well educated in the Islamic culture. After my question was answered my professor was curious to know why is Islam so misunderstood, Ali told the group the reason why is what people hear in the media, from politicians talking negatively about Muslims as a whole and the news. He told us that there is also a site called fearinc.com and corporations are spending money to in sight fear among everyone about Islam. As the director was speaking there was a prayer going on. Someone was chanting on the mic, in another language, saying

“God is great” , “come to prayer”. We paused for a moment to wait for the chanting to be over. It was 3pm and Ali had to leave for a moment to go and pray. As we were waiting for Ali to get back my professor and Sair began to talk about the Quran, the professor was curious to know how long does it take for a child to memorize the Quran. Sair said it takes a child three years to memorize it. Ten minutes later Ali was done praying and came back to answer more questions that the class had for him. Marilyn wanted to know why Muslims do not drink alcohol. Ali told everyone the reason why Muslims do not drink is because it is prohibited by God. After he told us the reason why, he talked about the the goals of Shariah, theses are the goals they follow: protecting life (that means no killing),Protecting the religion(not eating pork and praying regularly), protecting your mind(no drinking, Ali said that if a person drinks too much they can harm themselves), he also thinks that when you drink you don’t have a healthy mind. Ali wrapped up the tour by talking about how the mosque is built. The mosque is built by the community. A mosque is also built through community development, the community helps finance the mosque by donating money. We all thanked Ali and Sair for being our guide. The Class and I put our shoes on and said good bye to the professor. I walked to the F train with a few of my classmates and took the Manhattan bound F train to go home. It was an interesting experience. I really enjoyed Listening to Ali, he was very informative.