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Transplanted Continuity

Examining the Ethno-Spatial Prospect of the Dawoodi Bohra Community in Los Angeles

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Urban & Regional Planning

by

Arfakhashad Munaim

2014

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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### Transplanted Continuity

Examining the Ethno-Spatial Prospect of the Dawoodi Bohra Community in Los Angeles

by

Arfakhashad Munaim

Master of Urban & Regional Planning

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Chair

The thriving of immigrant ethics and diaspora communities in contemporary urban environments is emblematic of cultural and socio-political navigation. In Southern California, numerous micro-communities identify their inferential beliefs in the way they engage, negotiate, and embrace the extant planning processes and policy regimes of their respective municipalities and cities. The Dawoodi Bohra community is one such growing diaspora of approximately 1.2 million Shi'ite Muslims worldwide that have created micro-community establishments defined by a complex of four sacred spaces: the *Masjid* (mosque), *Manzil* (residences), *Madrasah* (academic institution), and the *Mujtama* (public space). Their Anjuman-e-Burhane complex in Woodland Hills in Southern California embodies numerous strategies—from site selection and planning negotiations to the systematic engagements of religious practices—all within the existing physical, social and political constructs of American cities.



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This thesis examines a five-part topical agenda on this larger topic: First, it contextualizes the Dawoodi Bohra community by tracing its historic vestiges in Cairo, Egypt and subsequently traces how this community has maintained its ideology and shifted its identity and cultural roots in the U.S., and specifically in Southern California.

Second, it examines the peculiarity of the day-to-day ritual practices of the Dawoodi Bohras. What are the implications of their society's socio-spatial characteristics? By understanding their culture, language and religious identity informs an *Alternative Modernity* in the way they engage their ritual practices to give and shape meaning to their spaces.

Third, it examines the embodiment of the community in Woodland Hills. How is the Dawoodi Bohra identity physically and culturally manifested in this establishment? It examines their places, buildings and inherent symbology, and observes the preponderance of the Dawoodi Bohra community in Southern California by learning, both their planning and architectural programs.

Fourth, it examines the political and social negotiations that have shaped the Woodland Hills community. By talking to a diverse set of stakeholders, from city officials and surrounding residents, to members of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex, it excavates the behind-the-scenes processes that have shaped the physical presence of the community we see today.

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Finally, this thesis gauges the degree to which current planning regimes and processes in Southern California are inclusive towards such community formation, and simultaneously speculates and posits how and to what degree they could be. It extracts particular issues and trends that focus on urban ethnography and concepts of traditional town planning and architectural solutions all towards an ethnically diverse community development. This thesis concludes with propositions for augmenting and celebrating the rich ethnic diversity of Southern California, towards becoming an exemplar of a culturally inclusive regional metropolis.

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The thesis of Arfakhashad Munaim is approved.

Roger Waldinger

Vinayak Bharne

Paavo Monkonnen

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

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This project would not also have been made possible without the generosity from the UCLA Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.



My moment with His Holiness, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.).  
Picture taken in Boston, Massachussets, 2004.



## Prologue

Purpose and Objective of the Research Study



With great energy and vigour dedicate yourselves to activities that contribute to the development of your cities and benefit their inhabitants. Become exemplary citizens through your wholehearted participation in projects and enterprises that contribute to the progress of the country you reside in.

His Holiness, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.)

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## Significance of the Study

The national tendency of urban developments across America have produced clusters of immigrant communities that is reflective of their indigenous cultural beliefs as well as American individualism. Many of the multi-ethnic enclaves or “micro-communities” have patterned their beliefs that are inherent in the physical form and their collective values established in the “place-making” of such spaces. The traditional ‘town-planning’ movement, although fast-forward thinking in its approach, has become a living practice once again in many American communities that is visible, geometric and democratic in nature (Campbell & Fainstein, 2003, Pg. 153). The primary area of inquiry is questioned: What are the spatial configurations of the multi-ethnic and urban character of these neighborhoods? How are their spaces used? And to what degree do they benefit the planning regimes of local governments? There are many studies of diaspora communities in Southern California—*Little Tokyo*, *Thai Town*, *Little Armenia*, and *Chinatown* are just a few examples that resonate a composition of their local and global living practices, historic semblance, and identity. From this, we begin to learn and speculate the values of a culture, their spaces, and the engagements within them. As a result, the emergence of these new spatial conditions exemplify the value of traditional-town planning coupled with the dynamism of community’s responses and modernity’s public planning regimes.

This thesis contributes to the ongoing debate of creating a vibrant, multi-ethnic and diverse regional metropolis that, in the case of Southern California is continually and ethically confronted in the planning and regulatory process. In particular, this thesis examines one such community known as the Dawoodi Bohra of Los Angeles who are composed of subcultural groups from

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the Asian subcontinent—Indians, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans residing in the western part of San Fernando Valley of the Greater Los Angeles region. Although this research contributes to the historiography, religious services and traditions, and architectural planning of Fatemi philosophy, the paucity of studies have not examined how Fatemi-planned communities have been created, what caused them to grow and what happens to them as they mature in different parts of the world. While drawing inspiration from examples of medieval Fatimid communities to contemporary places, we learn the application of *Transplanted Continuity*, which serve to demonstrate new proposed visions reflective of “a world that is constantly remaking itself.” (Campbell & Fainstein, 2003, Pg. 1).

## **Methodology**

### Research Strategy

This research study is an ethnographic and qualitative examination to understand a particular ethnic group and its formative connection to urban development in the regional Southern California metropolis. It is largely an investigative study of the planning processes and regimes that are undertaken of the selected city of the site.

The strategy of inquiry obtains a universal illustration of the subject in an attempt to capture how subcultural micro-communities structure their world within American cities. The research design is organized in a three-part study: first, the researcher will provide a detailed account of the focus of the study, including the researcher’s role, the context from which data is gathered, and

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the basis of selection and position of participants. Second, triangulation of data collection and analysis will be used for validity, and finally, all data collection methods will be reported in-depth to provide clarity and accuracy.

#### Role of the researcher

The focus of the research is observed and interpreted by the primary researcher who is an active member of the Dawoodi Bohra community in Woodland Hills and has extensively been involved in various Fatemi-planned projects. From March 2009 to February 2011, the researcher served as an architectural associate for Anjuman-e-Burhaneeh with primary responsibilities that included the design of the Madrasah (educational facility), draft plans and prepare three-dimensional renderings for the physical layout of the building and collaborate with construction workers to oversee the successful completion of the building envelope. Upon the completion of the Madrasah building, the researcher was appointed to work with the President, Vice President and Project Director of the Anjuman-e-Burhaneeh complex on generating a landscape plan for the 2.53 acre complex and held presentations in a participatory-based process with committee members.

In addition, as an associate designer for Rangwala Associates, the researcher collaborated with Moule and Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists in Pasadena, CA on a design competition for the Al-Jamea (university) in Nairobi, Kenya. The Al-Jamea would be the third international academic institution for the Dawoodi Bohra community. Due to previous experiences working with the Dawoodi Bohra community in this capacity has shaped the role of the researcher in the

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extent of enhancing awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to the understanding of this study. Although every effort is made to ensure objectivity, the role as a researcher may bring certain biases to the study shaped by the way the study is viewed and understanding of data and the way experiences are interpreted.

As an obligation to respect the ethical rights and values of participants and the community at-large and disclosure of all research data and materials will solely be used for the purposes of conducting the study. The following procedures are undertaken to protect the participant's rights and University of California, Los Angeles protocols:

1. The research objectives will be clearly stated verbally and in writing to inform all participants the nature of such study;
2. The faculty research committee will be informed the nature of such study at all phases of the project;
3. Written permission to proceed with the study as articulated will be received from the participants;
4. A research exemption form is filed with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) safeguarding all participants in the study and informing them of all data collection devices and activities (Protocol ID: IRB13-001594); and
5. Written interpretations and final report will be made available to the participants.

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### Strategies for validating findings

This is a naturalistic study, which all information and results will be presented in a descriptive and narrative manner and the final report will gauge the participant's experiences and meanings of data collection. This will allow readers to vicariously experience of challenges and provide the perspective which readers can view the subject's world. In order to ensure that all research data and materials do not compromise or misinterpret the validity of facts, the following strategies are employed:

- Triangulation of data—all information will be collected and revised from Islamic scholars and authors that are given permission to disclose such information;
- Long-term observation at the research site—disclosure of information will occur at site project;
- Participatory research—all contributors and participants will be involved throughout the phases of the study, from research design to academic review of interpretations and conclusions to ensure conformity to the University of California, Los Angeles policies and academic honesty; and
- Clarification of researcher bias—at the outset of the study research bias will be articulated.

### Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Research data and materials were collected beginning of June 2013 and continued until May 2014. Meetings with faculty thesis committee were scheduled beginning of summer 2013 on a bi-weekly calendar to ensure the research design and direction of this study. Subsequently, all

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meetings and research progress has been reported to the faculty advisor for guidance in the development of the overall research project.

### Setting

The research study is conducted at the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex in Woodland Hills, California. In addition, subsequent research data will be retrieved at community member's residences within the Woodland Hills area. The Anjuman-e-Burhane community is comprised of 410 members' congregation, and total of 129 families.

To assist in the data collection phase, a compilation of literature review and documents is assessed for the review and interpretation of results. The transcription and analysis phase accounts of everyday experiences and selected religious events as expressed by the participant is provided through observations and interviews. Taped Interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim, which is organized chronologically, reviewed repeatedly and continually coded. Field notes are reviewed regularly and the results of data are developed into chapters.

### Observations

The researcher will act as a participant in providing firsthand experiences with participants within the site, enabling a detailed analysis of observational notes through the lens of the researcher. However, certain information is limited that may not be intrusive to the participants and the community.



CHAPTER I

Contextualizing the History of the Los Angeles Dawoodi  
Bohra Community within a Global Setting



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The 11th century historic cityscape of the Fatimid capital—Cairo, Egypt became the epicenter of a rising empire led by the progeny of Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.). The *Aimmat Fatemiyeens* (Fatemi Imams) were the succeeding leaders of Islam who structured and democratized an emerging geography with *masajid* (mosques) complexes underpinned by political and cultural influences. Today, their followers recognized as the Dawoodi Bohras have established their historical vestiges through a network society of *Anjumans* (congregations) developed throughout the world. This chapter examines the diaspora of the Dawoodi Bohra community and further contextualizes the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex in Los Angeles, California within its global presence.

## 1.1 Tracing Historical Vestiges of a Longstanding Faith

Egypt is one of the most ancient civilizations in the world and remains a continuum of various socio-cultural traditions, including the Pharoanic, the Hellenistic, the Coptic Christian and the Islamic. In the 11th century traditional Egyptian cities, the inhabitants were highly organized in diverse groups, professional districts, residential communities, and religious schisms. Cairo was extolled as *Umm al-Dunya*—the ‘Mother of the World’ as it was the center of the world’s attraction due to its strategic location set akin to the Nile River and as a site for commercial trading routes. The inhabitants were thus, compactly integrated within a complex fabric of solidarity networks (Zahran, 1989, Pg. 324).

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The advent of the Fatimid dynasty began during the reign of the eleventh *Imam* (supreme leader), Abdullah al-Mahdi Billah (909-934 A.D.) who founded the City of al-Mahdiyya on January 6, 910 A.D. along the northeastern coast of Tunisia (Haji, 2012, Pg. 1). At the time of the Imam's reign, there was very little power to expand His empire, particularly due to the dictatorship of Abu Yazid who led the Sunni Islamism campaign by the Kharijite doctrine—an opposition to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) (Sanders, 1994, Pg. 9). The struggle of the Imam's conquest continued to the next three Aimmat Fatemiyeens for nearly sixty years before migrating to Cairo, Egypt. When the continuous political and religious instability of Cairo's fragile environment heightened insurmountably, the fourteenth Imam, al-Maad al-Moiz li-Dinillah claimed Cairo (in Arabic it is pronounced *Al-Qahirah Al-Mu'izziyah*, which means "the victorious, the triumphant") as the Fatimid capital on July 6, 969 A.D. (Zahran, 1989, Pp. 320-321). It was a historical moment when the tutelage of His *al-Ustadh* (Military General) Quaid Joher, whose forces entered Egypt after parading through Giza and across the Nile River to gain territorial and political power. It was observed that the celebration of the Imam's procession into Cairo was indicative of the Fatimid aspiration and symbolic importance that would soon become a rising dominion in Islamic Shi'ism (Bloom, 1980, Pg. 23).

The Aimmat Fatemiyeens are the posterity of Moulatena Fatema-tus-Zahra, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). According to the Fatimid faith, an appointment of the *Imam al-Zaman* (the Imam of the Age) represented a defining moment in history as they were considered the next generation of leaders, from father to son, decreed as God's representative on earth (Abdulhussein, 2001, Pg. 3). As a model of a rising empire, the ascension of the Fatimid city



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indubitably reshaped the city by revising geopolitical boundaries and interfaith relationships through the tumultuous exertion of dominance from different Islamic sub sects. The Fatimid hegemonic rule suggests a representative identity that actively produced a new urban formation. In doing so, Imam al-Maad al-Moiz li-Dinillah strategically created a model with spatial quarters, ritualized in a pattern that was tolerant of different cultures without extinguishing Cairo's collective past. This model can be viewed as a traditional town that integrates building uses with narrow streets and an identity that monumentalizes its sacred spaces (Figure 1-4). During the reign of the 20th Imam, Imam Mansur al-Amir bi-Ahkamillah instructed the Queen of Yemen, Sayyida Arwa bint Ahmad to bestow the office of the *al-Dai al-Mutlaq* (the Summoner of Faith with Supreme Authority) during the time the Imam's seclusion. During the Imam's concealment, an appointed Da'i was ordained to lead the *al-Dawah al-Hadiyah*—known as the 'rightly guiding mission' to the believers of the faith After the 21st Imam, al Tayyib went into seclusion, the first Da'i, Syedna Zoeb ibn Musa al-Wadii was appointed in Hus, Yemen in the year 1138 A.D. (Abdulhussein, 2001, Pg. 3).

Cairo remained under sovereignty up to ten Aimmat Fatemiyeens for more than two centuries. Evidently, the Fatimid capital was transformed from an imperial setting into an overcrowded cosmopolitan center, becoming the largest city in the Arab-Islamic region. Consequently, the revolt of the Ayyubids dynasty, which claimed the capital in 1124 A.D., destroyed many of the Fatimid monuments and inscriptions (Mwaria et al, 2000, Pg. 107). Today, it is believed that the followers of this faith, the progeny of Imam al Tayyib, that a descendant of His royal bloodline continues to remain present, but under concealment in the physical world.

Figure 01: Fatimid City in Cairo, Egypt founded by the fourteenth Imam, al-Maad al-Moiz li-Dinillah claimed Cairo (in Arabic it is pronounced Al-Qahirah Al-Mu'izziyah, which means "the victorious, the triumphant") on July 6, 969 A.D.

LEGEND

-  Building footprints
-  Open Space



Site Plan of the Fatimid City in Cairo, Egypt.

*Drawing by author.  
Source: Sanders (1990).*



Scale: 1: 5,000



Figure 02: Dawoodi Bohras walking inside the ancient City of Fatimid Cairo, Egypt.  
Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar





Figure 03: The Bab al-Futuh (The North Gate entrance to Fatimid Cairo, Egypt). *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar*



Figure 04: The ancient city of Fatimid Cairo, Egypt. *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar*

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## 1.2 The History of the Dawoodi Bohra Community

During the reign of the eleventh Imam, al Mustansir bi-Allah, sent three missionaries to the western part of India and amongst the first converts to the Fatemi faith were the rulers of the Gujarat state, Siddharaja Jayasimha and his *wazirs* (kings), Raja Tarmal and Raja Bharmal (Fleet et al, 2013, Pg. 57). By the mid-sixteenth century, the central seat of al-Dawah al-Hadiyah moved from Yemen to India under the leadership of the 24th Da'i, Syedna Yusuf Najmuddin in 1539 A.D. (Abdulhussein, 2001, Pg. 4-5). This gradual shift of the Fatimid progeny led to a new identity after the appointment of the 27th Da'i, Syedna Dawood ibn Qutubshah Burhanuddin in 1612 A.D., who claimed His followers as the Dawoodi Bohras. The term 'Bohra' is derived from the Gujrati (dialect language of the Gujarat state) word *vehvar*, meaning "honest dealings," after their prominent role in the trading centers of Mumbai (Fleet et al, 2013, Pg. 57). The Dawoodi Bohras also recognize themselves as *Mumineens*—'people of the faith,' who are the followers of Imam Ali (also known as "Amirul Mumineen"—the first *Wasi* (successor) of Islam appointed by Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.)). Today, the Dawoodi Bohras make up nearly 1.2 million followers worldwide (Figure 5). The largest concentrations of the diaspora are located in Southeast Asia—specifically in Mumbai, Surat, Ahmadabad, Dohad, Ujjain, Jamnagar, Nagpur, Pune, and Kolkata, India; and Karachi, Pakistan totaling nearly 800,000. About ten-thousand Dawoodi Bohras live in Sanaa, Yemen and parts of the United Arab Emirates, while other small communities in various parts of the western world (Fleet et al, 2013, Pg. 58).

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In 1965, the 51st Da'i, Syedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb (R.A.) bestowed the office of al-Dawah al-Hadiyah to His son becoming the 52nd al-Da'i al-Mutlaq, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin Saheb (R.A.) who led a rigorous campaign of the Dawoodi Bohra faith ensuing stronger unity, a renewed identity and an enduring faith. His passing on January 17, 2014 inaugurated the proclaimed *nass* (appointment) to His son and throne to the 53rd *Da'i al-Zaman* (Da'i of the Age), Syedna Aali Qadr Muffadal Saifuddin (T.U.S.). As a performance of *taqwa* (adoration of God), the Dawoodi Bohra community has become a global urban phenomenon, whose prominent migration patterns have clustered in the town their Da'i lives and often migrate to places near a *masjid* (mosque). In cases where there is no masjid, the Dawoodi Bohras have managed to uphold their religious practices by either locating to temporary community centers or congregating at Dawoodi Bohra residences. In this way, every Dawoodi Bohra remains connected to their beloved Da'i and the *mujtama*—the public realm that integrates the community.

To consider this phenomenon, it is important to understand how spaces differentiate across cultural groups. While modernity becomes the present focus of this transformation, the Dawoodi Bohra community has not only maintained their ideology, but has adapted within their surroundings. This further questions: What do the Dawoodi Bohra migrations inform towards the emerging landscape? And to what extent do their historical and socio-cultural trajectories describe the community seen today?



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### 1.3 Multi-scalar Shifts: The Dawoodi Bohras in America

Under the guidance of their Da'is, the Dawoodi Bohras have migrated since the early 1800's in search of a better livelihood. These migration patterns have led Dawoodi Bohras to master entrepreneurial services such as merchants, doctors, and engineers, and where their numbers have grown; they have built Fatemi-planned complexes (Fleet et al, 2013, Pg. 59).

According to Aamir Bhaisaheb Hatimi, Vice President of the Anjuman-e-Burhanee complex in Los Angeles states, "Many of the Dawoodi Bohras began to settle in America in the late 1960s to the early 1970s" (Personal Interview on December 20th 2013). Nearly 100,000 Dawoodi Bohras from the Indian subcontinent, whose ancestors migrated to Uganda during British colonialism, fled across to the western part of the world—United Kingdom, France, and Sweden. Many others totaling nearly sixty percent fled to Australia and North America, while some returned back to India and Pakistan (Moments in History, 2007, Pp. 9-10). Mr. Enayet Kapasi, a member of the Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra community and one of the first Bohras that settled in Los Angeles says, "Many Dawoodi Bohras fled their native provinces as either, refugees to escape the political oppression by the President of Uganda, Idi Amin or other opportunities such as employment or higher education" (Personal interview on December 15, 2013).

At the time, less than five-hundred Dawoodi Bohra families were dispersed sporadically in America. Many Dawoodi Bohras were unaware of other Dawoodi Bohra presences and often had fortuitous occurrences. Mr. Enayet Kapasi recounts his experience, "I did not know of

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any Bohras when I first came to America after leaving my native hometown in Tanga, Africa. I remember that my first encounter of another Bohra was through a correspondence from a mutual friend. This led me to search for other Bohras that may possibly reside in the U.S. I had gone through public telephone directories and began looking for surnames that would resemble a familiar Bohra name. It was my only hope to find other Bohra members” (Personal Interview on December 15, 2013). By the late 1970’s, the number of Bohra members slowly grew as they began to meet regularly at family households. Sheikh Juzer Jamaly, the headmaster of the *Madrassa tul-Burhaniyah* (academic institution) in Los Angeles accounts his experience when he was appointed by His Holiness (R.A.) from Karachi, Pakistan to Toronto, Canada in 1992: “When I first came to Toronto, many of the residing Dawoodi Bohras explained their first experiences in America when there was no masjid. They told me that everyone collectively congregated at other Dawoodi Bohra family households to conduct prayers and in hopes of keeping in touch with one another” (Personal interview on December 22, 2013).

Successively, the Dawoodi Bohra community began to establish *jamaats*—congregations throughout America held at the *markaz*—a community center that was used in the absence of a masjid. The first Dawoodi Bohra jamaat was established in Chicago, Illinois, following with a number of jamaats formed in Detroit, New York, and Toronto. Initially, Salmaan Bhaisaheb Rasheed, who was sanctioned from India from His Holiness (R.A.), served all regions while travelling periodically to each jamaat to deliver sermons. This ultimately led to the Bohra campaign to develop additional jamaats, and an appointment of an *aamil* (religious leader) in each jamaat. When His Holiness (R.A.) first visited America in October 1978, a large

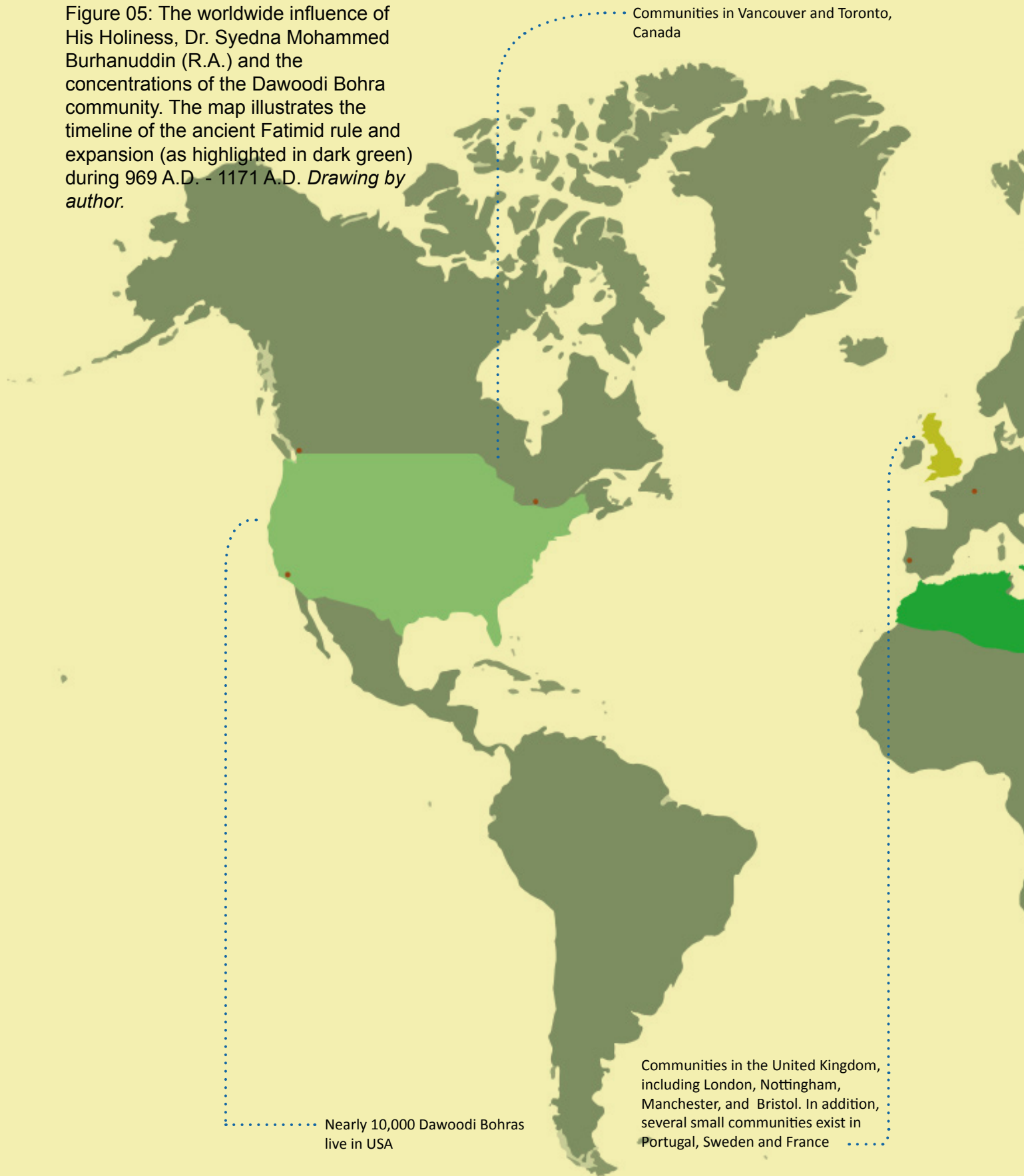
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concentration of new jamaats were formed in Washington, D.C., New York, Toronto, Tampa, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and Bakersfield.

The history of the Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra starts nearly 45 years ago when there were approximately 40 Dawoodi Bohras spread throughout Southern California. There was no jamaat due to the inconsequential number of Bohras, but when the Bohras came to learn about other Bohras in the region, they began to establish a network. In 1975, Shabbir Saifee, an engineer migrated from Karachi, Pakistan to Los Angeles worked for Hughes Aircraft Company coincidentally met Zohair Bhaisaheb Ezzudin while working together. When learning that there is a stronger threshold of Dawoodi Bohras within the region, the first markaz in Southern California was established in West Covina. The markaz was headed by their first aamil, Zohair Bhaisaheb Ezzudin (Personal Interview with Shabbir Saifee on January 3, 2014). As many of these centers substantially grew, like Los Angeles, the jamaats began to establish the *Anjumans*—sanctioned committees that operate under the al-Dawah al-Hadiyah in Mumbai, India led by His Holiness (R.A.). As an extension to this network, the Anjumans serve as a complete administrative, judicial and religious system in all public affairs of the community (Moments in History, 2007, Pp. 9-10).

It is important to point the pervasive nature of the Dawoodi Bohras engagement towards an inclusive agenda of community building—particularly in the context of American cultural influences. Their settlement-building actions while simultaneously exporting their “culture” as an important marker to new sites exemplify the notion of an *Alternative Modernity*. That is, an

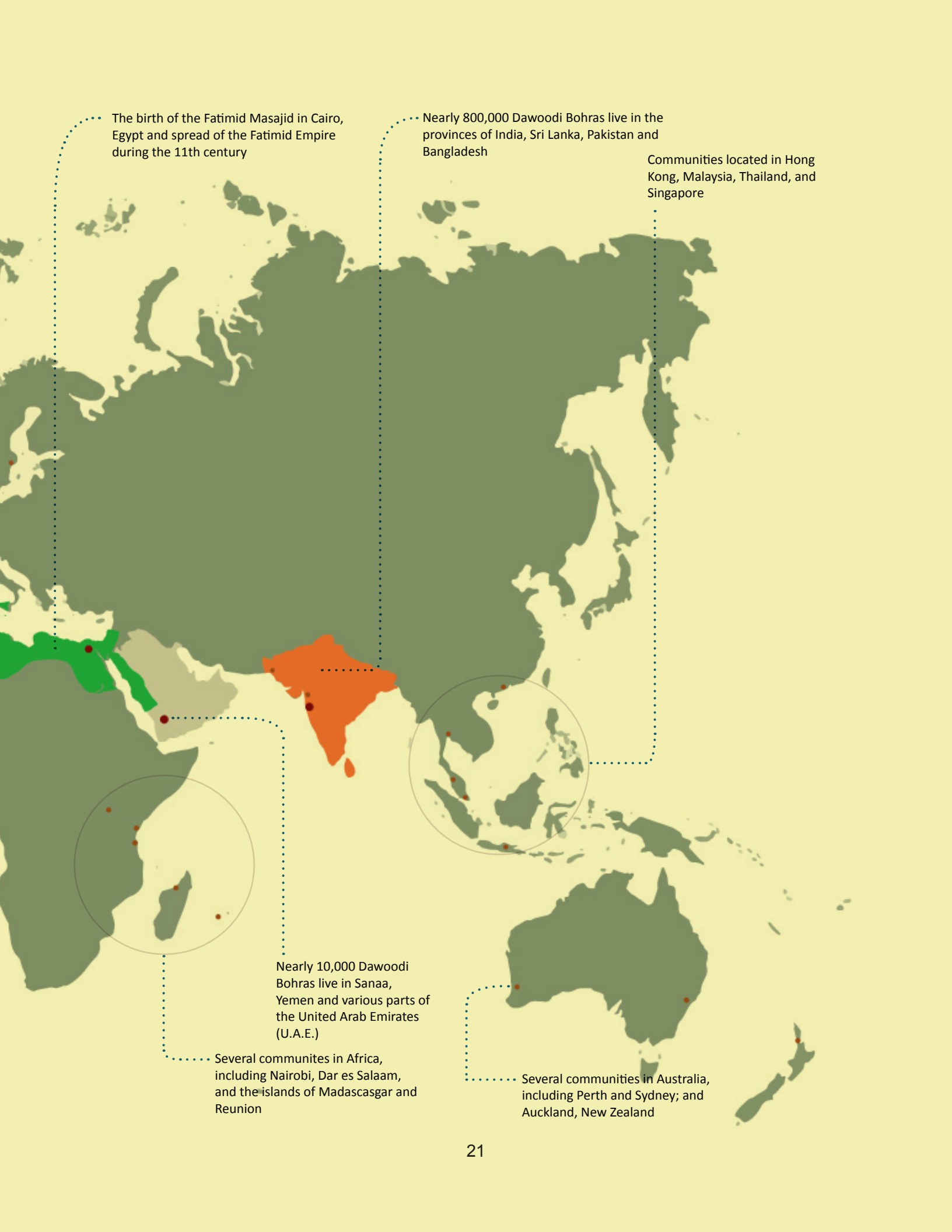
Figure 05: The worldwide influence of His Holiness, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) and the concentrations of the Dawoodi Bohra community. The map illustrates the timeline of the ancient Fatimid rule and expansion (as highlighted in dark green) during 969 A.D. - 1171 A.D. *Drawing by author.*



Communities in Vancouver and Toronto, Canada

Nearly 10,000 Dawoodi Bohras live in USA

Communities in the United Kingdom, including London, Nottingham, Manchester, and Bristol. In addition, several small communities exist in Portugal, Sweden and France



The birth of the Fatimid Masajid in Cairo, Egypt and spread of the Fatimid Empire during the 11th century

Nearly 800,000 Dawoodi Bohras live in the provinces of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh

Communities located in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore

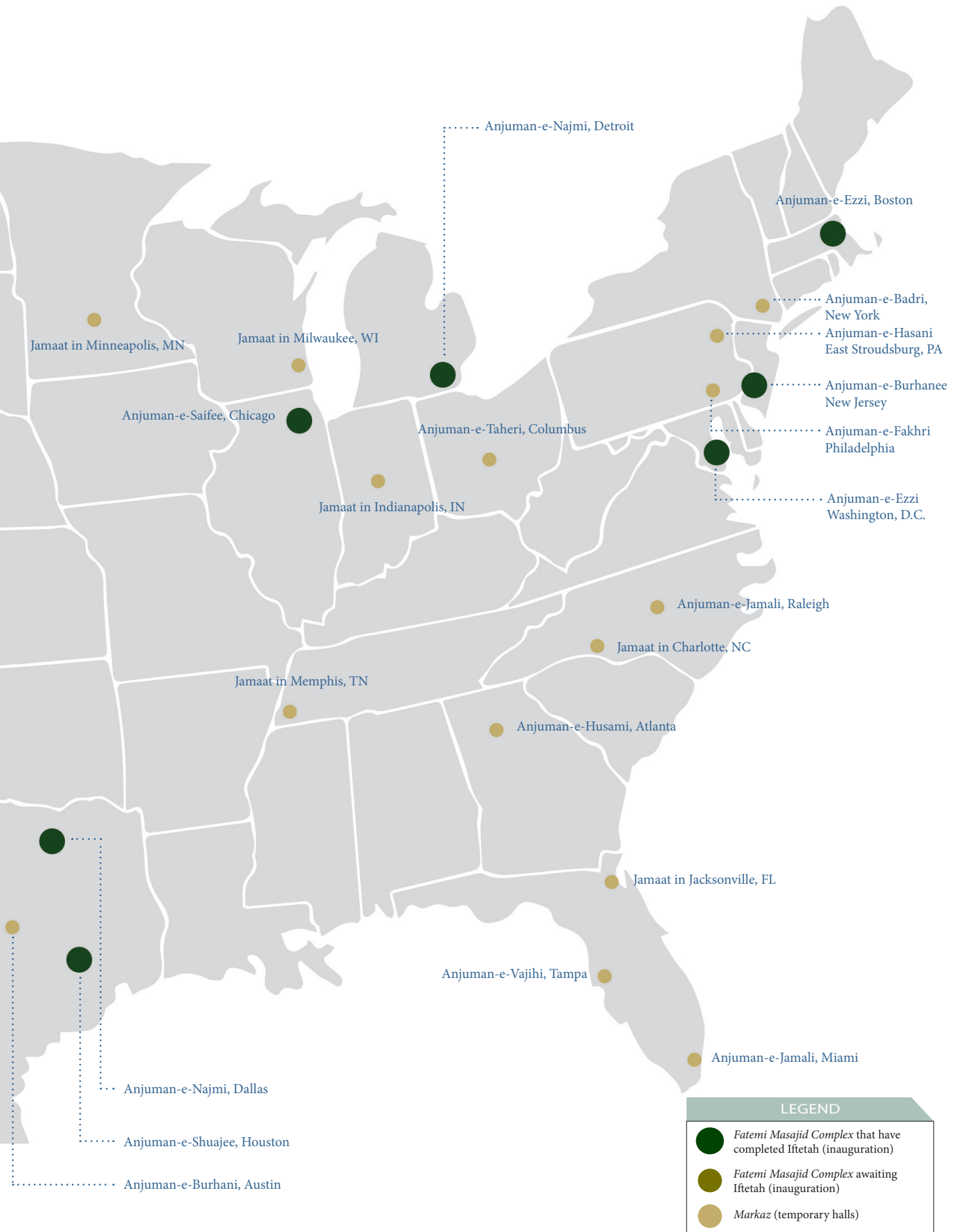
Nearly 10,000 Dawoodi Bohras live in Sanaa, Yemen and various parts of the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.)

Several communities in Africa, including Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and the islands of Madascagar and Reunion

Several communities in Australia, including Perth and Sydney; and Auckland, New Zealand



Figure 06: The Dawoodi Bohra communities in the United States of America. *Source: drawing by author.*



**LEGEND**

- *Fatemi Masjid Complex* that have completed Iftetah (inauguration)
- *Fatemi Masjid Complex* awaiting Iftetah (inauguration)
- *Markaz* (temporary halls)

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application that defines modernism to the current era of social, political, and physical structures of a particular community (Gandelsonas et al, 2002, Pg. 13).

What is meant of an *Alternative Modernity* within the context of the Dawoodi Bohra community? It emphasizes on the ethnic and ideological role of religion, cultural practice, and the importance of the Dawoodi Bohra community. Evidently, the Dawoodi Bohras have practiced unitedly without compromising modernism's agenda, which their culture is not an "irrational intrusion." This concept unfolds within particular cultures that transition to modernity can often lead to varietal outcomes within a culture's global presence. In this way, it reinforces Friedrich Nietzsche suggestion that '*Alternative Modernity*' is a way of life that transcends from the past, present and the future dialogues of urban formation. Nietzsche further argues that it is not only religion that reimagines the way a culture co-habits, but a way of living in the present world through different ideological semblances over a centuries-old heritage (Feenberg, 1995, Pg. 214).

Much of modernity often illustrates people damaging their environments, from small spaces to entire continents (Gandelsonas et al, 2002, Pg. 13). Interestingly, the system of the Anjumans is what keeps the Dawoodi Bohra communities connected at all scales—from the individual to the family unit and towards the societal level. The growing population of Dawoodi Bohras in Southern California eventually split into two jamaats in 1999. One jamaat is located in West Covina, which is now located in Ontario, CA—known as Anjuman-e-Qutbi, and the other jamaat in Woodland Hills, the Anjuman-e-Burhanee complex was led by the late Turab Bhaisaheb Hatimi for nearly 25 years. Today, the Anjuman-e-Burhanee complex is headed by Behlul



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Bhaisaheb Hashimi leading nearly 129 families. A branch office of the al-Dawah al-Hadiyah in Calabasas, California also caters to all the administration programs of the Anjuman committees in North America (Figure 6).

The Anjuman-e-Burhaneer community is one of the seven Dawoodi Bohra communities in California and of the 37 jamaats in America. The first *iftetah* (inauguration ceremony) of a Fatemi masjid in the western world was built in Detroit, Michigan in 1988 and soon after incorporated the office of al-Dai al-Mutlaq in the state of Utah in 1989. Succeeding His Holiness' (R.A.) subsequent visits to America commenced the *iftetah* of the second masjid in Toronto, Canada in 1990 and in Houston, Texas becoming the third masjid in 1996. Over the last 40 years, more than 10,000 Dawoodi Bohras have settled in U.S. cities, creating a strong presence in Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. (Moments in History, 2007, Pg. 6). According to the Dawoodi Bohra community, the *rasam* (protocol) of the *iftetah* ceremony of the masjid is a special occasion led by His Holiness (R.A.). The masjid *iftetah* celebrates the achievement of the Fatemi faith, in which thousands of Dawoodi Bohras gather at one time at a given location (Figure 7). The Anjuman-e-Burhaneer masjid complex will mark the completion of the twelfth Fatemi-planned complex in the U.S. and one of four masajid in California that awaits the *iftetah* ceremony led by His Holiness' (R.A.) visit, including the Anjuman-e-Hakimi, Bakersfield, Anjuman-e-Qutbi, Ontario, CA, Anjuman-e-Jamali, San Jose, and Anjuman-e-Burhaneer, Los Angeles (Table 1).

Name/Location of Jamaat (Congregation)	Year Masajid Built	Number of Dawoodi Bohra Families
Anjuman-e-Najmi, Detroit, MI	1988	100
Anjuman-e-Saifee, Chicago, IL	1992	300
Anjuman-e-Shujaaee, Houston, TX	1996	600
Anjuman-e-Najmi, Dallas, TX	1999	300
Anjuman-e-Ezzi, Boston, MA	2003	175
Anjuman-e-Burhaneer, NJ	2003	400
Anjuman-e-Ezzi, Washington, D.C.	2003	150
Anjuman-e-Najmi, Fremont, CA	2005	100

Table 01: Name/Location of Jamaat and their Masjid Built.

Fatemi-Masajid that are completed and awaiting the <i>Iftetah</i> (inauguration ceremony)		
Anjuman-e-Hakimi, Bakersfield, CA	2010	50
Anjuman-e-Qutbi, Ontario, CA	2010	100
Anjuman-e-Burhaneer, Los Angeles, CA	2011	143
Anjuman-e-Jamali, San Jose	2014	140

Table 02: Fatemi-Masajid Complexes that are completed and awaiting the *Iftetah* (inauguration ceremony)

As a global urban phenomenon, the Dawoodi Bohra community articulates the everyday experience of one's "place" in a system of social, cultural, and political relations as part of the greater society. While learning the migration patterns of the Dawoodi Bohra community, Alternative Modernities can emerge, even in the marginal features of appearance, language, and identity.



Figure 07: His Holiness, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) performing the Iftetaḥ (inauguration) ceremony of a masjid (mosque). Source: *courtesy of author*.



# CHAPTER II

The Cultural Traits of the Los Angeles Dawoodi  
Bohra Community

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The hegemonic rule of the Fatimid dynasty led to one of the most significant religious periods in the nation of Egypt. Their empire was governed by the Fatimid code of conduct, religious tolerance, and a patronage of learning that gave rise to a preeminent culture. Today, the social and cultural constructs are further exercised by the Dawoodi Bohra community under the tutelage of His Holiness, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.). This chapter studies the perceptions and experiences of the Dawoodi Bohra community in Los Angeles by describing their rituals, traditions and cultural beliefs. It further reveals an understanding of the Dawoodi Bohra's ideology and identity in tandem to shaping and adapting the spaces at the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex and within the Greater Los Angeles region.

## 2.1 The Prominence of Cultural Practice and Religious Identity of the Dawoodi Bohra Community

The social and cultural etiquette in medieval Islamic societies depended on personal bonds among individuals (Sanders, 1984, pg. 5). Dawoodi Bohra's characters are defined by *adab*—the behavioral regulations in which manners and morals regulate their lifestyle. The forms of *adab*—the prostration in prayer, communication with other Dawoodi Bohra members in a prescribed manner, and the etiquette of sitting and eating are highly disciplined acts that necessitate their daily and seasonal rituals of their faith (Sanders, 1984, Pg. 14). In 1978, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) initiated the *al-Multaqa al-Fatimi al-Ilmi*— a program assembled by the *Al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah* (University) in Surat, India. The program

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reaffirmed the community's identity and navigated its core traditional beliefs that would embrace modernity without wholly abandoning its faith's values. For each Dawoodi Bohra member, it was a requirement to commit to his or her beliefs by reinforcing the practice of the Dawoodi Bohra faith. In the inaugural speech, His Holiness (R.A.) exclaimed, "the program is an historic continuation of [our] faith and one that would 'open the gates to guidance'" (Abdulhussein, 2001, Pg. 86). For instance, in a setting where communities of Jews, Christians and other religious factions' cohabit, the Dawoodi Bohras of Los Angeles have managed to shape their spaces based on their social life and conditioned their practices by adapting and maintaining their ideologies in reverence to the teachings of the *Da'i al-Zaman* (Da'i of the Age).

In America, cultural continuity helps understand the traditional structure of the Dawoodi Bohra community and its urban thought in relation to *Alternative Modernity*. What remains is how the Dawoodi Bohras restructure their space in new environments to accommodate their culture? Arguably, the Dawoodi Bohra have challenged land use schemes to produce environments between 'what is sacred' and 'what is non-sacred' as a spatial reconsideration to learning the processes of creating a new city. Thus, the Dawoodi Bohra culture expresses a rich vocabulary in Islamic ideology. The Bohras follow the *rasam*—meaning 'protocol' to act in accordance to the ceremonies prescribed in their courts (Sanders, 1994, Pg. 9). Their salutations and acts of homage convey clearly defined lifestyles that reflect their identity and appearance. Like every Dawoodi Bohra, the members of the Los Angeles community are a distinct identity apart from other Islamic sub sects by engendering a dress code. The Dawoodi Bohra male is uniformly clothed in white *Kurta* and *Saaya*, a three-piece suit with the *Topi*—a combination of white-

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and gold-embroidered caps. The female is dressed in a medley of colorful designs in a two-piece garment called the *Rida*. Their dress poises their femininity as well as the importance of covering of their body (Moments in History, 2007, Pg. 9). The significance of their practices has defined their presence by making the world through their rational ideologies (Feenberg, 1995, Pg. 231).

Many of the social habits and traditions associated with Islam emphasize privacy, the idea of protecting the multi-generational family, and acts of homage are acts of conformity (Sanders, 1984, Pg. 9). *Alternative Modernity* has argued that the adapted lifestyle by the Dawoodi Bohras reflects the coupling of their 'ethical norms' and 'national identities' through the succession of making connections with the rest of the community. Their particular rituals do not only open the internal possibilities to their world, but transform the other worlds surrounding them (Feenberg, 1995, Pg. 147). Their strategy is successful as these practices, then, determine how their spaces are created, and the engagements within them.

## 2.2 The Daily Rituals of the Dawoodi Bohra Community in Los Angeles

It is said that the *Azaan* (call to prayer) is timely designated in such a way that the end of one *Azaan* in a particular location begins anew in another location. This vocal trajectory is performed consistently throughout the world in the *Zikr* (remembrance) of God. The meticulous observances of Islamic rituals answer the most primitive questions that seek the nature of the

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religion's intent and the relationship between the Dawoodi Bohras and the ceremonial spaces they have developed.

The Dawoodi Bohra community and their Anjuman-e-Burhaneeh complex is not built solely for the purposes of physical representation, but establishes a symbol of spatial organization, which can be restructured and transitioned to help in the dynamics of urban life (Sanders, 1994, Pg. 9). But, how are they performed? On what basis are they performed? Is there a spatial hierarchy required to conduct their practices? As with every Dawoodi Bohra member, the following constructs are prescribed by the *Saat Daa'im* (The Seven Pillars of Islam) that aide in pursuit of spiritualism, prosperity, and their conviction in God (Sanders, 1994, Pg. 85).

- *Valayat*—the belief in God, His Prophet, the *Wasi* (successor), the *Aimaat Fatemiyeen* (Fatemi Imams) and the *Doat Mutlaqeen* (al-Da'i al-Mutlaqs). At the center of *Valayat*, *Iman* (faith) stands as the cornerstone of an individual's judgment in matters of religion.
- *Taheraat*—the state of *pakizgee*—which means absolute cleanliness of the physical body and materiality. Before the start of any religious act, each Dawoodi Bohra must perform *wuzu*—attainment of spirituality through cleansing of the body performed with water.
- *Salaat*— the prostration of prayer. The cycle of prostrations—*ruku* and *sadjo* are the disciplined acts to perform prayer. There are five daily prayers. Due to the ubiquity of its nature, *salaat* can be performed anywhere in public and private spaces; however, it can only be performed in the state of *taheraat*, in which the body and head must be



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covered, and performed on the *musalla* (prayer rug).

- *Zakat*—the practice that commemorates the giving of a portion of one’s collected wealth to the cause of God in recognition of Him as the Provider of Islam (Sanders, 1994, Pg. 94). The common practice to offer zakat annually occurs during the month of *Ramadan* (Month of Fasting).
- *Sawm*—Fasting is considered the abstinence from the worldly pleasures, including eating food, water and materiality to the state of spiritual attainment.
- *Hajj*—the act of commitment to oneself. This idea refers to the day-to-day struggles a Dawoodi Bohra encounters in urban occurrences. Hajj is also the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia.
- *Jihad*—to fight for oneself from all actions that deviate *Shariat* (Islamic law) and the teachings of the Prophet (S.A.W.).

Each member conforms to the *al-Dawah al-Hadiyah*—known as “the rightly guided mission,” which is built on the foundation of *‘ilm* or knowledge and is regarded as the act of acquiring for the cause of merit and forgiveness (Abdulhussein, 2001, pg. 11). The day-to-day activities induce a civilization that foresees all forms of learning and living, which are deeply rooted in the Islamic value-system. Their practices have simultaneously transitioned and transplanted in emerging landscapes without changing their prescription. In other words, the Dawoodi Bohras adhere to a *rasam* which gives them the advantage to create spaces without changing their beliefs.

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According to the 43rd al-Dai al-Mutlaq, Syedna Abdeali Saifuddin (R.A.) contributed His effort by bridging the gap between the Arabic language and the local dialect in India, *Lisan al Dawat*, which means ‘the language of the mission.’ *Lisan al Dawat* is composed of the vocabularies of Arabic scripture, Urdu grammar, the Gujrati dialect and Persian diction (Abdulhussein, 2001, Pg. 27). Although the Arabic language continues to be the community’s primary language for religious works and literature, *Lisan al Dawat* serves as a medium for communication and delivering the sermons at the masjid. In relation to the processes of city-making, language also plays a decisive role in the *Alternative Modernity*. Many second generation Dawoodi Bohras in Los Angeles and America have broken linguistics that is interwoven with a somewhat ‘Americanized’ native tongue or interchanged with English semantics. In an effort to reestablish the Dawoodi Bohra culture, the 51st al-Da’i al-Mutlaq, Dr. Syedna Taher Saifuddin (R.A.) revamped its educational program by creating the Al Jamea tus Saifiyah in Surat, India and then the 52nd al-Da’i al-Mutlaq expanded its intellectual base to another academic institution in Karachi, Pakistan in 1984 (Al Jamea tus Saifiyah, 2014).

His Holiness (R.A.) has sought various educational programs for the Dawoodi Bohra community to keep their culture, identity and language intact to their belief-systems. One example is the *Mahad-al-Zahra*, an academic program that exhibits the learning and memorization of the Qu’ran. In this effect, it marks the literary and cultural merit of the Dawoodi Bohra community. The *Lisan al Dawat* language is considered the living vernacular that is constantly evolving as it adopts terms and phrases in the contemporary linguistic setting (Abdulhussein, 2001, Pg. 95).

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## 2.3 The Seasonal Rituals of the Dawoodi Bohra Community in Los Angeles

The Fatimid ceremonies were deeply rooted in the social and religious life in the city (Sanders, 1984, Pg. 9). Based on the Seven Pillars of Islam, the seasonal religious observances are practiced worldwide in the Dawoodi Bohra community. Many events are proclaimed in the Qu'ran and the revelations set forth by Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.), including the *Sipaara* (prayer of mourning), *darees* and *majlis* (religious gatherings).

While modernity can have consequential challenges for immigrant communities, especially religious-based groups because it threatens their systematic beliefs; one can ask how do they transplant their ritual practices in alternate geographies? (Feenberg, 1995, Pg. 146). Do the Dawoodi Bohra practices differ from other Dawoodi Bohra communities? The occasion of *Ashara* is one important example of an annual event that is traced by the Dawoodi Bohra community across the world.

This section examines two religious activities that mark the culmination of the Dawoodi Bohra faith and the importance of their belief in Islam. To be considered a Dawoodi Bohra—one must prepare and attend these two occasions: First, the month of *Moharram ul Haram*—the beginning of the Shi'ite Islamic calendar year is commemorated by the first ten days known as the occasion of *Ashara*. Second, *Sheruallah Mo-azzam* (Ramadan) is one of the holiest months and venerates the practices of the Seven Pillars of Islam. During this period, the *rasam* (protocol) and *adab* (behavior) are consciously articulated in the everyday life of the Dawoodi Bohras.

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These observances do not only renew their beliefs, but also renews their souls.

### *Moharram ul Haram*

Every year, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) prepares the occasion of *Ashara*, in which sermons commemorate the mourning of martyrdom of Imam Hussain (A.S.). The occasion fulfills a variety of social-cultural functions, including the *majlis*, which is an age-old tradition in which Dawoodi Bohras come together at the masjid for the *zikh* (remembrance) of community's history and culture. The conduct of the *majlis* has been held on important dates in the Islamic (*Hijri*) calendar and is well-defined in a specific sequence of reciting sermons and hymns (Abdulhusein, 2001, Pg. 94). The *Waaz Majlis* is performed by an orator that delivers a sermon to the Dawoodi Bohra community. The first ten days of the month are performed by His Holiness (R.A.) in different parts of the world and publicly announces each year the location of His sermons. This occasion attracts Dawoodi Bohras worldwide to travel wherever His Holiness (R.A.) wishes to deliver the sermons. Typically, they are delivered in Mumbai, India and draw more than 200,000 Dawoodi Bohras to attend the discourses for more than four hours each day (Figure 8). Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) and Syedna Aali Qadr Muffadal Saifuddin (T.U.S.) gives a paradigmatic importance to the revelations of the Qu'ran and the history of Islam in an epic dimension that commemorates the 2nd Imam of Islam, Imam Hussain (A.S.).

The occasion of *Ashara* is built on a tradition that takes back nearly a thousand years that cultivate an occasion to seek *ilm* (knowledge) and testament to the Dawoodi Bohra's faith. It

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is worthy to note that preparations for the occasion of *Ashara* are consciously managed for the thousands of Dawoodi Bohra visitors, including accommodations, preparation of food, and the arrangement of hearing the sermons. In this way, the temporal spatial conditions allow the community to reconstruct different modalities in emerging spaces (Figure 9).

Nothing is different from the occasion of *Ashara* in Los Angeles to other parts of the world. In this way, every member is somehow connected to His Holiness (R.A.) and Syedna Aali Qadr Muffadal Saifuddin (T.U.S.). However, the only notable difference is the time scale of each geographical location. For example, the sermons in Los Angeles are delivered in the evening, whereas, the sermons in Mumbai begin in the morning and lasts throughout the evening. In this way, the completion of sermons in Mumbai marks the beginning of the sermons in Los Angeles. However, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) has recently commanded that each jamaat (congregation) should adapt the practice of delivering sermons in the morning during the same time they are delivered by the Da'i.

### *Sheruallah Mo'aazzam*

*Sheruallah Mo'aazzam* (Ramadan) is the 9th month of the Islamic Lunar calendar, which is the month that the Qu'ran is said to have been revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.). During the observance of Ramadan, congregations occur daily at the masjid for a period of thirty days in which every Dawoodi Bohra engages in a daylong fasting accompanied by the continuous recitation of the Qur'an and supplications. The fasting begins an hour before dawn and is broken with a meal after the *Maghrib Namaz*—sunset prayer. Dr. Syedna Mohammed



Figure 08: His Holiness, Syedna Muffadal Ali Qadr Saifuddin (T.U.S.).  
Source: *Zeninfosys.net*.



Figure 09: His Holiness, Syedna Muffadal Ali Qadr Saifuddin (T.U.S.) performing the waaz majlis (sermon) during the month of Mohorram ul Haram (the first month of the Dawoodi Bohra calendar). Source: *Zeninfosys.net*.



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Burhanuddin (R.A.) gives particular attention to the religious obligations during this month by ensuring that every individual attains the *barakaat* (blessing) of Ramadan. In doing so, His Holiness (R.A.) sends an *ustadh* (apprentice) who has graduated from *al Jamea tus Saifiyah* (university of Arabic philosophy and literature) to lead prayers in communities that are located in even in the remotest parts of areas worldwide.

There are two occasions in Ramadan according to the Dawoodi Bohra faith:

*Lailatul Qadr*—The Night of the Decree is the holiest of nights, in which the Qu’ran was revealed to Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.) (Sanders, 1984, Pg. 146). The Dawoodi Bohra community gathers late in the evening to pray continuously throughout the night until the next day at sunrise. During *Lailatul Qadr*, thousands of Dawoodi Bohras attend the annual event with His Holiness (R.A.) in Mumbai, India.

The occasion of *Eid al-Fitr* is celebrated after the last day of Ramadan and marks the first day of *Shaawal Mukarram* (10th month of the *Hijri* calendar). *Eid al-Fitr* serves as the novelty of the final breaking of the fasting. The Dawoodi Bohras prepare themselves with spectacular attire, exotic foods and gift-giving for the meritorious qualities derived by their pious acts. At the end of *Fajr*—morning prayer, a ceremonial *majlis* (gathering) is undertaken commemorating Ramadan with a series of hymns and sermons.

The most dramatic evidence of the Dawoodi Bohra community is their sustained efforts to mobilize the traditional and cultural sentiment of their faith into a growth of *Anjumans*—a form

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of neighborhood organizations that brings together each Dawoodi Bohra. According to Sheikh Juzer Jamaly, “Nothing is different than what is prescribed by His Holiness (R.A.). Every cultural and religious practice remains the same, which further unifies everyone to their beloved Da’i and the Dawoodi Bohras worldwide” (Personal interview on December 23, 2013). The importance of these occasions and their rituals exemplify a network society as a method to regenerate space. In doing so, their acts are sustained in conditions that manifest themselves in space as a subjective ideology—one that can be transplanted. That is, regardless of their location, their performance clearly demonstrates the engineering, mutability and continuity in the formation of the cityscape. This process of planning, as a condition to the architecture of space, serves as an instrument for urbanism (Blau & Ruptnik, 2007, Pg. 108). In order to understand the Dawoodi Bohra culture, a close examination of their physical environment reveal how they embrace these practices.





CHAPTER III

*The Spatial & Formal Patterns of the Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra Community: The Case Study of the Anjuman-e-Burhanee Complex*

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At the center of the Fatimid's social and cultural empire, the Aimmat Fatemiyeen (Fatemi Imams) structured their administrative, judicial, and religious systems. As an extension to these systems, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) has prescribed four components in its sequential order for the establishment of the Fatemi-planned complex: 1) the *masjid* as the religious center followed by the 2) *manzil* –residence, 3) *madrassa*—academic institution and the 4) *mujtama*—the public realm. After observing the social and cultural constructs of the Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra community, this chapter examines their spaces that begin to reshape the existing cityscape. In so doing, it unfolds the critical relationship of the spatial and formal patterns of the Dawoodi Bohras that have constantly managed to adapt themselves in the Greater Los Angeles region.

### 3.1 Hybridized Democracies in Homogenous Environments

Architectural writer Norman Weinstein (2009) identifies that, “Architecture is in the business of designing spaces for human relationships to unfold.” The identity of multicultural quarters is leading cities in newly defined urban spaces. These emerging “metropolises” begin to create new opportunities for design interventions at the neighborhood scale (Sandercock, 1998, Pg. 90). The township of Woodland Hills is no exception to this truism. During the Portola Expedition in 1769, a group of European settlers encountered the Chumash Indians, the original inhabitants that occupied the “Valley of the Oaks”—what is now the present day Woodland Hills suburb. The urbanization of the area by American households began during the 1860s, but it

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was not until the 1920s that the area became an integral part of the history of the San Fernando Valley. From the onset of the Great Depression to the repercussions of World War II, plans for suburban development were brought to fruition (Woodland Hills-Tarzana-Warner Center Chamber of Commerce). In 1922, a prominent real estate developer Victor Girard Kleinberger and the Boulevard Land Company purchased 2,886 acres and renamed the “Valley of the Oaks” to the personified “Town of Girard.” In an effort to generate land sales and expansion, Girard developed a model “dream city” with provincial entrance gates, a mosque tower, business districts, and the planting of 120,000 variegated trees that would soon create a suburban resort in Southern California. Girard’s town vision was to attract a base of wealthy homeowners that would help generate land value to what would seem a flourishing community. However, the gradual shifts in the economic climate demoted the Town of Girard to nearly 75 families in the 1930’s, but subsequently increased to 4,500 residents in the early 1960’s (Woodland Hills-Tarzana Chamber of Commerce, 2014).

Today, the township of Woodland Hills is located in the southwestern region of the San Fernando Valley and considered as part of the Greater Los Angeles area—bounded by Victory Boulevard to the north, Corbin Avenue to the east, Mulholland Drive to the south, and the Los Angeles city limits to the west (Figure 10). According to the U.S. Census (2010), the San Fernando Valley has a population of 1.4 million, of which 59,661 persons make up Woodland Hills (U.S. Census, 2010.). To any observer, the most distinctive feature of the San Fernando Valley is its mass-production of single-family housing tracts developed in the late 1950’s and 1960’s. It effectively integrates a grid-pattern with open space, commercial centers, and

academic institutions located centrally in residential neighborhoods (Figure 11). The township of Woodland Hills is a typical product of a modern suburban city—with its inorganic, homogenous spaces of postwar economic growth and a prominent Non-Hispanic White neighborhood making up nearly 78% of the community (U.S. Census, 2010).



Figure 10: The township of Woodland Hills in the San Fernando Valley.  
*Source: ArcGIS.*

In the midst of this expansive grid of undifferentiated housing tracts, the Anjuman-e-Burhaneh complex and the Dawoodi Bohra community display a rapid spatial, social and cultural transformation. To any observer, there is something both traditional and modern about their complex—their houses, their spaces, their neighborhood, their community, their city are, in part, a development that defines a Fatemi-planned complex (Radoine, 2011, Pg. 529). Many of the

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Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohras have migrated from parts of Southeast Asia and have established to find jobs, residences, and interact with the community and society at-large (Figure 12). Their strategies to create and maintain their modes of living have established a spatial dimension that results in the co-existence of continuing influences—from traditional logic to an Alternative Modernity that continually measure their identity to ordinary urban occurrences.

### 3.2 The Spatial and Formal Prototypes of the Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohras

The Dawoodi Bohras have expressed an eloquent display of their space and monumental architecture. Before examining the particular spatial and formal prototypes of the Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra community, it is noteworthy to distinguish the reasoning behind their spatial logic.

The Aimmat Fatemiyeens created a community to house their courts, administrative and judicial system, and military centers for their regimes (Ley, 1991, Pg. 5). While some scholars may argue that Cairo was built on the premise of a “ritualistic city”—one that is driven by socio-cultural practices, it was more so conceived a “religious city,” which exercised Islamic *Shari’a* (the law of its land) and thus, was designed based on ceremonial and religious spaces (Sanders, 1994, Pg. 9). Generally, the cities of the Arab world embodied ‘courtyard spaces’ that articulated privacy between males and females around public and private quarters of the neighborhood. Within this domain, the masjid (mosque) served as the focal point of the city

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structuring all facets of urban development (Jinnai, 1989, Pg. 394). One can discern that the traditional Fatemi-planned community resembles an “auto-poetic” program—which is defined as a spatial configuration with a fortified wall enclosed with the masjid (mosque), manzil (residences), madrasa (academic institutions), and the mujtama (the public realm) (Radoine, 2011, Pg. 534). Annals of historic evidence reveal that Fatimid Cairo did not cater to a single ethnic group, but the city also nurtured a community of tolerance towards other Muslim schools of thought and Jewish minority groups (Bloom, 1980, Pg. 86). By observation, the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex in Woodland Hills is not any different from Fatimid Cairo. Like its historic counterpart, the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex is situated amongst a diverse ethnic group, including a prominent Jewish community—the Temple Aliyah Synagogue located approximately one mile from the complex, the Woodland Hills Presbyterian School, and predominant Non-Hispanic White family households (Figure 13).



Figure 11. Site Plan View of the Anjuman-e-Burhane Complex in Woodland Hills, CA (2014).  
*Source: GoogleEarth.*



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To conceptualize the spatial arrangement of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex, the Dawoodi Bohras have used the model of Fatimid Cairo. Fatimid Cairo was constructed with a north-south axis with primary gates located on the North entrance—the *Bab al-Futuh* and the *Bab al-Nasr*, and one located on the South, *Bab al Zowayla*. Along the axis are two masajid, including *al-Jamea al-Anwar* (1013 A.D.) and *al-Jamea al-Aqmar* (1125 A.D.) that connects with a grand boulevard—*Shari' al-Muizz li-Dinillah*. In the center of the city is an open void—*Bayn al-Kasrayn*, which connects the eastern and western palaces of the Imam (Al Sayyad, 2011, Pg. 7). Similarly, the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex has created a niche around a stream of existing single-family residences. As one enters through the 11-foot constructed wall with its primary entrance at the intersection of Burbank Boulevard and Platt Avenue, one can see its glorious presence adorned with the architectural elements of Fatimid Cairo's masajid (Figure 14).

The Dawoodi Bohras of Los Angeles are pioneers of community-building processes by working together to re-establish new forms of space. It may seem to appear to the common eye that their Anjuman-e-Burhane complex acts as a private town that exclusively works amongst 143 Dawoodi Bohra families. The form of the city is clearly embedded in the structure of this community—in the heart of the complex is the great masjid and around it are its courtyard spaces and private residences that make up the city (Al Sayyad, 2011, Pg. 74). The architectural monuments of Fatimid Cairo represent a period during a rapid transformation of the built environment—an introduction of architectural details such as the *muqarnas* (honey-combed) stalactites and cornices embellished in Kufic calligraphy are recollections of the past adopted at the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex (Figure 15-16). The relationship of its architecture

Figure 12:  
 The figure ground contextualizes the Anjuman-e-Burhaneh complex in relation to the western San Fernando Valley. The diagram illustrates the estimated time from the neighboring townships that have the highest concentration of the Dawoodi Bohra community. Approximately 60 percent live within the 10-mile radius.



Estimated distance by vehicle from Anjuman-e-Burhaneh Complex to the neighboring townships with the presence of Dawoodi Bohra residences in the western San Fernando Valley.

3-minute drive

5-minute drive

8-minute drive

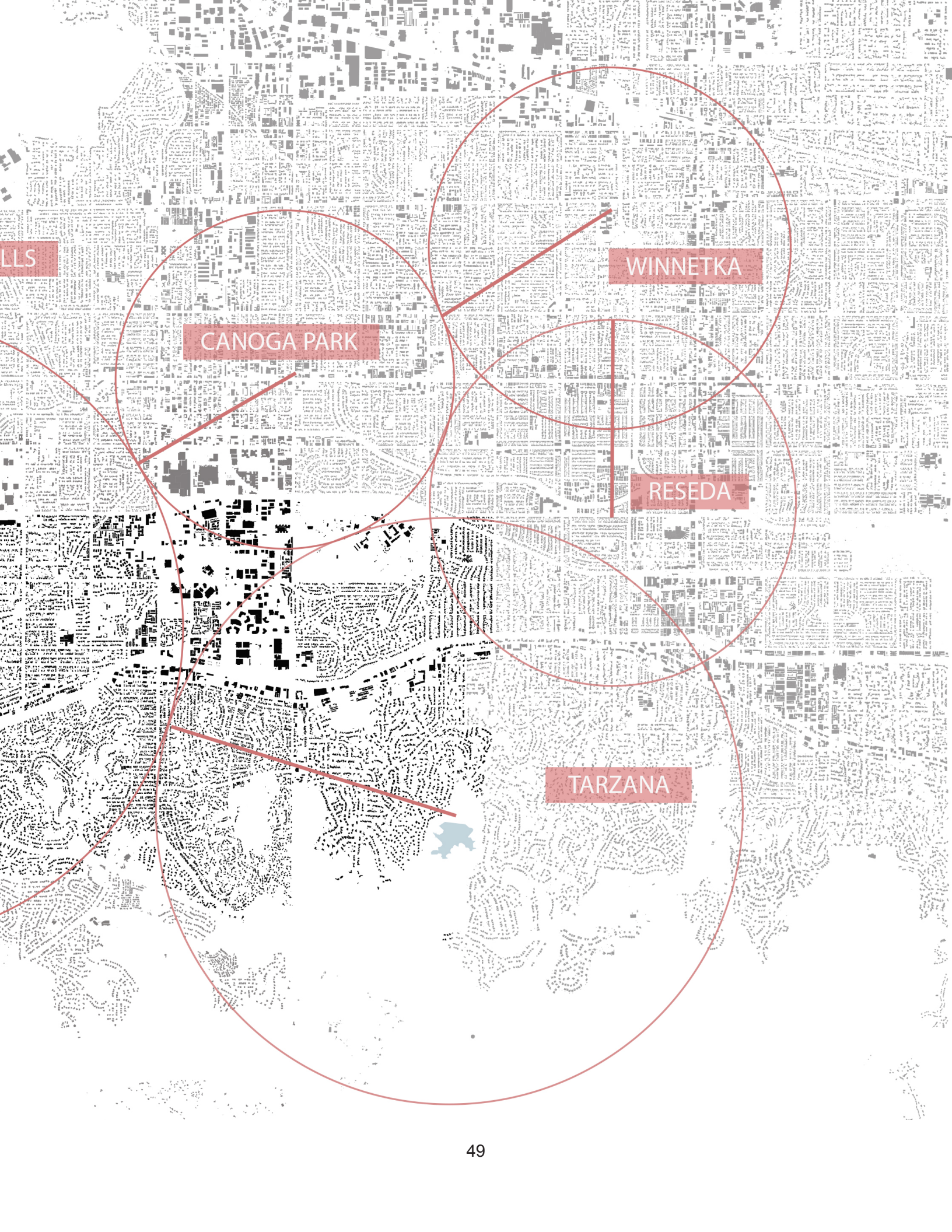
LEGEND

-  Within the Jurisdiction of Woodland Hills
-  Outside the Jurisdiction of Woodland Hills

Source: ArcGIS.







LLS

CANOGA PARK

WINNETKA

RESEDA

TARZANA



Figure 13: Panaromic View of the Anjuman-e-Burhane Complex

The Anjuman-e-Burhane complex exemplifies the principles of traditional-town planning with four components. Architects and planners of the Fatimid philosophy developed these communities by emphasizing architecture to the street, their design as a manifestation of their faith and sacred spaces that demarcate the ritual and cultural practices of the faith. *Source: by author.*

THE ANJUMAN-E-BURHANE MASJID





THE MUJTAMA

THE MADRASA  
TUL-BURHANIYAH

THE MANZIL



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to the street façade is another important feature of traditional town planning, which is also evident in many American cities today.



Figure 14: The application of architectural details from the Fatimid Masjid.  
*Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*

The development of Fatimid Cairo took nearly three years until its completion on July 3rd 971 A.D. Although many of the Fatimid remnants were physically concealed after the city's invasion, it took nearly 830 years after the seclusion of the 21st Imam in 1132 A.D. to restore its physical presence. In 1937, the 51st al-Dai al-Mutlaq, Syedna Taher Saifuddin (R.A.) visited the ancient capital along with His son, then the Da'i-to-be, Syedi Mohammed Burhanuddin to explore what remained once of Fatimid Cairo (Saifuddin, 2000, Pg. 115). In 1979, the Dawoodi Bohra community received a grant from the World Heritage Commission to restore many of the Fatimid-era monuments and declare "Medieval Cairo" a World Heritage site. The excavation of the remaining inscriptions, details and their rich heritage opened new avenues for architectural





Figure 15. the application of architectural details on the mehrab.  
*Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*



Figure 16. The application of architectural details inside the masjid.  
*Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*

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development and city formation (Saifuddin, 2000, Pg. 127). As a testament to the traditional-town planning strategies, many new Fatemi masjid including the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex answers to the workings of spatial divisions that dictate 'how' and 'to what' extent is adaptability embedded in its multi-dimensional form.

### 3.3 The Mohammedi Center –Anjuman-e-Burhane Masjid

In its sheer size and scale, the Mohammedi Center, also recognized as the Anjuman-e-Burhane masjid, was officially completed on January 29, 2010 (Figure 17). Beyond the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex, the masjid stands eloquent with a display of indelible wealth of knowledge. Like all masjid, its spatial configuration is designed with the orientation towards the qibla wall—the direction towards Mecca, Saudi Arabia and the mehrab—an empty niche inside the qibla accommodates the seat of the *aamil* (priest) to conduct prayers (Figure 18). As one enters the masjid, there is a central aisle, wider and open with a void supported by arcades and the *sahn*—an open interior courtyard that is similar to the size of the prayer hall. The crossing of the prayer hall is distinguished by a volumetric roof inlaid with grand chandeliers and Kufic inscriptions.

In traditional Fatemi-planned communities, the masjid is a symbol of sovereignty that serves as a site of important ceremonial activity (Al Sayyad, 2011, Pg. 74). The Anjuman-e-Burhane masjid caters to all functional spaces of the continuous and ephemeral day-to-day functions in





Figure 17: The Anjuman-e-Burhaneh Masjid. *Source: by author.*

society. In works of observation, the day begins with the commencement of the *Azaan* (call to prayer) during *namaaz* (prayer), which collectively unites each member as they lay down their *musallas* (prayer rugs) and meet shoulder to shoulder. The prayer is typically led by the *aamil* and then, unites the community for the *majlis* (religious ceremony) in observance of religious preaching. It is in this form that the masjid structures and accommodates the basic belief system of their faith and identity. According to Shabbir Saifee, Project Director of the Anjuman-e-Burhaneh complex, “Los Angeles is our home and we wanted our masjid to be one-of-a-kind apart from other Fatemi masjid” (Personal interview on January 3, 2014).

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In order to establish a Fatemi-planned community, the Dawoodi Bohra community first located the grounds for the masjid. After nearly 25 years of searching for a designated site and nearly 10 years of construction development, the Dawoodi Bohras used an existing church, which was subsequently demolished to accommodate all aspects of their practices. A Fatemi masjid does not act alone for the spatial prototype of the Dawoodi Bohra community. It must integrate all three components—the *manzil*, *madrassa*, and *mujtama* together. In this sense, the masjid serves all facets of life—life and death of every Dawoodi Bohra begins in the masjid. Sheikh Juzer Jamaly states, “During the occasion of the *Nikkah* (marriage) ceremony, the aamil solemnizes a couple’s marriage at which a child is conceived. On the other, the occasion of the *Sipaara* (prayer of mourning) is also conducted at the masjid in honor of a Dawoodi Bohra member’s death” (Personal Interview on December 23, 2013).

One of the most remarkable features of the Fatemi masjid is its interior and exterior façades. The minaret serves as a navigable component that reference the direction to the masjid. Historians of Islamic architecture claim that the minaret were used to proclaim the Azaan (Bloom, 1984, Pp. 162-167). However, contemporary minarets generally serve as an aesthetic element or a functional program as a storage facility (Figure 19). The minaret of the Anjuman-e-Burhaneer masjid rises high among the oak trees with a golden arrow that points towards the sky, and its exterior walls dressed with travertine stone. Surrounding the masjid, its pillars are exported from Jordan and coated with silk, and the inscriptions on the front doors are sandblasted in Kufic calligraphy are reminiscent of the *masajid* (plural for masjid) in Cairo. A study of their physical and ornamental vocabulary expressed in Kufic calligraphy and geometric



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floral patterns establishes a manual of visual and linguistic symbols that are emblematic of the Fatemi faith (Saifuddin, 2000, Pg. 107).



Figure 18: The mehrab, a niche where the head priest leads the daily prayers under the spatial axis of the qibla (direction of prayer). A door is constructed to allow the head priest to privately enter the masjid's quarters. *Source: by author.*

The masjid's interior is spatially organized with front to side-entry points that make way for both males and females to enter privately to its quarters (Figure 20). The Anjuman-e-Burhaneer masjid has three stories: the ground floor caters to the administrative and social activities; the first floor serves as the main entrance for the males who are navigated to the *sahn* (courtyard) and further ascends to the sacred prayer space courted with Fatemi floral designs and Kufic inscriptions on its entry doors and windows (Figure 21). Similar to the first floor typology, the





Figure 19: The interior of the minaret. *Source: by author.*

second floor is dedicated to the Dawoodi Bohra women who peer below to view all religious activities led by the aamil (Figure 22). As with every Fatemi masjid, the Anjuman-e-Burhane masjid personified is Da'i—who symbolizes unity: to believe in the Da'i is to believe in God and His Prophet; to obey the Da'i is to obey God and His Prophet (Sanders, 1984, Pg. 41). According to Sheikh Juzer Jamaly, "the masjid is the basic tenet of a structured living system that forms a community by bringing each Dawoodi Bohra member to learn from one another, understand each one's strengths and benefit from one another. Therefore, the Anjuman-e-Burhane masjid becomes the center of the 'everyday life' for the Dawoodi Bohra individual" (Personal interview on December 23, 2013). This further asserts the understanding, despite the challenging era of modernity, that the Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohras have consciously integrated

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their lives near and around the masjid—to live, work and interact with the society while transplanting their collective identity. Today, the Anjuman-e-Burhanees masjid awaits the Iftetah (inauguration) ceremony by His Holiness (R.A.); meanwhile, the adjacent madrasa building is currently used by the community for all religious and social occasions.

### 3.4 The Manzil

The palaces of the 14th Imam, Imam Mu'izz were not just a residential living quarter; they served as the center for the dissemination of *ilm* (spiritual knowledge) (Sanders, 1984, Pg. 65). Another formal prototype of the Fatemi-complex is the residential district: the *manzil*. In the Dawoodi Bohra culture, the parents are the primary agents for their children's upbringing and enculturation—taking them to the masjid, enrolling them to the madrasa and allowing them to interact with members of their society (Personal Interview with Sheikh Juzer Jamaly on December 23, 2013). These values continue the ongoing legacy of generations, specifying a social hierarchy of the family unit. Thus, the Dawoodi Bohra home serves as the center stage for the dissemination of *ilm*.

Although, their houses are not different from the typical tract housing developments in Woodland Hills, they somehow represent a counter culture that contradicts the modernity espoused by western communities. The home of the “modern life” in America is not any less different from the nature of the Dawoodi Bohra way of living. The way a Dawoodi Bohra conducts oneself in





Figure 20: The sahn (interior courtyard) of the masjid, which allows only males to enter through its primary entrance. *Source: by author.*



Figure 21: The prayer hall for the males on the first floor of the masjid. *Source: by author.*



Figure 22: The prayer hall for the females on the second floor of the masjid. The central void allows the females to take part in the sermons conducted on the first floor. *Source: by author.*

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these emerging spatial conditions prompts to question: How is the Dawoodi Bohra way of living manageable? To answer this question, the manzil is construed by the manifold perspectives in which it may be used. That is, if there is no markaz or masjid, the manzil is readily transformed as a place to conduct religious activities. Interestingly, the Dawoodi Bohras have managed to continue their practices by relocating to community centers, warehouse buildings or Dawoodi Bohras residences, especially during the construction phases of the Anjuman-e-Burhaneer masjid. Typically, the very little furniture in the manzil allows the Dawoodi Bohras to shift and redefine their spaces—it connotes the conscious articulation of living summed by religion and identity—a photograph of His Holiness (R.A.) framed on the wall, the installation of eastern toilets directed away from the orientation of the *qibla* (direction of prayer towards the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia), and the *paakizgee* (spiritual cleanliness) imbued in each room enables one to practice the Seven Pillars of Islam on a daily basis.

Once entered into the Dawoodi Bohra home, you are divorced from all secular practices of society and required to practice the traditional ethics of a Dawoodi Bohra. The primary difference between a Dawoodi Bohra residence and those of western homes is the way in which their space is defined and conducted. As a practice of daily rituals, it is important to remove shoes once inside the house, communicate in the native *Lisan ud Dawat* language, and wear the *Topi* (gold and white embroidered cap) while praying and eating.

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On the south of the property site, there is a 27-unit gate community complex of single-family residences, of which 14 units are occupied by Dawoodi Bohra family households (Figure 23). In many traditional societies, the housing units were planned around the masjid to develop a spiritual relationship. However, this complex has worked conversely—the Anjuman-e-Burhaneer masjid is built around a high density of existing single-family housing communities. At the time the Anjuman-e-Burhaneer property was purchased, there was only one family household within the Woodland Hills suburb. Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra member, Feroz Engineer states, “I moved to Los Angeles more than 25 years ago and as I witnessed, the community grew from nearly 10 to a total of 143 families, of which 60% have moved within a 10-mile vicinity of Woodland Hills, including Canoga Park, Reseda, West Hills, and Winnetka” (Personal Interview on December 16, 2013).

Of the properties occupied and abutting the property line of the Anjuman-e-Burhaneer complex, the Dawoodi Bohra community has created internal entry paths from the backyard of these residences to connect the complex. It has become a self-contained, autonomous community—

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people can walk to the masjid. Sheikh Juzer Jamaly states, “The typical ‘what I do at my home is not your business’ model is dissociated from the traditional aspects of the Dawoodi Bohra community” (Personal Interview on December 23, 2013). In this sense, the community functions in continuous feedback loops, which permeate the Dawoodi Bohra’s lifestyle. This is prefixed with the idea of how one should act at the manzil, one to behave at the masjid, and trains oneself at the madrasa, and how to conduct oneself to the mujtama. On this larger part, the manzil is the center point where each individual is initiated in the “process” of becoming a Dawoodi Bohra. By exploring their residential prototypes, the Dawoodi Bohra community is an extensive network of intensive practices.



Figure 23: The 27-unit Residential Planned Development (RPD) adjacent to Anjuman-e-Burhanee complex. *Source: by author.*

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### 3.4 The Madrasa

One of the major goals of the Aimmat Fatemiyeens was to cultivate the rigor and scholarship of Islamic pedagogy by establishing educational institutions—the *al-Jamea* (university) to propagate their traditions and beliefs in preparation of their future generations. In 988 A.D., the first organized school began at *al-Jamea al-Azhar* that preached Fatemi doctrine and ilm (knowledge). During the 43rd al-Dai al-Mutlaq, Syedna Abdeali Saifuddin Saheb (R.A.) founded the *Dars-e-Saifee* (presently known as *Al-Jamea tus-Saifiyah*) in 1818 A.D. in the Gujarat state of Surat, India, which serves as the first Dawoodi Bohra academic institution. His contribution to *al-Dawah al-Hadiyah* structured the functional administration of *Dars-e-Saifee* in the community to practice the religion and its philosophic studies.

Today, the Anjumans have developed schools of Islamic thought—the *madrassa* or the academic institution that fosters the teachings of the history of *Da'wat* (teachings of the Prophet), writing and reading Arabic, and the attainment of prayer (Figure 24). The ubiquity of the Dawoodi Bohra's faith can be practiced in any condition of the built environment. Just like the manzil, the absence of a madrasa facility can be substituted by using other facilities. During the construction phases of the complex, the madrasa was temporarily relocated to community centers in Van Nuys and Calabasas. Soon after the madrasa building was completed in 2011, the classes were relocated to the complex site. In this way, the Dawoodi Bohras continue to adapt to emerging landscapes in which conflicts arise, they are able to adhere to their systematic beliefs.





Figure 24: The madrasa building. *Source: by author.*

The Anjuman-e-Burhane madrasa building is designed to service multi-purpose functions and for this reason, there is very little furniture—children sit on the floor with small tables (Figure 25). There are a total of 75 students enrolled in Madrasa tul-Burhaniyah (name of the academic institution) for a period of three quarters of 12 weeks. The Dawoodi Bohra students appear to be trained in a specialized way of conducting themselves—how they sit, eat, and interact in a prescribed manner according to their traditions (Figure 26). However, the students do not know that they are trained in this capacity. They are learning the etiquettes as they witness the actions of their *ustadhs* (teachers) and other classmates (Personal Interview with Sheikh Juzer Jamaly on December 23, 2014). In this sense, the madrasa plays a key role by illustrating the “process” of becoming a Dawoodi Bohra, while acquiring personal values, their histories, and their individual personality.



Figure 25: Madrasa classrooms. *Source: by author.*



Figure 26: The interior of the madrasa building. The ground floor is currently used as the prayer hall. *Source: by author.*

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Of the subjects, language is the essential component that inextricably links all Dawoodi Bohra practices. Not only children, but adults are also encouraged to speak their native *Lisaan ud Dawat* language. “Language is a living entity; if you were to change your native language, it bears the reflection of your traditional practices—it changes one’s practice, one’s culture, and the society you interact” (Personal interview with Sheikh Juzer Jamaly on December 23, 2013). Furthermore, the madrasa is a training ground for the Dawoodi Bohra’s engagement to the masjid. Apart from religious studies, the Dawoodi Bohra child participates in the secular studies of their present surroundings. Many of the family households that live within the vicinity of the Woodland Hills area, nearly 79 percent of males and females attend nearby American academic institutions in the Los Angeles Unified School District, including George E. Hale Middle School, El Camino Real High School, and Canoga Park High School, and Ventura Unified School District. The remaining 21 percent attend universities or professionals within the Los Angeles County and Ventura County.

### 3.5 The Mujtama

There is nothing a Dawoodi Bohra does that does not, in some way, portray his *akhlaaq* (character) as well as his station in life (Sanders, 1994, Pg. 14). Each Dawoodi Bohra member brings their family, introduces their friends, and welcomes one another as part of the larger Dawoodi Bohra community. The *mujtama* is the public realm that creates the livable spaces for physical and spiritual habitation. The traditional roles of the Dawoodi Bohra women are expected to manage the *Tarbiyat* (upbringing) of their children; however, many have

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simultaneously taken a professional career. As for the typical Dawoodi Bohra men, many have taken the professional roles as businessmen, engineers, educators, computer scientists, doctors, architects and government employees. The mujtama in its physical context of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex is built around a courtyard encapsulating the masjid, madrasa and the manzil altogether for reasons that are both, aesthetic and symbolic. The boundaries created by walls, doors and gates enable men and women to enter privately to different quarters of the complex and navigates interaction amongst others (Figure 27). As the Qur'an explains such landscape elements, including water fountains and greenery are placed in the center with trees and flowers planted around it. These boundaries are an extension of the most public to the most private spaces of intimacy, creating small oases from the nonspiritual to a spiritual environment (Jinnai, 1989, pg. 393).

*Jame Karwo*—"to keep together" is an important aspect of the Tarbiyat of the Dawoodi Bohra community (Personal Interview with Sheikh Juzer Jamaly on December 23, 2013). The mujtama is a product of an extended family—"We help one another, we advise one another, and we look after one another," says Sheikh Juzer Jamaly. The prime example of the mujtama is the *Faiz-ul-Mawaidul-Burhaniyah* program—which is the provision of daily meals distributed to each family throughout the world. This program was initiated by the late Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) and is spearheaded by the 53rd al-Da'i al-Mutlaq, Syedna Aali Qadr Mufaddal Saifuddin (T.U.S.), which was initiated in 2011. Each family member picks up a meal package from the complex distributed three times a week—each family eats the same menu prepared by a member of the community. The reason behind this logic is that in each manzil,





Figure 27: The mujtama. *Source: by author.*

each jamaat, and each mujtama the provision of food leaves behind no Dawoodi Bohra member hungry (Personal Interview with Sheikh Juzer Jamaly on December 23, 2013).

On the whole, the 1.2 million Dawoodi Bohra people are considered as one mujtama; the Anjuman-e-Burhane community in Los Angeles is one part of the greater society. For example, the occasions of Eid al-Fitr and Ashara are symbols of unity that “gathers” the Dawoodi Bohra community as one mujtama at a single point in time. Throughout the world, the commencement of the *Waaz* (sermons) signifies that every Dawoodi Bohra is sitting, listening and praying during the occasion of Ashara regardless of their location. The everyday life of the Dawoodi Bohra is

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composed of a set of values and attitudes comparable to an endless expedition that measures all things—attire is that of a Dawoodi Bohra; language is that of a Dawoodi Bohra; each and every artifact of their culture is that of a Dawoodi Bohra. The Anjuman-e-Burhane complex and the Dawoodi Bohra community in Los Angeles have managed to adapt themselves in a way that conforms to the by-laws of their state and the tolerances of different denominations in their communities—they learn and take away the knowledge sought, then as a Dawoodi Bohra journeys outside the community, one brings back any doubts and disbeliefs to the mujtama for clarification. The exploration of this spatial field functions as self-sustaining feedback loops that continuously refine each Dawoodi Bohra (Personal Interview with Sheikh Juzer Jamaly on December 23, 2013).

“Americans experience modernity as a birthright; America does not strive for modernity, it defines modernity” (Feenberg, 1995, Pg. 148). For this reason, the Dawoodi Bohra community has held a long withstanding system of beliefs with political concern of modernity. The aforementioned spatial and formal prototypes are a formative representation of the Los Angeles and worldwide Dawoodi Bohra identity. Adaptability in many ways serves as a testing ground for a transformative condition in parallel to *Alternative Modernity*. It further reveals the spatial and formal patterns of an 11th century traditional town-planning praxis that have continued to identify and support the Dawoodi Bohra community. But, to what extent have they adapted their traditional town-planning principles to the current regimes of city public planning processes? An investigation of strategies and tactics that were undertaken by the City of Los Angeles and the Dawoodi Bohra community begins to answer these questions.



CHAPTER **IV**

*The Planning Process behind the Creation of the  
Anjuman-e-Burhane Complex*

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While different communities often create, produce and inhabit new and different forms of space, mainstream planning processes can often serve to block these possibilities. After learning the religious and cultural treatises of the Dawoodi Bohra community, this chapter begins to unfold how the traditional value systems have transformed in their built environment in Los Angeles. This chapter specifically seeks to understand half-a-decade's worth of social and political negotiations that exerted the dominance of local homeowners' opposition to the building of the Bohra complex in southern California. It unfolds the perspectives of a diverse set of stakeholders, from city officials and surrounding residents, to members of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex itself, excavating the behind-the-scenes decision-making processes that have shaped the physical presence of the community we see today.

#### 4.1 The Immersion of the Fatimid City in Los Angeles

For nearly 25 years, Anjuman-e-Burhane searched for a strategic location to accommodate the needs of the masjid. The community found a 2.53-acre property on 5701 Platt Avenue in Woodland Hills. At the time, the site accommodated the Lutheran Church of Atonement built in 1962, enclosed with a 6-foot high wall along the perimeter that separated the residential neighborhoods. When the Lutheran Church of Atonement enlisted the site for sale, the 4-Square Church, a Christian congregation located in the San Fernando Valley, was in escrow. However, the January 17, 1994 Northridge earthquake severely damaged the site and 4-Square Church appealed their decision. Meanwhile, the head priest of the community Turab Bhaisaheb Hatimi



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had done *araaz* (request) to Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) and upon His visit to the site in 1996; His approval commenced the soon-to-be masjid complex (Figure 28-29). Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra community member, Feroz Engineer exclaims, “It was a blessing for our community in Los Angeles. At the time, there has been no other Dawoodi Bohra community in America that has received the *barakaat* (blessing) from His Holiness (R.A.), who was present at the site and inspected the property before its purchase” (Personal Interview on December 19, 2013).

Anjuman-e-Burhanee acquired the site on February 20, 1997. No restrictions were imposed on the existing site and Anjuman-e-Burhanee volunteered to remove all previous entitlements (i.e. operation of a little league baseball facility pursuant to Zoning Administration 20824 on November 15, 1972) with the condition that the site will remain as a place of worship (Figure 30). The most significant production of this community is its collective association to work under one common goal: to build a community inclusive to the practices of their faith, but also “co-exist” with other communities. The transient nature of the church was internally transformed by adorning Fatemi inscriptions and installing partition walls to separate men and women. Where it may appear to the common eye, one would see from the outside that the church appeared just like any other church, but contained within it was a mosque that revered the teachings of the Prophet (S.A.W.) and the Aimmat Fatemiyeen (Fatemi Imams).

On March 9, 1997, the complex opened for the first time celebrating the 21st day of Ramadan, *Lailatal Qadr* (the “Night of the Decree”). For nearly five years, Anjuman-e-Burhanee used



Figure 28: The Dawoodi Bohra community of Los Angeles with His Holiness (R.A.) during the site visit in 1996 at 5701 Platt Avenue before the purchasing of the property. *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*



Figure 29: His Holiness (R.A.) touring the site in 1996. *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*

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the church simultaneously as a prayer hall, administrative offices, madrasa, and a gathering place for public meetings. As witnessed, the community managed to work around the physical constraints of the built environment, capable to adapt in the context of any given environment.



Figure 30: Top view of the Lutheran Church of Atonement built in 1962. It was used by the Dawoodi Bohra community for the first time on March 9, 1997. *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*

On August 9, 2000, applications for a new conditional use permit (Case No. CA 2000-2816) was filed to allow the reconstruction of the church into a masjid under the then-Councilmember of the Third District, Laura Chick. Anjuman-e-Burhanee drafted a series of master plans that would renovate the existing 4,500 square-foot church into a multi-purpose facility and add 7,500 square-feet for the masjid. “The community’s intent was to aesthetically elevate the property

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site for our religious practices and the damages evident from the 1994 earthquake,” says Shabbir Saifee, Project Director of the Anjuman-e-Burhaneer Construction Committee (Personal Interview on January 13, 2014). But, what the community did not anticipate was a series of unwarranted risks and challenges that contested the Dawoodi Bohra community’s ability to build a masjid in “our” backyard.

#### 4.2 The Role of the Dawoodi Bohra Community, City of Los Angeles and the residents of the Woodland Hills Community

After property acquisition and prior to the City’s discretionary review, Anjuman-e-Burhaneer committee members wrought out master plans with several architects in Southern California. From the outset, any project undertaken in the Dawoodi Bohra community is subject to the *razaa* (approval) from Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (R.A.) to benefit from His blessings. Now, the development of the complex was confronted with two challenges: 1) the attainment of *razaa* from His Holiness (R.A.) oft-called *Sigatul Tameerat*, and 2) obtaining the necessary entitlement permits from the City of Los Angeles.

*Sigatul Tameerat* is the office of design and planning as part of the al Dawat al Hadiyah office in Mumbai, India. While each project undergoes a discretionary review led by His Holiness (R.A.) and His selected committee, the process is partly deduced from the Qu’ran and the by-laws of

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Fatemi philosophy. Although the review process undertaken by *Sigatul Tameerat* pays critical attention to architectural and aesthetic elements of the Fatemi masjid, they work under the conformance of the selected city's planning processes. The purpose behind Sigatul Tameerat requires each Anjuman to follow His Holiness' (R.A.) wishes and His final approval, duly necessary for a Fatemi-planned complex.

On the other hand, Section 12.24-W,9 of the City of Los Angeles Municipal Code states that churches are permitted in the R4, R5, CR, C2, C4, and C5 Zones. The subject site is designated in the RS-1 (Low-Medium Residential) zone, which requires a conditional use permit for any new development. By definition, a conditional use permit (CUP) is a discretionary permit for a particular use which is not typically allowed as a matter of right within a particular zone. Conventionally, the CUP is issued to single out the different building uses that may be desirable, but incompatible in specified locations (Case No. CA 2000-2816). Southern California has allowed nonresidential uses in residential areas (i.e. churches, multi-purpose facilities and wireless telecommunication facilities), and evidently, there are numerous non-residential uses within the Woodland Hills suburb. A CUP can only be denied if the potential impacts of a proposed development are not mitigated. In this case, the development of a masjid required certain findings to substantiate the legality of its use in a residential zone.

Many of the residents contested to the CUP, strongly objecting the development of a religious building. However, what is unclear is that the site previously accommodated the Lutheran Church of Atonement, and the masjid complex was a transition to its existing use based on

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the conformance to previous entitlements. What was the difference from a church to a masjid considering that the land use remained the same? Behind this apparent logic lies a set of deeper questions that inquire an investigation of social justice in alternative geographies—was there intolerance towards a different denomination? And to what extent are conditional use permits exercised to achieve the City's goals?

While the conditional use permit was under review with Zoning Administrator Nicholas Brown, Anjuman-e-Burhaneh consistently failed under both political processes: the architects were not able to propose a convincing 'Fatemi' masjid and the CUP was deliberately criticized by the Woodland Hills neighborhood. The design of any foreign building in American cityscapes is not only imposed by the City itself, but by the people who reside in the area. These conflicting social interactions between one cultures threatened by another can lead to certain prejudices that can give cities a creative challenge to condition, transform or refute the public planning process. Consequently, Anjuman-e-Burhaneh worked with Mr. Zohair Vajihuddin of Fatemi Consultants based in the Greater Los Angeles region for the initial design of the masjid and hired Bally & Taylor Associates, a planning consultancy firm in Hollywood to serve as the mediator between the City and residents.

#### 4.3 What did the community and its leader's compromise and negotiate?

The first Neighborhood Planning Advisory Council (NPAC) meeting was held with then-councilmember, Laura Chick on the evening of November 8, 2000 at the Platt Library. From



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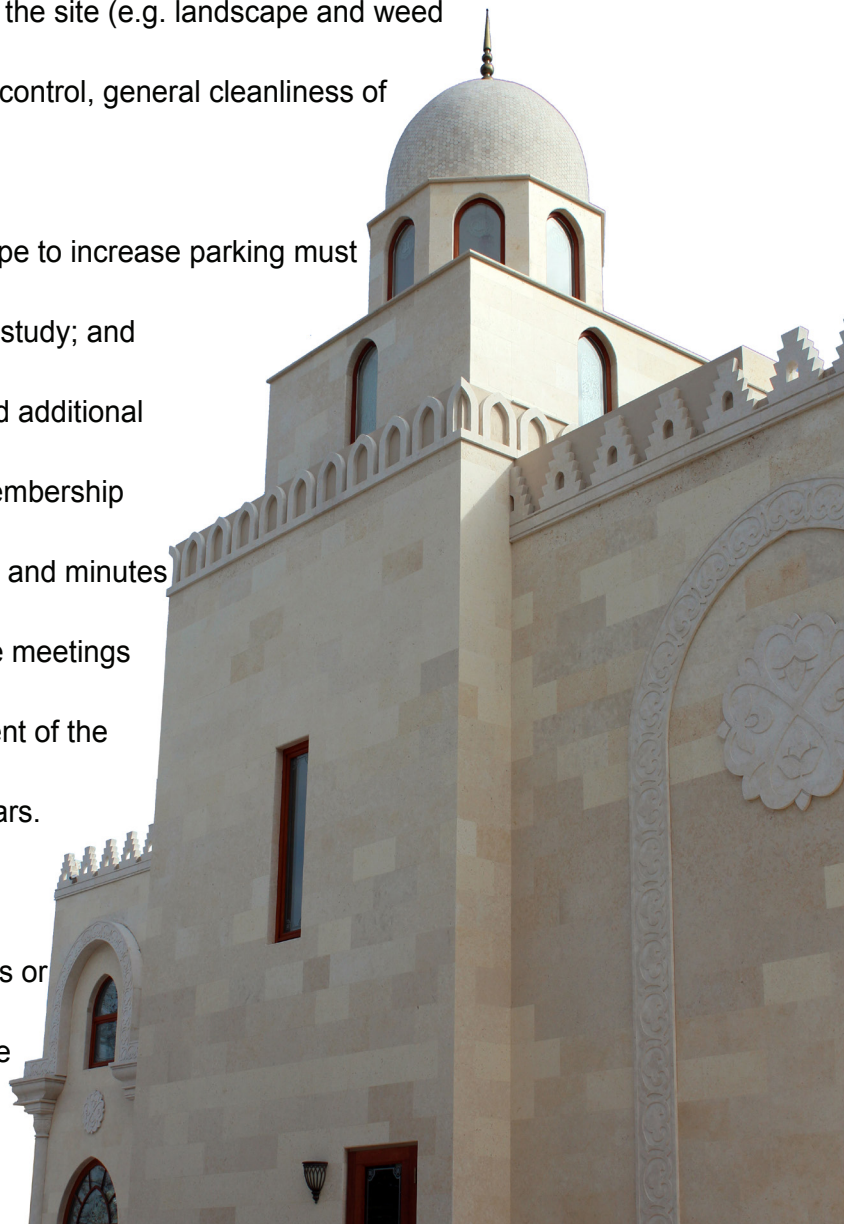
the onset, the proposed project had an exhaustive list of questions and concerns raised by residents who were affected in some way by the project. To address the resident's concerns, Anjuman-e-Burhaneeh held their first open house on November 18, 2000 at the site. Several members of the community and consultants of the project explained the nature of their intent to the dozens of individuals that appealed the conditional use permit. For many of the Anjuman-e-Burhaneeh members, it was not until the concern of the residents emerged, that they understood the opacity of the bureaucratic process. "We thought there would be nothing against us out there" said Shabbir Saifee (Personal interview on January 3, 2014). In a democratic society, the "granting of approval" of a project is not exclusively a technical procedure, but often what is not illustrated is the multilayered web of political and social relationships that need to be channeled. The Dawoodi Bohra community learned that a community project is indeed a "community project," of which democratic decisions between all stakeholders weigh heavily on the outcome of such a development.

The on-going correspondence letters lasted nearly three years. The appeals of residents are a collection of transgressive impulses addressed to the Dawoodi Bohra community and the City of Los Angeles with the primary concerns (Nicholas Brown, City of Los Angeles Planning Department, Conditional Use Permit Case No. ZA 2000-2816):

- The visual impact that the complex would have on the residences along the perimeter of the site. The masjid and the minaret were non-conforming to the architectural continuity of the area;
- The use and function of the minaret as a call to prayer;

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- Many of the residents were concerned that the project's proposal to add an additional 7,500 square feet would exceed the required 490 persons allowed on the site. As a result, many residents were concerned about the increased volume of activity at the masjid (i.e. traffic and noise that was generated after 10 p.m. and lasting up to 2:30 a.m.);
  - The possible inclusion of a school on the site, which is not allowed according to the CUP;
  - The poor maintenance of the site (e.g. landscape and weed control, vermin and pest control, general cleanliness of the exterior buildings);
  - The excavation of the slope to increase parking must have a soil and geologic study; and
  - The community requested additional information, including membership history, financial support, and minutes or notes of any executive meetings regarding the development of the project in the last two years.

Whether these are opportunities or challenges for a just society, the Zoning Administrator took the case "Under Advisement" at a





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public hearing on December 4, 2000 to gather additional information regarding the appeals. As a result, Anjuman-e-Burhaneer conducted another open house on January 20, 2001 attracting 50 residents. In addition, the Dawoodi Bohra community contacted newly elected councilmember of the Third District, Dennis Zine to participate in the open house (Figure 31). Shabbir Saifee recalls, “I remember when we invited Councilmember Dennis Zine. He brought six residents with him to the masjid development. I remember Mr. Dennis Zine telling us, why are you building a masjid here?” Although, Mr. Dennis Zine questioned the project due to the numerous neighbor complaints, it took nearly a year to realize the goal of the Dawoodi Bohra community until his re-election. At this time, the Dawoodi Bohras were supportive of his campaign and showed that they were engaged in community affairs, by taking participatory roles in civic life and the general



Figure 31: During the open house meeting with Councilmember, Dennis Zine (center) and committee members of Anjuman-e-Burhaneer (from left to right in the front row), including: Mr. Feroz Engineer (Operations Manager); Mr. Shabbir Saifee (Project Director of Anjuman-e-Burhaneer), Mr. Turab Bhaisaheb Hatimi (Head Priest and President of the Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra community), Mr. Juzer Saifee (Secretary of Anjuman-e-Burhaneer), and Mr. Najam Alanwar (Graphic Designer). *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*

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welfare of the Woodland Hills neighborhood. As a result, government officials, architects and planning consultants developed different modalities to satisfy the needs of community concerns and compliance to the City's planning department. On February 22, 2001, Anjuman-e-Burhaneh provided a subsequent set of plans and volunteered conditions based on the public hearing.

As a result, the Dawoodi Bohra community learned not only to adjust to the frequent changes, but also make change to their advantage. The situation called for emphatic techniques, such as working with city officials to add an additional floor and still accommodate a minaret at the height of 45 feet. In this way, the proportion of its design and uses was not limited, and also conformed to the municipal code (Figure 32-33). The result of the permit conditions imposed restrictions based on the complaints by the residents. First there were a number of complaints about the Islamic architecture of the complex. Then there were concerns about the social activities that were occurring at the site.

According to the Los Angeles Municipal Code Section 12.21.1 (Height of Building or Structures) limits the height to 45 feet for the RS-1 Zone in Height District No. 1. Anjuman-e-Burhaneh volunteered to limit the use of the minaret above the roofline of the Masjid in order to ensure the privacy and visual continuity of surrounding property owners. Height restrictions were not to exceed 25 feet for the masjid and 45 feet for the minaret. Most important, the minaret was not to be used traditionally as a place to call for prayer or speakers located in the minaret. What is often unconventional in many minarets in the eastern world, many Dawoodi Bohra congregations in the U.S. including Anjuman-e-Burhaneh accomplished the task of developing

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the minaret with dual functions: 1) as a circulation route integrated into the masjid; and 2) a physical manifestation of the masjid's component even though it was restricted as non-habitable space above its roofline.



Figure 32: Construction phases for the masjid. *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*



Figure 33: Excavating below the surface-level to conform with the City's municipal code. *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*



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In addition, Anjuman-e-Burhaneer constructed an 11-foot solid wall on the east property line primarily to serve for dirt retention as residents complained the pollution the project generated during the construction phases. However, any passerby can partially see the masjid's minaret, but provokes that there lies something deeper beyond the walls that remains unnoticed. Although the Dawoodi Bohra community had no intention of creating an enclosed precinct, the 11-foot wall seems to achieve the goals for all stakeholders. For example, residents complained the visual discontinuity the masjid displayed in their neighborhood, but also, it allowed the Dawoodi Bohras to practice their faith without interrupting the residents (Figure 34).

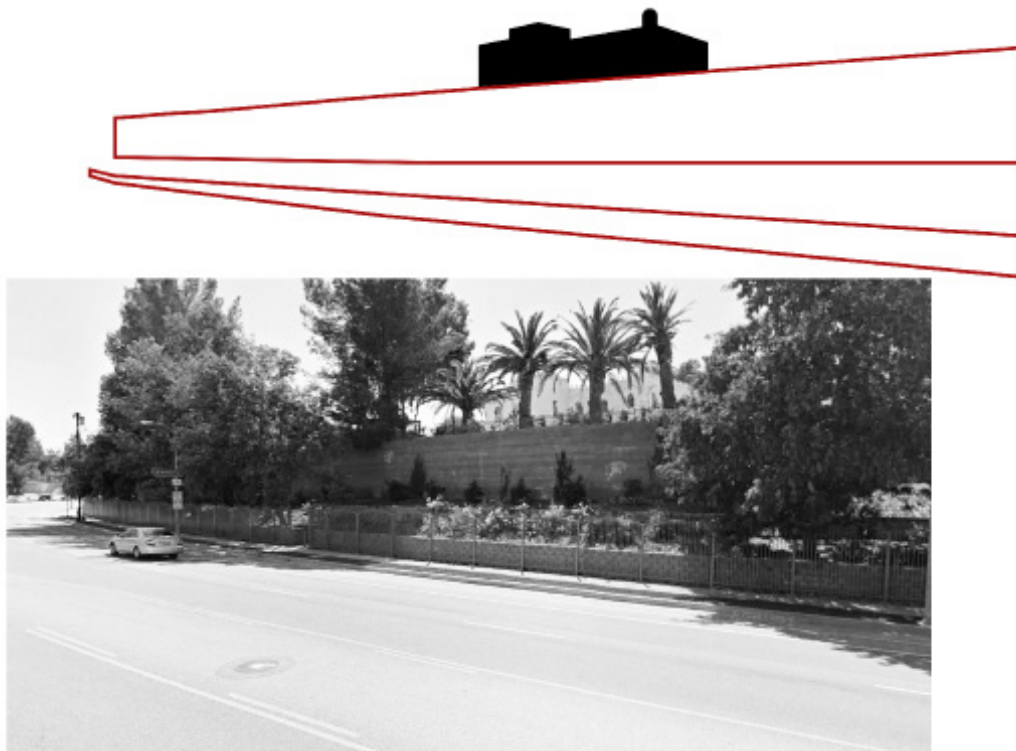


Figure 34: The 11-foot construction wall facing Platt Avenue.  
*Source: by author.*

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Furthermore, the previous entitlement under CPC 10583 and ZA 2000-2816 (CUP) states that there shall be no school on the site except during worship services. For the Dawoodi Bohra community, the madrasa building served as a Sunday school and a multi-purpose facility that catered to both, religious teachings and ancillary uses. In this way, the Dawoodi Bohras conformed to all code enforced requirements. According to the conditional use permit, Anjuman-e-Burhanee provided an insightful explanation of the Dawoodi Bohra's daily prayer and religious activities that occur throughout the year (Exhibit B—Case No. ZA 2000-2816). The Woodland Hills community was made aware about the activities that would take place in the morning and evening, the rate of intensity of each activity, and any special occasions. These conditions were appropriated to discretely specify and minimize public scrutiny.

#### 4.4 Not [A Mosque] In My Back Yard: Tackling the Social Justice Paradigm

The problems the masjid faced are not uncommon. In the past few years, zoning conflicts involving religious institutions have become contentious across Southern California. The decision of granted approvals came only after the City made a number of concessions. “As a religious community, we wanted to work with the City and residents to make this project successful. But we could not understand why the residents were unwilling to cooperate with us” says Shabbir Saifee (Personal Interview on January 3, 2014). The Dawoodi Bohra community was set against a prominent Jewish community, who were affected by the complex. Although several of the residents were accepting the existing church being used as a mosque; but they were opposed to the idea of a masjid complex development.

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During the public hearings, the residents claimed that they sought the safety of their neighborhood, “keep the land as is and you can use the church as is,” which was expressed by one of the residents abutting the complex. The residents were not reasonable even after collaborating through democratic methods. In the course of understanding territorial relationships, it became clear that the contradictions inherent to the political and cultural hybridity of the project were based on racial discrimination.

Los Angeles Dawoodi Bohra member and former employee of the California Endowment, Sheikh Akhbar Badri collaborated with the non-profit organization for assistance in funding the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex. The California Endowment was supportive of the project, in which they partially contributed the ancillary building to the masjid (Personal Interview with Sheikh Akhbar Badri on May 23, 2014). Since the Dawoodi Bohras received the transgressions from the resident’s, they requested the Grants Administration Assistant, Clarence-Jon Heisler to write a letter of support to the Planning Commission and Members of the Assembly on behalf of the Anjuman-e-Burhane committee stating:

I am concerned as I look at the previous appeals of this application, that there are those who would obstruct this project based on nothing more than whom the applicant is, rather than what this project is. Let us be clear in our actions and motivations. If you do not want these people in your community, then have the courage to say it publically and do not hide behind appeals and more appeals. On the other hand, if you want to support these people, then let us all work together and make this one of the beautiful mosques in the world.

“What we could not understand was the ongoing opposition after clearly conforming to the requirements and the conditional uses imposed by the City. The residents continued to oppose the masjid development even though restrictions were put in place. Even the project consultants

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questioned the resident's opposition" says Shabbir Saiffee (Personal Interview on January 3, 2014). After the subsequent public hearings, the number of opponents decreased to the remaining two persons who lived south of the site. Other neighbors withdrew their appeal and consequently moved out of the neighborhood. One neighbor on the north of the property site became a proponent of the community and offered his property for sale, in which Anjuman-e-Burhaneer purchased the residence.

Complex negotiations may take place based on political and religious authority that often puts emphasis on our U.S. Constitution and the Freedom of Religion (Reference 42 U.S. Code 2000bb). The Freedom of Religion Act states that religious freedom shall not be limited except if a government can prove a 'compelling interest.' "By this, the government must choose an ideal method that result in the least possible inference with religious freedoms of individuals, churches, and other organizations" says Zoning Administrator Nicholas Brown. At the public hearing, several legitimate issues and concerns were raised and the solutions to these issues were volunteered by the applicant. In addition, the Zoning Administrator cited each neighbor's concern with specified conditions in the conditional use permit to mitigate the foreseen potential adverse impacts.



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#### 4.5 What does this project reveal about the planning process of the City of Los Angeles?

What is often perceived in mainstream planning processes is a web of complex interactions that result in dynamic transformations of the built environment. A characteristic of entitlement permits allows rules to be flexible. At times, they posit as formal or informal; in either case, they establish the boundaries of what is possible (Blau and Rupnik, 2007, Pg. 308). Specifically, these rules impact the way participants behave in decision-making processes. An argument that Zoning Administrator, Nicholas Brown constantly mentioned is that, “churches, monasteries, shrines, temples, synagogues and mosques—all houses of worship are similar land uses, but have different names.” Brown’s argument states that these places are “inherently beneficial” uses without any substantial impacts.

Subsequently, the conditional use permit was appealed again in June 2001 after the City rendered modifications of the permit in May 2001 (CA No. ZA 2000-2816). The neighbors seemed resolute in their decision. “After the appeals we received from the residents, we learned that political leverage was needed to get this project approved,” said Shabbir Saifee (Personal Interview on January 3, 2014). It was not until October 21, 2004 when the Zoning Administrator approved the Anjuman-e-Burhaneer plans by granting an approval for the building height and square footage of the masjid ((Exhibit A of Case No. ZA 2000-2816 (CU) and Case No. ZA 2000-2816 (CUP) (A4) under 29 conditions (Figure 35).



Figure 35: The ground breaking ceremony commemorating the approval of the project. The head priest, Turab Bhaisaheb Hatimi (front) along with members of the Dawoodi Bohra community. *Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.*

The case of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex exemplifies that to design a city for residents living in their native area is not a matter of exclusivity, but an agenda of ameliorating contemporary environments that exercise tolerance. As a result of this project, there are several key trends that begin to emerge towards understanding urban planning scholarship:

First, community skepticism is by now a norm in most planning efforts, and may be aggravated towards ethnic community projects. The profession of urban planning propounds on the struggles of such projects that navigate through these planning processes—what direction do democratic processes inform new spatial conditions? And to what degree does policy-making

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ensure the safety and general welfare of society? These questions seek the necessary propositions to answer the accommodation of multi-ethnic enclaves in Southern California.

Second, that in the end however, the project is essentially a larger matter of how a municipality seeks to situate itself—is it “pro-diversity” or “no-diversity?” The Anjuman-e-Burhanee project was not entirely disapproved by the City of Los Angeles, but it was the residents themselves who contested towards a project that they felt negatively in their neighborhood. As a result, urban planners can serve as facilitators between stakeholders to find the best possible means to justify democratic actions and decision-making processes.

Third, political support often becomes a necessary strategy to counter normative opposition. Although conformity to the code was insufficient, the negotiations revealed how the Dawoodi Bohra community saw themselves in relation to other political powers. The Dawoodi Bohras worked collaboratively with other sources, including the Grants Administration Assistant from the California Endowment to get a support letter for the project. The importance of receiving assistance from non-members reveals a democratic approach towards city-building processes.

Fourth, the creative compromise, like the adaptation of the minaret, the 11-foot wall, and excavating below surface-level are key strategies that ultimately provide the way we negotiate and provide give-and -take scenarios between stakeholders. This chapter highlights the planning adaptations from both sides, of which are infant in this unique circumstance, but operates within a larger jurisdictional framework towards community formation.



CHAPTER **V**

*Propositions for Multi-Ethnic Enclaves in Southern California*

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The example of the Dawoodi Bohra community and their Anjuman-e-Burhaneer complex challenges the prevailing perceptions regarding the presence of sacred spaces in secular environments. This chapter seeks to answer the question: To what degree is the Anjuman-e-Burhaneer complex benefitting the City of Los Angeles? To address this, the following chapter gauges the degree to which current planning regimes and processes in Southern California contribute to community formation. It also speculates about the role of city planners in helping to acknowledge and promote a rich ethnic diversity in Southern California, thereby helping it become an exemplar of a culturally inclusive regional metropolis.

## 5.1 The Challenge of Multi-Ethnic Enclaves in Los Angeles: The Case of the Dawoodi Bohra Community

As time passes, the Dawoodi Bohras has adapted centuries-old town-planning principles to new avenues in search of an *Alternative Modernity*—an adapted lifestyle that combines community’s ‘ethical norms’ with a ‘national identity’ by establishing connections with the rest of the community (Feenberg, 1995, Pg. 147). Nan Ellin (2013: Pg. 60) states that, “an ‘authentic-city’ is one that results from a combination of large-scale and small-scale interventions that deal with local climate, topography, history, and culture.” In this sense, we learn that the city is continuously reshaped with the existence of multiple identities in urban spaces that demands new planning regimes to embrace multi-ethnic enclaves. My objectives here are twofold: first, to understand the dualities of spaces: sacred versus secular; and second, to critically analyze the

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role of city planners in developing propositions that gauge the lessons from this case study. This paper culminates an investigation of the relationship between the humanities, architecture and urbanism, which addresses a specific culture in a world that is constantly influenced by modernization. For more than 40 years, the Dawoodi Bohras of Los Angeles and their Anjuman-e-Burhane complex has been a site of a particular set of social and cultural norms—their ‘everyday life’ and residences, the masjid and their sacred spaces, and their participatory politics in the development of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex. Given the strong presence of an identity in these urban spaces, how do we design the physical and social environment? More importantly, how do we design the political environment to accommodate them?

Urban planning scholarship can address this question if it seeks to rediscover the values of existing spaces and the historical, social, and political conditions in which those spaces are appropriated. For the Dawoodi Bohras of Los Angeles, these spaces are shaped by their enduring religious practices.

## 5.2 Sacred Spaces in Secular Environments

By examining the functions of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex, we can begin to respond to the challenges of planning and overcome the dualities between sacred and secular spaces. For example, Fatemi-planned complexes undergo the Masjid *Tasis* ceremony—a celebration



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in which the first stone of the complex is inserted into the foundation (Figure 36). It is a highly regarded religious observance, which accepts the *barakaat* (blessing) from His Holiness (T.U.S.). During this observance, Dawoodi Bohras gather and contribute to the foundation with additional stones. According to one community member, “The masjid is the basic tenet of a structured living system that forms a community. It brings each Dawoodi Bohra member together” (Personal Interview with Sheikh Juzer Jamaly on December 23, 2013). By embracing these ritual acts, we begin to understand the true meaning behind the value of their spaces. The idea of ‘sacred spaces’ in the Fatemi faith long endures how these spaces are defined or how they are used. The method of preserving them, therefore, requires a new understanding of how centuries-old urban architectural practices relate to contemporary city-making processes.



Figure 36: The Masjid *Tasis* Ceremony. Source: Courtesy of Najam Alanwar.

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However, the planning processes of gaining a conditional use permit pose a challenge to such religious spaces by inhibiting their development. Although conditional use permits may allow particular uses within a specified zone, city officials and residents have often objected to the proper permits for religious buildings where large groups of people assemble for secular activities. Many have purposefully changed zoning regulations in illegal discriminatory ways (Ramirez, L.A. Times, August 5, 2000). The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), which was passed by Congress in 2000, attempted to resolve this problem by protecting churches and other religious organizations from land use ordinances that hinder the exercise of their religion and associated development. The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA):

prohibits state and local governments from regulating land use in a manner that would discriminate against or among religious institutions (42 U.S.C. 2000cc(b)); or imposes a substantial burden on religious exercise, unless the regulation is the least restrictive means of serving a compelling government interest (42 U.S.C. 2000cc(a)(1)).

RLUIPA further applies if a “substantial burden” arises by any government’s formal or informal procedures to make assessments of a property’s uses or on a “religious exercise,” unless if there is a “compelling government interest” (RLUIPA, 2000). For example, protecting residential privacy is a “compelling government interest.” RLUIPA defines “religious exercise” as “any exercise of religion, whether or not compelled by, or central to, a system of religious belief” (42 U.S.C. ‘ 2000cc-5(7)(A)):

The use, building, or conversion of real property for the purpose of religious exercise shall be considered a religious exercise” Id. § 2000cc-5(7)(A),(B). In case that a religious institution expands the religious use of a property to accommodate religious activities or offices, or converts property to be used for religious education and practice, it constitutes religious exercise. [Furthermore,

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a “substantial burden” is a fact-based inquiry, which depends on a case-by-case basis.] A “substantial burden” can be defined as a “more than an inconvenience on religious exercise that bears direct, primary, and fundamental responsibility for rendering religious exercise, including use of real property,” and “significant pressure which directly coerces the religious adherent to conform his or her behavior accordingly” (RLUIPA 2000).

Given this, it may seem that the residents’ complaints demonstrate a “substantial burden” on the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex because residents attempted to limit the Dawoodi Bohra’s right to exercise their religion. Having settled under the by-laws of the U.S., the Freedom of Religion and Civil Rights enables the Dawoodi Bohra community to practice, as long as, they conform with the provisional standard of the planning department. In this case, there was no “compelling government interest.” To reiterate Mr. Shabbir Saifee’s comment, “we conformed to everything the neighbors wished, but what we could not understand is why they did not want us to develop our masjid” (Personal Interview on January 3, 2014). Through participant interviews, a consistent answer I received that hindered the approval of the conditional use permit was racial discrimination. Many residents were unreasonable to limit another religious institution within their jurisdiction without any proper justification. The Dawoodi Bohra community worked transparently with all stakeholders by providing open houses with city officials and residents, and conforming to all inquiries from their oppositions.

### 5.3 How to Build the ‘Tolerant City?’

Although the case of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex is just one example of how churches, temples and synagogues deal with modern planning processes, it is indicative of the pervasive

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nature of contemporary urban planning practice. Urban planning achieves grand city visions when communities engage and negotiate with existing planning regimes of local municipalities. The challenge to developing sacred spaces and maintaining their identity in the western model of modernity presents another question: How do we plan for the 'Tolerant City'? Nan Ellin (2013) argues that the planning profession has taken a dynamic role that is "poly-directional and poly-vocal," involving multiple stakeholders ranging from politicians, architects, urban planners, cultural institutions, and interested community members to serve as 'pragmatic idealists' to refine a vision (Ellin, 2013, Pg. 118).

During the planning process, many nearby residents strongly voiced their opinions regarding the visibility and architectural discontinuity of having a masjid in their backyard. Another second challenge that appears when communities attempt to develop their sacred spaces regards the obtrusive character of their building. In this case, the Woodland Hills residents requested to construct an 11-foot wall on Platt Avenue. Although the primary purpose of the 11-foot wall served for dirt retention, there are many similar examples in American towns and cities where a mosque and its cultural associations are viewed negatively by non-Islamic members of the community. Was there a deeper purpose concerning the development of the solid wall? According to one complaint, the issue was the complex's noise impact on the abutting properties (Case No. ZA 2000-2816(CU) A1-A4). Regardless, the wall generated a certain area for prescribing site-specific procedures. For example, for the residents and the uniformed observer, the complex functions as a private town with very minimal distraction of the Dawoodi Bohra's activities. Also, the enclosure of a complex becomes a cultural preference, as well as a spatial

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definition that distinguishes between sacred and secular spaces.

Despite the political upheavals during the planning process, one of the abutting residents became a proponent of the masjid complex. Although other abutting residents decided to vacate, they offered their property for sale to the community (Personal Interview with Sheikh Juzer Jamaly on May 15, 2014). Thus, the enclosure of the complex also called for more emphatic techniques to develop a well-integrated, autonomous community defined by its sacred spaces. If we take into consideration the spatial and formal patterns of Fatemi-planned communities, new potentialities for intervention begin to emerge. These new interventions may be characterized as an idea that is then executed in collaboration with other stakeholders in order to realize a particular vision. The Dawoodi Bohras began to develop a network of interconnected nodes from the residences to the complex (Figure 36-37). It fully integrates the masjid, manzil, madrasa, and the mujtama. In essence, the Dawoodi Bohras enhanced their place for people through a democratic process—one that seeks to satisfy the social, physical and political structures of the Woodland Hills community (Ellin, 2013, Pg. 118).



Figure 37:

The development of the Anjuman-e-Burhaneeh complex led to new interventional strategies. The example illustrates the Dawoodi Bohra community created internal pathways from residences to the complex. *Source: by author.*

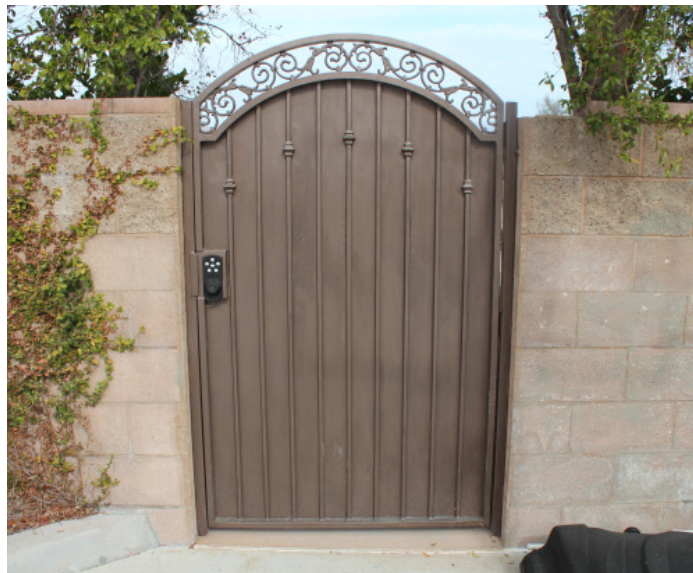
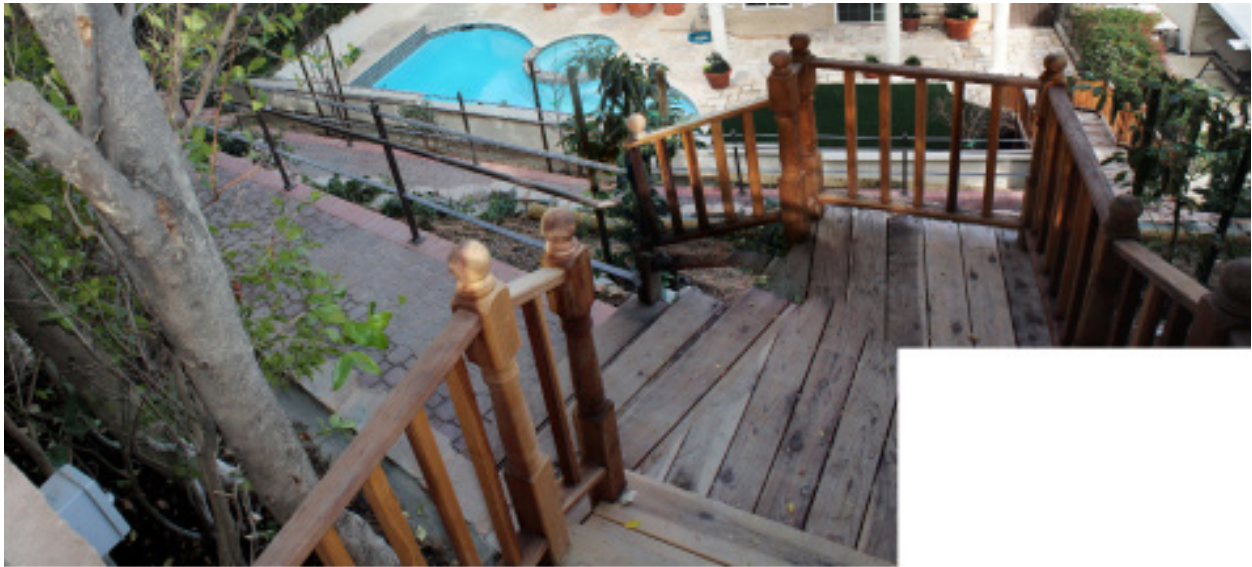
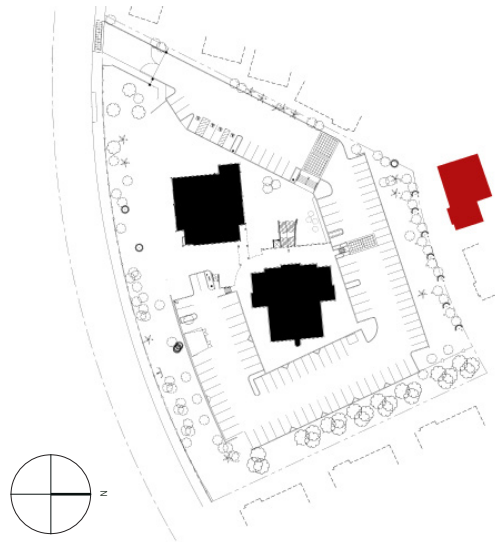




Figure 38:

Example of proposed pathway from a Dawoodi Bohra residence to the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex.

Source: by author.



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## 5.4 Planning Instruments for Community-Building Processes

Throughout my participant-observations of the Dawoodi Bohra community in Los Angeles, it became clear that what makes a successful community are cultural norms of collaboration and public participation, which in turn produces a kind of urban continuity in the social and physical landscape. It questions the role of the urban planner: How should urban planners create new planning mechanisms to address the challenges of multi-ethnic enclaves? An opportunity presents itself to extend their capacity to combine local interventions with grand visions and inform the general public to respond to the social and political conditions of emerging landscapes (Blau and Rupnik, 2007, Pg. 324-325). To further address this concern, there are three propositions to consider:

### **Proposition #1: Creating a “Multi-cultural” Element to the General Plan**

Like all global cities, the City of Los Angeles embodies a network of administrative functions dictated by General Plans, Specific Plans or Community Plans, and ordinances. Similarly, the Dawoodi Bohras and their Anjuman-e-Burhane complex rely on the roles of separate institutional spheres. For example, every Anjuman complex is bounded by the Dastarul Amal—a constitution with a prescribed organizational structure and by-laws that mandate each Dawoodi Bohra community. Historically, the Aimmat Fatemiyeen (Fatemi Imams) in Fatimid Cairo conquered the city with the initiation that a state be made. This state was tolerant to different

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denominations with religious buildings—temples, synagogues and mosques that gave freedom to each individual to practice their religion. Their constitution, Shar’ia (Islamic law) dictated its State. Similarly, the Dawoodi Bohras operate like a State, but under the principles of modern planning regimes of local governments.

In this perspective, the City of Los Angeles should acknowledge and promote the rich ethnic diversity of Southern California residents. By doing so, amendments to the General Plan of the City should be explicit in identifying a city’s subcultures. Typically, each American city is bounded by a General Plan (as required by Government Code § 65300 et seq.)—policy statements that describe the comprehensive make-up of a city’s developmental goals. General Plans contain seven elements—land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open-space, noise, and safety, which help steer decision-making bodies towards a community’s future. In essence, General Plans serve as a forum for debate and dialogue where city officials and urban planners often contend to unanswerable questions that need to respond to the rapid changing circumstances of city growth (Fulton, 2005, Pg. 103-106). While General plans often provide quantitative metrics—such as numbers of housing units, square footage of buildings or demographic trends, but seldom do they emphasize quality of life or the ‘everyday’ living aspects that result as byproducts of policy initiatives.

In this sense, the General Plan should require a “multi-cultural” element that identifies all community groups that may be suppressed by political endeavors. It should aim towards *restorative justice*—which can help in repairing the harms that have affected residents and

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enables these groups to work together with other communities to “co-create” great cities from the ground up (Ellin, 1990, Pg. 18, Pg. 39). The “multi-cultural” element would seek to add depth of layers to cities—identifying their cultural characteristics and principles of ‘place-making’ that exist in their neighborhoods, thereby allowing a “transdisciplinary” dialogue for community-building. As a result, the General Plan can serve as both a regulatory framework as well as demonstrate moral responsibility and emphasize humanitarian endeavors, allowing for new ways to produce space and address issues of control, power and alienation between communities.

### **Proposition #2: Creating Specific Standards to Develop Special Neighborhoods**

The General Plan contains only a set of broad policy statements, and thus lacks specific procedures of designing neighborhoods. My second proposition refers to a subsection of the General Plan framework, which designates Specific Plans or Community Plans to enforce particular geographic regions or neighborhood characteristics (Fulton, 2005. Pg. 106).

On this micro-level, cities employ Specific Plans and Planned Development (PD) Overlay Zone schemes that aim to provide an efficient use of land and flexibility in design concepts (Fulton, 2005, Pg. 133). Ethnic enclaves are often confronted with “gaps” of development in many Western cities. The aim of this research study, which is titled: *Transplanted Continuity* begins to reveal a meaningful transformation of society by which religious spaces are actively reread, and while exporting their culture, they are reexamined over and over again. As a result, *Transplanted*

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*Continuity* finally places a complex historical timeframe in which centuries-old practices are still felt today. Specific plans that are tailored in this capacity can imply strong and specific neighborhood characteristics—such as building typologies, demographics, percentage of parks and open spaces, and special cultural and religious amenities that can enable a particular community to transplant without having any adverse impacts.

In Los Angeles, there are many traditional neighborhoods—*Chinatown*, *Little Armenia*, *Little Tokyo*, and *Thai Town* amongst many others whose cultures display an indelible wealth of identity. As we enter these districts, we develop an impression of their culture and its site specificity, their demographics, their rituals and behaviors, their building typologies and architectural details. By developing Specific Plans that foster the peculiarity of these details, the urban planner can demonstrate to concerned residents the appropriateness and value of certain culture-specific projects.

In addition, if the Specific Plan were to cover a broader arena of developmental standards, there are additional planning instruments such as ordinances that can target specific neighborhood blocks. This could allow design characteristics of localities rather than employing general policies of understanding ‘place-making’ principles at only large scales.

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### **Proposition #3: Multi-scalar Urbanism: Developing Community Relationships**

The challenges of democracy further necessitate the role and profession of the 21st city planner to produce knowledge about cities that inform and address contemporary urban problems.

Modernity has become a determinant marker that expresses 'change' as a global tendency for the development of multi-ethnic enclaves. In this regard, we are witnessing this phenomenon in which traditional societies are erased in Western communities. Given the dynamic nature of planning practices, the study further questions: To what degree is the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex benefitting the City of Los Angeles? The efforts of the Anjuman-e-Burhane complex to make connections to the rest of society were intensely contested. These efforts make us aware that the reconsideration of urban spaces and formation of community-building processes play an important role. It should be argued that public policy initiatives alone cannot bring change itself. Instead, city officials, urban planners and neighborhoods must be responsible to take initiatives as an extension, and translate into direct action.

This signals a return to the practice where cities can take a greater role in enabling cultural bridges and partnerships between multi-ethnic communities. Urban planners can engage and develop transitional strategies through open-houses, town hall meetings, workshops, and exhibitions to open new doors for long-term cultural synergy. In addition, multi-ethnic communities should also give back to the city since they do not live in semi-isolation nor are they perceived as glorified refugees. They should seek to actively participate in civic life, even getting elected in public bodies such as neighborhood councils, resident associations, local



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chambers of commerce etc. Such liaisons could foster an enriching environment, which enables the understanding of daily processes of different cultures. As a result, city officials, urban planners and neighborhoods should see everyone as part of their greater city and find ways to unify them.

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