



## What Would Our World Look Like Without Muslims?

A look into L.A.'s future in Trump's anti-Muslim America

By **Ani Zonneveld** - February 21, 2017

Imagine: It is October 2020, nearly four years since the election of President Donald Trump. Armed with a visa issued through Homeland Security, I have traveled back to Los Angeles—where I once made a life with my family— from the Netherlands, my exiled home.

Despite the jet lag, I want to drive by the various neighborhoods I used to know, to bear witness to the death of so many Muslim institutions and communities. First I head south. In Orange County, Little Arabia and its numerous Arab Muslim-owned businesses and restaurants have been shut down; in Little India, only the Hindu- and Sikh-owned stores and businesses remain. I work my way up to L.A. and find that Little Bangladesh is gone. The halal butcher shop on 3rd Street has been replaced by a café. The Islamic Center in Koreatown is deserted, and there is silence on the playground where there used to be shrieks of happiness. Silenced, too, is the clamor of languages once heard within the center : the voices of its members who had emigrated from Iraq, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bosnia, and the countries of Africa (the congregation had just a few Caucasian Americans). Even African American Muslims, ancestors of slaves, have not been spared the trickle-down effects of Trump's "Ban on Muslims" policy, enacted after his 2017 inauguration: Plans to remodel Masjid Bilal, a mosque and community center near downtown, are abandoned, frozen in time.

***All of the articles and photos from our special [Immigration Issue](#) are available in the October 2016 issue.***

Gone is the American Association of Bangladeshi Engineers and Architects. Muslims in 2016 had made up 1 percent of the U.S. population, and doctors of Muslim heritage had made up 2.7 percent of the country's physicians. They had to leave as well (as did Muslim nurses, lab techs, physician's assistants, and hospital administrators). The University Muslim Medical Association Community Clinic in South Los Angeles was a free health care facility set up by Muslim graduate

students from UCLA soon after the 1992 riots to provide services for a community in which 35.7 percent of the residents lived below the poverty line. Now it's shuttered.

I am an American who happens to be Muslim. But in this imagined future I—and others like me—have opted to leave the city and country I love. The reason: The ban on entry has brought with it an intolerance of all who've already entered. Even as Americans continue to use and enjoy things that Muslims helped create—YouTube, to name just one—I am struck by the fact that in 2020 under Trump, the family of Jawed Karim (the entrepreneur of Bangladeshi German origin who co-founded YouTube) would never have been allowed to cross the border. Same for the family of Farooq Kathwari, the CEO of Ethan Allen furniture, who is of Kashmiri descent.

I was born in Malaysia, and thanks to my father's job as a diplomat, my family lived in Germany, India, and Egypt when I was a child. When I turned 18, my parents—none too happy about my desire to be a musician—declared, "You are going to do something useful with your life." That meant sending me to the United States for college. Upon graduation, having double majored in economics and political science, I decided it was time I pursued my dream; I moved to Los Angeles in 1986. As a programmer and producer (not the more typical course of lyricist or singer-songwriter for a woman in the music industry), I learned that disclosing my Muslim identity was counterproductive. I am Asian (and not the Chinese or Korean kind); I already didn't fit into any racial category. Bringing up my "exotic" faith would only complicate things further. So I was a closeted Muslim.

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Still, after 26 years in the industry, with many songs published and some awards under my belt (including a Grammy certification for my songwriting contribution on Keb' Mo's *Keep It Simple* album), I was unfulfilled. 9/11 prompted me to relearn Islam for myself, and I discovered it to be more liberating and rooted in social justice than some of its practices, which can be misogynistic and unjust. That's when I decided to start my own community. With other like-minded Americans, I founded Muslims for Progressive Values in 2007. Since then, I've been an activist who speaks and sings against radicalism and its theology of hate.

Los Angeles is where I met my husband, where we have raised our daughter, where we have built our lives, our business, our American dreams. Los Angeles is home. What is to become of mixed families like ours, where one partner is Muslim and the other is not? (My husband is an agnostic who emigrated from the Netherlands.) In my imagined future the hatred toward Muslims will be too tangible to dismiss, discrimination normalized and accepted. In 2016, I already experience attacks from not just the political right, but also the left (thanks, Bill Maher). It is not that Trump can change the Constitution and make it possible to criminalize Muslims. We are a democracy. But here's what he has already done: fan the flames of hatred. And that worries me. I've worked for ten years to counter radicalism. I consider myself battle hardy. Death threats don't faze me, but these latest threats from Trump and his followers do. In my imagined future it will be too difficult to fight the real menace, the radical Muslims. I will leave. As for my family, my college-age daughter will again have to pretend to not be a Muslim, as she did in middle school to avoid bullying; my husband will have to tend to our business alone.

Today Muslims such as myself have been able to create an Islam void of sexist, homophobic teachings—an Islam that values freedom of expression, religion, and belief. It is this egalitarian Islam that has propelled Muslims for Progressive Values from a tiny L.A. group to a growing community with footprints in 20 cities and 12 countries. Muslims all over the world are suffering from the radicalism perpetuated by those who seek political gain in the name of religion. Our

global, progressive Muslim movement is a light in that dark tunnel, but in my dreaded future that light will be snuffed out by the very country that stands for liberty and justice for all.

Think about the disgrace this ban on Muslims will bring America on the world stage. Think—and imagine.

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