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Presence of Mind: A Political Posture

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Abstract: The political posture often encouraged in liberatory movements is that of urgency. Urgency is based on the idea that if oppressed peoples do not act "now," then their fate is forever sealed as subordinates within social and political power hierarchies. This paper focuses on a contrasting political posture, termed presence of mind, motivated by the current political atmosphere of distrust and disenfranchisement in which some Muslim-Americans find themselves. Presence of mind is defined as the ability to critically unpack visceral affective responses to injustice—giving special consideration to power structures, one's social location, and relationships—and then to assess an appropriate response in virtue of that consideration that best upholds our commitments. This paper argues that cultivating presence of mind acknowledges the complexities of the Muslim-Americans' identity while providing a posture that allows the resistor to best represent their political commitments.

Introduction

The underlying motivation for this project is practical in nature, as opposed to one situated within ideal theory. I take the existing circumstances surrounding Muslim-American participation in American society as my background conceptual space, where the expectation and experience of exclusion from what it means to be "an American" hinders us from expressing our political leanings, where our comments about our country's (the United States) policies are suspect unless they align with existing U.S. foreign alliances, and where we experience frustration or apathy in politics. Charles Mills stresses that theory construction must begin "from realities crucial to our comprehension of the actual workings of injustice in human interactions and social institutions"[1] if its aim is to provide a framework of theoretical ethics and a guide for action intended to achieve genuine racial and gender equality. It is this spirit of not divorcing ourselves from our reality that informs the questions within this paper.

The inquiry that motivates this paper is: How do we, Muslim-Americans, participate in politics in an atmosphere in which we are aware that authorities are suspicious of us despite our cooperation? In what manner do we cultivate and manifest our affective response within politics without losing the comforts awarded to us for our silence, or conversely, without losing our integrity?

The answer, I claim, lies in habituating *presence of mind.*

I define presence of mind as a posture that is consciously aware of our commitments and how we stand in relation to others; *and* the habituation of using that awareness to assess whether and how to respond in public or political contexts. We cultivate this assessment and response in a manner that best represents our commitments in life. In this sense, presence of mind is the habituation of a thought process such that it becomes our political posture.

In this paper, I do not make the argument for presence of mind as a political virtue. Such would be a different (complementary) project possibly situated within a neo-Aristotelian framework. However, I use the term habituation as used in virtue ethics, i.e., the gradual process of development through practice.[2] Here, I explore a political posture. By posture, I refer to a mental state or a consciousness that one habituates such that it becomes one's default way of approaching and of being in the world. The term posture does not refer to mere 'posturing,' i.e., to appear a certain way (aggressive, timid, bold, etc.) to one's political adversaries or peers. Rather, I use the term in a manner similar to how the term is used for physical posture. A teenager, who sits a certain way while playing video games (generally slumping) or does ballet regularly (a straight back), retains their physical posture into adulthood. Much effort needs to be devoted for the slumping adult to habituate themselves into acquiring the 'correct' physical posture. Similarly, the habituation of a way of thinking, of a conscious mental state, becomes second nature to the political resistor, such that it becomes the way that they respond politically.

This particular posture of presence of mind finds its footing within non-ideal theory and is motivated by experiences of disenfranchisement and distrust of Muslim-Americans within social and political hierarchies. Since the motivation is set within the "actual workings of injustice," it is important to clarify presence of mind from what it can be mistaken for in conditions of oppression. Presence of mind is not a case of deceiving oneself to believe that this is not the right time to speak, or that there is either not enough or too much injustice to speak up about. It is not an act of being insincere to our cause, to ourselves, or to avoid the harsh consequences of speaking out. And it is not a quality that is cultivated merely to obtain short-term gains or interest-based goals—though it is cognizant of strategies that best convey our commitments. It is also not a formula or a set of principles to follow on how to act in resistance.

Possessing presence of mind is knowing that responding in a particular way at a particular moment is *displaying commitment to ourselves and our cause.* In

this sense, it is habituating oneself to be *present* in mind, in full faculty to assess the response in light of commitments.

Urgency of Action in Liberatory Struggles

Let me begin with a different political approach committed to eradicating injustice that may stand in contrast to presence of mind. A common theme that abounds in speeches and literature on liberatory struggles is a sense of urgency. A posture of urgency is encouraged in liberatory movements based on the idea that if oppressed peoples do not act now, then they forever seal their subordinate fate.

In the civil rights movement in the United States, silence was regarded as detrimental and even fatal to achieving social justice. Martin Luther King, Jr., known for non-violence and Christian virtues, responded to calls from his fellow (white) clergymen to be patient for change to come along. In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," King wrote: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was 'well timed' in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' . . . This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'"[3]

Such an urgency-based approach acknowledges both the consequences of speaking out and those of keeping silent. Audre Lorde, a feminist, antiwar and civil-rights activist, writes: "Death . . . [approaches] without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words."[4] Lorde urges us to neither live in fear (because we suffer either way) nor to wait patiently for the right time (because there is none), but to speak out now.

A call for urgent adversarial politics is valuable in not only forcibly loosening the grip of the privileged by preventing oppression from continuing unchecked within societal institutions, but also in avoiding the stifling of the self that Lorde alludes to.

However, I argue that a liberatory resistor's focus on immediate urgent action may constrain her recognition of other valuable responses embodied in a different political posture. Reacting against years of having been told to "wait" for a better time, liberatory struggles' calls for urgency take it for granted that immediate action is better than waiting or silence. It is in contrast to this sense of urgent, immediate speech and action that I am exploring a different quality—a political posture that I term presence of mind.

The Muslim-American Case

In this section, I focus on the specific element of distrust within the Muslim-American experience in order to set up the conceptual space for the value of presence of mind

to our specific political struggle in the United States. Ultimately, presence of mind—a conscious emphasis upon our being in relation to other—is valuable as a response to, or in the context of, the experience of distrust.

One of the most glaring examples of distrust within a Muslim community came to light when an FBI sting operation went awry. In August 2006, Craig Monteilh, a convicted felon and a paid FBI informant, joined a mosque in Irvine, California that had a Friday prayer attendance of 2,000. Monteilh came to all five prayers, and even followed some worshippers to their gyms. Eventually, the worshippers were so alarmed by his talk of violent jihad that they filed a restraining order against him. This was before they knew he was an FBI agent. That same year, Monteilh recorded Ahmadullah Sais Niazi, an Afghan-born American, agreeing to blow up a mall. A few days later an anguished Niazi contacted the imam of the mosque, convinced that Monteilh was a terrorist. The imam reported Monteilh to the FBI, who came and interviewed Niazi. Niazi was indicted a year and a half later "by a federal grand jury on charges of lying about his ties to terrorists on immigration documents. In court, prosecutors said that jihadist materials were found on Niazi's computer and that he had wired money to an alleged al-Qaeda financier. Prosecutors said he is the brother-in-law of Osama bin Laden's security coordinator. Much of the evidence was FBI testimony about Niazi's recorded conversations with an FBI informant, who sources say was Monteilh."[5] The case was later dropped when Monteilh went public about his identity for reasons of his own. The incident bolstered the narrative that authorities do not trust Muslim-Americans. This narrative often results in fear of being suspect, of being watched, which consequently paralyzes any meaningful non-violent yet concrete action to oppose US foreign policies.

In terms of statistics, according to one nationally-conducted poll in 2011, a majority (67%) of Americans don't see Muslim-Americans as trustworthy. Furthermore, half of Americans thought that Muslim-Americans should register their whereabouts with the government.[6] Another national poll cited a quarter of Muslim-Americans who said that, in the past year, "people have acted as if they were suspicious" of them. This percentage was significantly higher (42%) in the under-thirty age group. More than half of Muslim-Americans also believed they were singled out for surveillance and monitoring simply by virtue of being Muslim. This was again significantly higher in immigrants who came to the U.S. before 1990 (61%), among African American Muslims (72%), and among native-born Muslims who are not black (74%). Most of those who believed the government gives extra scrutiny to Muslims said this attention bothers them some (34%) or a lot (40%).[7]

It is often within this space of distrust that Muslim-Americans operate within the political arena. Like our predecessors of the civil rights era, we can encourage an urgent response, a now-or-never ultimatum and demand that Americans embrace us and our patriotism. However, such an approach bears problems.

First and foremost, the urgent approach is psychologically difficult for Muslim-Americans precisely because they are distrustful of what will happen to them if they make urgent demands. Political paralysis induced by paranoia caused by anecdotes of mistaken renditions, immigration status revocations, and vagueness of due process makes it psychologically burdensome to act with urgency. The consequences of urgency-driven actions are largely uncertain. However, our psychological status is not the motivation or the focus of this particular paper.

Here I focus on another issue often at odds with the urgent approach. Except for the glorious leaders of resistance, such an approach is not true to the experience of many, and not simply because of the fear of backlash. Immediate response and an uncompromising posture sidesteps the value of our being in relation to others. In this respect, presence of mind offers liberating possibilities to the Muslim-American resistor.

As Paulo Freire writes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "The point of departure of the movement lies in the people themselves . . . with the human-world relationship . . . with the men and women in the 'here and now,' which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene."[8] That is to say, to achieve social justice one must not merely situate oneself in ideal theory constructs, but begin from and within the actual conditions in which they exist, in order to understand the challenges and consequently change those very conditions. The motivation for presence of mind, then lies in the present context that Muslim-Americans exist in.

In the case of Muslim-Americans, the "here and now" of sting operations, congressional hearings, and extraordinary rendition situates us within the limits of our freedom, without anyone having to draw out a boundary. But such incidences are not the only reality in which we are submerged. We are part of school PTAs, of neighborhood boards, of community projects; we are lawyers and doctors and cab drivers in our communities; we serve burgers, enjoy our lattes, and value the many freedoms that our country offers us. Thus, like any political agent, our social location is complex in its dimensions. And while it is necessary to define and assert our political standing, it is equally important to acknowledge the everyday bonds we value and where we stand in relation to others, whether that be to Muslims across the world with whom we may have little in common but our faith, or to our next-door neighbors.

It is in this respect that an urgency-based approach may overlook the significance of our bonds with the "oppressor" in preference of waging an equal rights and opportunities movement. Presence of mind acknowledges our multiplicitous self and that how we relate to others in our moral locus affects our commitments.

Proper cultivation of presence of mind such that it becomes our political posture guides us to not speak impetuously and fight gloriously at every opportunity of injustice but to deal, treat, manage, and fight in relation to our social location.

This social location itself is subject to and of social construction and so, is ever fluctuating and negotiated.

Part I. Presence of Mind As Conscious Awareness of Our Relation To Others

The first essential aspect of presence of mind is to be consciously aware of how we stand in relation to others. The habituation of a conscious awareness is in part an awareness of our own multiplicitous selves *and* of the complex ways that we stand in relation to others. Such cognizance entails confronting the fluidity of our social location and our evolving/ conflicting commitments in light of it.

For Muslim-Americans who have unsettled feelings about the conflicts in/ with Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Northern Pakistan, or the proxy repression in Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and of course Palestine, among others, ambiguity often mars the strength of our political stance. We are reminded that our comfortable lifestyle is afforded to us by virtue of being Americans, and America's manifest destiny lies in its military and economic power. Do we exploit the freedoms that America has to provide (even religious freedoms that many Muslim countries fail to offer), but distance ourselves morally from the sacrifices it makes in terms of the wars it undertakes and regimes it supports to maintain that superiority? Many Muslim-Americans have ambiguous, often seemingly conflicting sentiments about the United States's foreign policy and what it means to be American. Having any response to one of those sentiments appears to be a betrayal of some other concurrent, and often inseparable, commitment in our lives.

The cultivation of presence of mind entails that one situates oneself in relation to commitments to values or to others, whether that be to our next door neighbors, global diasporic ties, or to our moral or religious commitments. For multiplicitous beings, presence of mind requires that we recognize and even sustain the ambivalence that is essential to retaining integrity.

In his discussion of integrity, Bernard Williams[9] offers the example of a fictional recent doctoral graduate, George, who has a strong commitment to pacifism. George has young children and difficulty finding work because of poor health which limits his job opportunities. He hears of an opportunity to work on biological and chemical warfare in a laboratory. If George takes the job, he can provide for his family and develop warfare weapons perhaps less zealously than another. Williams presents this example in critique of act-utilitarianism and concludes that utilitarianism would demand George to act without integrity by giving up an identity-conferring commitment to pacifism (i.e., a commitment that he identifies with deeply as constituting what he considers life to be fundamentally about) in order to maximize utility (i.e., bring sustenance to his family and forestall the overzealous development of warfare).

Since Williams's example is a critique of utilitarianism, many of the responses to Williams are also in defense of it. However, I use the fictional George's example to illustrate how commitments are not as clear and prioritized as they may seem, and that George's choice to take the job can also be an instance of preserving integrity. As a multiplicitous being situated between a commitment to provide for his family and a commitment to pacifism, we can view his commitments as intermeshed, inseparable aspects of who he is. For George, acknowledging the conflicting aspects of his commitments in order to make an informed decision about the job offer could display presence of mind, if he indeed becomes consciously aware of how he stands in relation to both his children and to pacifism, and responds in a manner that best reflects his inseparable commitments.

Here I want to draw on Jane Mansbridge's work on the idea of conflicts within oneself. She states that "I must act, as with the other choices in my life, and not be frozen into inaction by the injustices I perpetuate. . . . I should not simply make my peace with the unjust coercions and move on. I should *keep a consciousness of those injustices with me*—keep with me, in a tension that does not induce inaction, some space in which a live residual consciousness of the injustices with which I compromised can reside."[10] In George's case the conscious retention of a pacifist consciousness sustains integrity. He acknowledges that in light of his social location as an unemployed pacifist graduate with a family to support, this response best represents his commitments and he remains ambiguous about this conflict.[11]

For many Muslim-Americans, ambiguity is not only an inevitable part of the political realm, acknowledging that ambiguity is essential for our integrity. For my definition of presence of mind, recognizing the complexity of one's *self* is essential to situating oneself in relation to one's commitments. The idea of seeing the *self* in all its complexity has been developed by many women of color philosophers. Gloria E. Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* speaks of the physical U.S./Mexican border as a sociological and psychological tool to separate the good from the bad, the safe from the dangerous, us from them.[12] Much like someone with a *mestizo* identity, Muslim-Americans cannot be confined to the boundaries of the either Western or Islamic civilizations, wherein we embrace either "freedom"-related values or our religion. María Lugones, building on Anzaldúa, asserts a multiplicitous being for which a unified singular identity would betray one's sense of oneself, and where the ambiguity of her identity is necessary for survival in the different worlds she exists in and travels to.[13]

The first aspect of presence of mind retains this ambiguity as an acknowledgement—as opposed to a paralysis—for political possibilities. In this respect, Cheshire Calhoun argues that ambiguity is essential to retaining integrity for multiplicitous beings. She states that, for members of oppressed groups, not resolving ambivalence about their desires and commitments sustains their integrity by acknowledging not only the conflict between the different worlds that situate the multiplicitous *self*, but also between one's own judgments and another's.[14]

It is in this very sense that presence of mind helps sustain the integrity of multiplicitous beings. This element of acknowledging the *other* makes integrity primarily a social virtue for Calhoun, one that ought to be examined via a person's relations to others. A person of integrity would be a "deliberator among deliberators" with proper regard for her own best judgments. Thus, it is neither sufficient nor necessary that one act consistently with one's own endorsements, but to stand for one's own best judgment within a community of people trying to discover what in life is worth doing.

Furthermore, such an understanding of integrity does not imply aligning ourselves with those around us with whom we have moral disagreements, but at least acknowledging the *other* in our considerations. Carolyn McLeod makes this very point, writing that while having integrity may involve alienating oneself from one's society in order to stand for what is right in one's judgment, it "is consistent with saying that we should be in the sort of relation to others that integrity demands on Calhoun's theory. The proper relation is not physical but moral. The agent must resist pressure to conform not simply for his own sake, but for others' sakes."[15]

This particular thread within integrity—the spirit of being in relation to others, of being a deliberator among deliberators—takes into account the complex, conflicting worlds of the multiplicitous being; it is this precise element that is central to habituating presence of mind. For a Muslim-American resistor, to resolve our commitments in prioritized order would not only betray our sense of self, but also would be a loss for the intersectional and often conflicting communities and commitments we have affinities to. Thus, what others may regard as selling out or cooptation is often the manifestation of our ambivalence as multiplicitous beings. The conscious awareness of this ambivalence is essential to our integrity and discerning our commitments in life. Developing the habit of confronting the conflicts between our commitments and the ambiguity of our affective response—the two components, in essence, of situating ourselves in relation to others—is crucial to cultivating presence of mind as a political posture.

Part II. Presence of Mind As Cultivating an Assessment of Our Reaction

Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech in Riverside Church in New York opposing the war in Vietnam, titled "Beyond Vietnam—A Time to Break Silence," in which he remarked that staying silent meant betraying his commitment to the health of the soul of United States, and to Jesus Christ—"who loved his enemies so fully that he died for them."[16] For King, he would not be standing by his convictions if he stayed silent.

King's response is not contrary to presence of mind. To fully comprehend how silence as a response can be either contrary to or concordant with presence of mind, it is essential to explore the motivations behind our response. Below I delve

into three distinct motivations for presence of mind in order to comprehend how one ought to assess a response and cultivate a presence-of-mind posture.

Is Habituating Presence of Mind Done to "Save" the Oppressor?

Martin Luther King Jr. speaks of the concept of "agape." Agape is redemptive goodwill for all men. It does not require that we "like" the person we "love," i.e., it is not the affectionate, intimate love we commonly refer to. It is love for the evildoer, while hating the evil deed.[17] King wanted "to win his [the opponent/oppressor] friendship and understanding,"[18] and to rescue the oppressor from his oppressive image: "The Negro must love the white man, because the white man needs his love to remove his tensions, insecurities, and fears."[19] Simultaneously, King was also clear that his resistance philosophy was not passive. The philosophy of love would disturb the white man's sense of contentment. The white man could "respond to guilt by engaging more in the guilt evoking act in order to drown the sense of guilt,"[20] but it would not make the white man comfortable. King defines agape as moving with calm reasonableness and wise restraint, not resigning to oppression or reacting with violence in response.

In a posture such as the one that King advocated, if we offer a measured response—which could even mean sometimes remaining silent—it is not because we are fearful of the consequences. On the contrary, King gave workshops for nonviolent protestors to prepare them for how such an approach might yet result in consequences, some of which included powerful water-hosing, control dogs, brutal police beatings, rubber bullets, and jail. A measured response is thus not in fear, but out of consideration of the sort of self we ought to be; and for King, the sort of resistor we ought to be is one that loves all creations of G-d.

Presence of mind bears many similarities to King's philosophy. The strongest shared thread is the nature of the posture (namely, being true to our commitments). For King, this commitment was to Christ. We habituate presence of mind, to be true to who we are and our various commitments. As in King, so for presence of mind: the possibility of silence, or measured response, is not based in fear of consequences, but is an active form of resistance, grounded in "wise restraint and calm reasonableness."[21] Furthermore, to avoid cooptation into the oppressor's system, one must be maladjusted to injustice. This means that when we do choose silence as a response, we habituate the conscious assertion (within ourselves) that our chosen response is one that *best* serves our commitments in that situation, as opposed to habituating the trait of silence itself.

In this capacity silence serves to convey our commitments in the best manner possible. By participating in workshops on how to respond to police brutality, civil rights marchers cultivated their commitment to non-violence as a political answer—as opposed to habituating docility or inaction as a response to the conditions in the South.

In more contemporary settings, in September 2009 in the House chambers, Representative Joe Wilson, Republican of South Carolina, shouted "You lie!," in the middle of the President's speech.[22] The outburst depicted a lack of respect for the Office of the President, violated civility and decorum reserved for the House chambers and more importantly, was taken by many—including myself—as having racial undertones.[23] President Barack Obama, who in his tenure as a law professor at the University of Chicago Law School had taught the historical intertwinement of racism and law, responded by not engaging with Mr. Wilson. He made no public statements thereafter and accepted Mr. Wilson's apology through the White House chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel. The President's restraint best conveyed his commitment to maintaining the dignity of the Office of the President, and did not take away from his integrity as a person who has studied and understands the insidious ways that racial attitudes emerge. That is to say that the absence of a verbal retort was an active response that best represented his commitments. In both these scenarios (non-violence and President's response), restraint serves as an active practice, yet it is not the act of silence itself that is habituated—rather, the assessment of the best response to convey our commitments.

Where I differ from Martin Luther King Jr. is in the content of his posture (namely, that the resistor love his oppressor and save him from his own hate). This content arose out of King's understanding of his commitment to Christ. Departing from King, presence of mind is not rooted in loving the enemy. I believe the oppressor is more often than not too far gone to be rescued; that it is not our purpose; that it is too taxing, too condescending, that it is too careful a navigation between self-righteousness and appeasement and, ultimately, that it is not our burden to restore the oppressor's humanity.

Freire advocates a stance similar to King's (i.e., liberating the oppressor of his image) but differs in motivation and, consequently, in the order of emphasis on saving the oppressor. Freire's motivation does not lie in saving the oppressor as an essential aim but as an inevitable by-product. The primary struggle is to liberate ourselves and to truly restore our humanity. We must be careful to not model ourselves after the oppressor, because "The very structure of their [the oppressed] thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. . . . [T]heir perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression."[24]

Habituating presence of mind is closer to Freire's understanding of divorcing ourselves from the image of the oppressor, ensuring that our aspiration to be a part of the American political system is not based on the image of what it means for the oppressor to be integrated into the American political system. In short, the motivation for our occasional silence is not one based on respect for the oppressor (though there is no intended disrespect), on loving our oppressor, or on shaming

the oppressor's moral sensibilities. Rather, it is grounded in being true to our commitments, in wise restraint and calm reasonableness.

Is Habituating Presence of Mind Merely Strategic?

If presence of mind requires us to assess whether and when to speak, is this a strategic assessment? If we fully comprehend the nature of presence of mind, such questions cannot be responded to because the answers are more complex than the strictures of the posed questions allow.

Presence of mind is more complex than, and irreducible to, mere strategy, even as we are cognizant of how we stand in relation to others within the here-and-now. To understand this complexity, I employ María Lugones's notion of the *tactical strategist* that situates the resistor within the more complex space of *pedestrian* among others. Lugones presents this in opposition to a resistor who either theorizes from above or fights in tactic without the bigger picture. I use this idea of the pedestrian resistor to understand our a-heroic behavior which is born of seeing our circumstances in the moment we are in, the people we are surrounded by, and the long-term evolving values and commitments in our lives. The complexity of the pedestrian resistor gives insight into why questions of strategic moves, such as those above, are confining to the portrait of the resistor we ought to embody.

Lugones emphasizes how subversive behavior ought to be seen in its ambiguity. For example, an act of sabotage within the confines of an oppressive system can be an act of resistance, but could also be understood as an act of incompetence. More importantly for Lugones and for the purpose of this paper, it is not simply the subversive action that is significant, but the recognition that the multiplicitous agent meant for the act to be understood both ways. Ultimately, Lugones leads us toward the idea that all oppressed people ought to have the ability to recognize resistant intentionality in others and in ourselves.[25] She dissolves the dichotomy between the *theoretician/strategist*[26] and the tactician. From high up, the theoretician constructs abstraction, "a fiction that makes the complexity of the street readable,"[27] a neat worldview that obscures all the complicated, everyday negotiations at street level. A tactic, on the other hand, may not take into account the entire picture but acts from an any-means-to-an-end position, without altering the existing system. Lugones transcends this dichotomy and redefines the resistor as a "tactical strategist." The tactical strategist lives in the subaltern position where she does not have the neat worldview of the theoretician—rather, a tactical strategist theorizes as a pedestrian, in the midst of company, where oppression is understood as intermeshed. By so doing, the tactical strategist defies reducing resistance to mere tactics by understanding that resistance is mediated by the theoretician's plans, his power and authority.

For the purpose of this paper, I use this perspective in the following sense: the pedestrian's actions and intentionality are more multifaceted than either mere

strategy or following a set of principles. Presence of mind is in part a habituation of the acknowledgment of these different facets by recognizing that we are within—and emerge from—the here and now of our social location, and by being cognizant of the sort of self we aspire to or ought to be. It is in this spirit of awareness of multifaceted-ness that presence of mind defies the dichotomy between strategy and a striving for the sort of self we ought to be. Understanding how presence of mind transcends the duality between strategy and the aspired-to self helps us understand why the initial question posed, "Does practicing presence of mind merely habituate strategy?," cannot be answered.

Presence of mind then recognizes the here and now of everyday obstacles and evolving sense commitments. It is cognizant of the complexity of the space that multiplicitous beings exist in (often within dual logics). Cultivation of this posture aims to make us conscious of the pedestrian view, the moment we are in, and our evolution toward the sort of self we strive to be.

Is Habituating Presence of Mind How We Ought To Be?

While waiting to board a flight, a friend helped out an elderly stranger with his gate number. The stranger wore a turban that signified he was Sikh. As they waited for their boarding calls, he asked my friend where she was from. She replied Lahore. That was enough to set off a tirade against Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, and how he stole "our" Punjab away from "us." A few minutes in, she realized he thought that she was a Sikh who originated from pre-partitioned British Subcontinent Lahore as he had, and not Lahore as it is today. She wrote: "I furtively hid my [green Pakistani] passport and continued to listen to his rant in fascination and not anger; my hiding of the passport wasn't really out of fear though, it was more to avoid any awkwardness. And I do think his being elderly had something to do with it but it never occurred to me to say anything because I think a part of us knows that expending effort in argument is in certain circumstances futile and will accomplish nothing. I've had moments where I wished to say something but felt uninformed . . . or too nervous at other times. But during this instance I felt no need to say anything at all and there was not any internal debate."

Like her, there have been times when I did not speak back to someone because I felt that I lacked concrete information or because I was afraid, but that is not what presence of mind is. Like her, sometimes I have kept silent simply because that was the best response in light of my commitments. In that moment of silence, I have listened to the other without staking a contradictory claim in their narrative, perhaps even mapping myself within it. And without any element of artificiality, I have felt connected to the other. I have felt that I have a relationship with them that is valuable beyond the tangible. In my friend's case, she was never to meet this gentleman again, never to gain anything by sustaining a connection based on a case of false assumption, yet she kept silent and was "fascinated" just listening.

There was no loss or gain for her materially, for her integrity, or for her commitments; her assessment to remain silent simply seemed the appropriate *way to be*.

Presence of Mind Refined

Presence of mind is developing a habit to recognize how we stand in relation to others and to assess a response in virtue of that consideration. The first part entails acknowledging an appropriate significance of relationships, not merely relationships in the traditional sense of the word such as parent-child, boss-employee, etc., but situating ourselves among others we are in relation to—others with whom we share the neighborhood park, or those whom we may never meet but who are within our moral locus, such as people to whom we may have diasporic ties or ideological affinities to. Our relations with others are often more complex than labels such as "oppressor," "imperialist," "privileged," "colonizer," "terrorist," "uncivilized" etc., reduce them to. They are *others* in certain respects, but are also "us" in many others. In describing the corrosive and unforgiving nature of systemic injustice, we go into every detail in order to illuminate the intricacies of how oppression functions, to provide language for our experiences that were distorted by the master narrative, and sometimes, at least in my own case, to validate our existence. However, when the glory of resistance fails to match up with the reality of our measured response, the answer is not as simple as fear or lack of integrity, but a value for relationships within the social location we occupy. Presence of mind habituates a conscious acknowledgment of this value.

The second part of presence of mind entails the assessment of a response in light of the significance of social relations. For example, staying silent on occasion with my mother-in-law, I would argue, trains me to be the sort of person I want to be: one that values a bond with my husband's mother or finds value in respecting elders. This does not imply a lack of integrity, but an affirmation of it, because the response is not arbitrary or even a disavowal of corresponding values, such as feminism. Rather the response is assessed in light of all my commitments, with conscious retention and reflection of the conflict. While sometimes contradictory, my commitments are not cleanly prioritized, or do not lie neatly within a dichotomy (as often presented in politics). The relationships between various commitments in life are ambiguous, and a posture of presence of mind allows us to be habitually cognizant of that of ambiguity and how we stand in relation to what and who we value. Our response then lies in light of the continual assessment.

Presence of mind trains us to assess our actions in order to remain true to ourselves and our commitments. And the assessment here is this: How do we best convey our commitments, whether that be to the value we place in the bonds of social relations, or the values of social justice, political power, moral ideals, or religious obligations. In this sense, presence of mind is presenting our commitments

in the best light possible; it is respecting our commitments and ourselves the best way we can. And often silence or restraint is the best form of commitment we can exhibit. It inhibits the need to constantly reveal our righteous sentiments within liberatory struggles that may expose every little detail, including flaws, within us.

Many of us practice variations of such a posture every day. This paper refines this everyday practice into a posture that, when properly cultivated, is not only beneficial to the political participation of Muslim-Americans, but also permits us to be whole and multiplicitous, and ultimately the sort of resistors we ought to be. It is not a posture for the saints or the martyrs. Rather, presence of mind is a consciously cultivated response that assesses life in all its complexity of commitments.

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Notes

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1. Mills 2005, 170.

2. In Book Two (i, 1103b) of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle refers to developing traits, feelings, appetites through one's activities or actions in life. The continual activity of being honest makes one an honest person, or cultivating and feeling confident makes us one brave. Ultimately the activity/habituation makes all the difference in the sort of self we are. It is in this sense, that I use the term habituate, i.e., training one's self to think and respond a certain way.

3. King 1990, 292.

4. Lorde 2007, 41.

5. Markon 2010.

6. Nisbet et. al 2011.

7. Pew Research 2007.

8. Freire 2006, 85.

9. Williams and Smart 1973, 96.

10. Mansbridge 1994, 55. Emphasis mine.

11. This particular idea has basis in Islam, where one's circumstances are taken into account in assessing their life choices and where intent matters significantly. One saying as related in *Sahih Muslim* states that the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said that if one cannot act against something evil, at least speak up about it, and if one cannot do that, then at least detest it in your heart. (See Al Mundhiri 2000, 56.) So the idea here is that the oppositional consciousness that the multiplicitous being carries with them through the different worlds they occupy—the world of home life, the world of warfare lab to earn a livelihood—affects their character in a more complex way than merely marring their integrity or their character.

12. Anzaldúa 1987.

13. Lugones 2003.

14. Calhoun 1995.

15. McLeod 2005, 126n52.

16. King1990, 234.

17. Carson, et al 2008, 4.

18. King 1990, 18.

19. Ibid., 19.

20. Ibid., 336.

21. Ibid, 14

22. Hulse 2009.

23. Rosenthal 2012.

24. Freire 2006, 45

25. Lugones 2003, 208–9

26. Lugones uses the term strategist differently than I have used it previously, therefore I will confine my use of terminology referring to one who holds that particular social position to "theoretician."

27. Lugones 2003, 212.

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Two Concepts of Community

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Abstract: Communities play an important role in many areas of philosophy, ranging from epistemology through social and political philosophy. However, two notions of community are often conflated. The descriptive concept of community takes a community to be a collection of individuals satisfying a particular description. The relational concept of community takes a community to consist of more than a set of members satisfying a particular trait; there must also be a relation of recognition among the members or between the members and the community as a whole. The descriptive concept is simpler, however, it does not provide a sufficiently robust concept of community. I argue instead that the relational notion is philosophically richer and more accurately captures the true nature of a community.

I. Introduction

Communities play an important role in much philosophical thinking. Philosophers of language use the notion of linguistic communities in reference-fixing.[1] Epistemologists track the transmission of knowledge within communities by considering chains of testimony.[2] Social and political philosophers discuss communitarianism and problems that arise when an individual clashes with their community.[3] All of these people discuss communities, yet it is not entirely clear what they mean by "a community."

A principal reason that it is difficult to determine the nature of communities is because there are two notions of community that are often conflated. The first of these, which I will call the descriptive concept, takes a community to be a collection of individuals satisfying a particular description; we can define a community of all people living in a particular country, for instance. The second notion, which I will call the relational concept, takes a community to consist of more than a set of members satisfying a particular trait; there must also be a relation of recognition among the members or between the members and the community as a whole. By