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“Looking Beyond 9/11: Islam in the West and
Democratic Trends in the Middle East and North Africa”

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ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS

“Beyond Park 51: Mosques and Muslim
Communities in New York City Post 9/11”

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Watching the wildfire of controversy spread across America after news broke of Park 51, one could be excused for thinking New York City was being invaded by a foreign culture and an alien community. Despite the years of public awareness campaigns, mosque open-door days, and a Muslim senator after 9/11, the American public felt the hallowed grounds of Ground Zero would be sullied, poisoned even, by a mosque. As this disquieting episode continued to unfold, it became evident that on top of the simply misinformed and sometimes hateful perspectives being presented on major airwaves and websites, much of the discussion progressed in a vacuum. Where was the mention of the over 100 mosques and their communities in the city (including the many close to the World Trade Center)? Or the 29 Muslims who died on 9/11 at the Twin Towers? Did people know that 10% of school-aged children in the city were Muslim? Or that NYU had a thriving Islamic Center in Greenwich Village? In this paper, I attempt to ground the Park 51 controversy in the larger historical context of Muslim communities in New York City and the more contemporary timeline of Muslims' growing visibility and civic participation after 9/11. Through interviews and historical profiles of key New York City mosques, I seek to discover what unique factors define and hinder Park 51 aside from the obvious impediments of scale and the sensitivities around Islam and 9/11. While Muslim communities across America have confronted refusal and rejection to mosque/community center projects - thinly veiled as a matter of zoning or Friday parking - Park 51 merits attention for the particulars of its location and symbolic significance. This case-based presentation contributes to the development of a more nuanced and theoretically rigorous subfield of Islam in America, touching on issues of integration, mobilization, visibility, and religion in a civic context. It builds on the work of Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr's *Backlash 9/11* (2009), Mustafa Bayoumi's *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?* (2008), and Jerrilynn Dodds's *New York Masjid* (2002).