

Interviewee: Rakin Nasar

Interviewer: Hollis Dudgeon

Date: December 11, 2017

HD= Hollis Dudgeon

RN= Rakin Nasar

HD: OK, we're going to start by getting a few pieces of basic information. My name is Hollis Dudgeon, and I'm a student at Wake Forest University School of Divinity. So what's your name?

RN: I'm Rakin Nasar (pronounced Rock-een Nass-ar)

HD: And what year are you?

RN: I'm a Senior.

HD: And what's your major?

RN: I'm a Biology major, with minors in Neuroscience and Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies.

HD: Are you pre-medicine?

RN: Well, I'm going to Graduate School and we'll see where I go from there.

HD: So, what role does Islam play in your daily life?

RN: So for me, the role it plays-it's changed over time, and at first I tried to take it a little more spiritually. The consistent thing is just how I am marked in society and while that might take different forms and the way society has dealt with Muslim bodies. Still the fact of the matter remains that after a post 9/11 America, Muslims are more, society tries to identify them clearer and uses tactics like racialization in order to determine who is perceived as a threat to like the sort of western society. So that has not really changed perse. But what has changed in my own personal life, so I had, I started what I would consider, I went to Islamic school when I was younger and that was like Sunday School, it's kind of like that. And then at

some point I made the conscious choice when I was in middle school to eat only halal, and I did that for about 6 years. And that was out of my own volition, no one forced me to do it. Then I went into college and I was like, Ok it's hard to do that here, without like home cooking and whatnot. So then I decided to shift away from that and I started engaging with like spirituality and what its like to connect with God I guess. More coming into college now I've reached a point where I don't really necessarily believe in any of that, and I don't believe in God perse. But I will say that I derive a lot of my ethical values from Islam and I see like there's a knowledge base and a history that's worth looking into to see like, oh there are good people and there are good role models that we should take advantage of when conducting our own life narratives. Also, this was how I was raised has influenced how I view the world. That means I have, a lot of my ethics are derived from there. I don't necessarily think there is a greater purpose to how the world operates.

HD: I hear you saying that you made a kind of transition from the spiritual to the ethical? Can you talk a little more about what that looks like?

RN: Yeah, what that looks like is now I really, if I do something, it's for myself and not pleasing some greater, higher power, because I don't think that exists. I think that, there are obviously social forces and what not that exists that are greater than individuals. I respect those because I can experience those and feel those, and see like, oh if I do something good, I think that's like doing something good for the world. I can see those and experience those, but do I think there is some universal judge at the day that will right all the wrongs of the world? I don't think so. Is there a path that world is going towards that is trying to achieve some sort of moral, like, ideal? No, not really. So that's really just the point I am at. To me, really, that's what believing in a god essentially is, right? Like if you believe in a god, you think that there's some sort of plan that is imperceptible to how the universe is structured and so if you believe that so there's this thing that controls or at least initiated all that is, or exists, then you believe in a god of some kind. But if you don't then you really don't. And it's more like metaphysical than spiritual I think because I like will say like I do like engage in like practices that are considered like spiritual. I do like meditation, not as much as I'd like, but I do it as least regularly. So like most people would consider it like spiritual but I don't necessarily believe in God. So I feel hesitant to use the word, spiritual because of the cultural context in comes in these days. It has a kind of

(kaley?) health, self-improvement kind of vibe now with it, and to me, and it's like a way to justify believing in something without engaging in traditional, cultural ways of expressing that belief. And that's kind of what the whole spiritual movement to me means. Like, I'm spiritual but not religious kind of thing. So like, while I don't, I would characterize myself as engaging in things I consider good for my own well-being, I don't do it in order to connect with a power greater than me, or a power that controls my existence.

HD: When did this sort of transition happen for you?

RN: This transition, it's been weird because part of me, I'm hesitant to use the word transition because, looking back at it, I think a lot of what I was doing, at least spiritually, was kind of a facade. Not a facade to everyone else, but a facade to myself to kind of be like, oh, I should be believing in a god and all this stuff, therefore I need to be doing all these actions and things that people who believe in god do. Sometimes I probably did genuinely think, oh there was like a greater power. I have engaged intellectually with all of that and very intellectually with the theology behind Islam and what not. But to me it's just a little bit more, I don't know, I started, I'm in a Philosophy class and that's kind of helped me to open my mind up a little bit. And I've just kind of like experienced some things and seen the world a lot, and it's just not, I don't know, maybe it's just like a wave of just meaninglessness going on in my life. But, there's, it's, the point is I'm not connected with any kind of divineness right now.

HD: What's that been like for you?

RN: It's been liberating actually. I feel like I do what I want right now, and I don't listen to things I don't have to listen to. I only control things I let control me. I feel, happier is not the right word, but more free.

HD: Thank you. So I'm going to take a little bit different direction. You kind of talked about this social identity as a Muslim. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

RN: Yeah. So this is something I'll never, that people nowadays can't really escape. It affects people in a lot of different ways. But I am proud of this part of my identity. Regardless of what I believe in, like I believe that...believe is the wrong word....advocate, identify, like all those types of

words, like with the identity of being a Muslim because I've had such strong experiences within that faith tradition, and so that's one part about it. But, to get to how society categorizes Muslims, at large, not just my own relationship with that categorization. I think that Islam, it's like first of all society, it goes like a little bit more to first of all, Orientalism and how that whole concept functions. And like preserving the occident and like creating a dichotomy between the orient and the occident, and the kind of knowledge bases that come from the orient are seen as less salient and less valuable than traditionally western knowledge. Even though I think of that construction, is like ahistorical, because the middle east has historically preserved a lot of Greek and Roman, Greek in particular, ideas intellectually they preserved that entire culture. While you had Europe during the Dark Ages burning books and people were illiterate, right? You start from that, right? And, oh, that false dichotomy, right? Then, you get into today and you see people are still afraid of the non-west, and in the west. It's seen as an invading and threatening force because of some fundamental insecurity of what it means to be in the west, because that is such a constant and fluid category because people are coming in and changing what it means to be an American. People are uncomfortable with that so they kind of try to delineate the line of, this is what Americanism is and it's not a fluid concept, it's this one thing that's static and you coming here does not change what it means to be an American, because that threatens what I strongly categorize myself, like a normal western person will be like I categorize myself as an American and you coming here and saying you're an American threatens how I view myself, right? So to me that's like the underlying thing, I know I'm speaking kind of abstractly but you can see there's a clear racialization of Islam. You have South Asian and Middle Eastern people that get targeted and you see like, for example Sikhs get targeted when they're not Muslim just because they are perceived as Muslim. And, for example you have, I believe it was Kentucky, they have, like in a bar or something, they have a South Asian dude with his friend... some dude was like, said some sort of hate rhetoric, shot him, and then I think it was directly tied to Islamophobia, right? But it was acting on a non-muslim. You can see this sort of fear of Islam is not just directed at Muslims but people perceived as being Muslim. So it's a very complicated thing because some people....Islam is not a racial category, because Islam at least at its inception made it clear intention to say this is not a racial sort of category. In the last sermon of the prophet, he said like an Arab has no superiority over a non-arab and a non-Arab has no superiority over an Arab. The only thing that distinguishes people

is their piety, right? So if there is a very clear message that there is no racial component to how, the way how people should be valued, right? But then, you have Muslims being categorized in this way, and then you also have like people that might convert to Islam, right? And that, for example, they might be a white person who converts to Islam and they don't get racialized and like culturalized in the same way as like most Muslims do, right? There is also a very clear distinction between how men and women, how Muslim men and Muslim women are sort of categorized, I don't know, I've been using different permutations of that word. But you know what I mean, right? So, men are considered violent, aggressive and threatening to western society. And then you have women who are kind of seen as kind of oppressed and subservient to that terrorizing force of otherly Islam, right? So it's a very complicated thing and I think the best way to get at it is talk with different, not like different Muslims, right? Islam is the most diverse religion in America. So, 35% of Muslims in America are black, and they are the largest ethnic, and ethnic is the wrong word, but largest identity, like racial identity group in the entire American Muslim population. And so, it's like really interesting how we racialize Islam to be something like oriental in the orientalism sense, like something from the Middle East, number one... two really big problems with that, number one-most Muslims in the world are not from the Middle East, they're from South Asia, particularly Indonesia. So that's bad in the world context. Number 2, in the United States most Muslims in the America are black. To me it's not an indication of how Muslims are, it's an indication of the fear of the Orient. And that's how Islamophobia is, kind of, categorizes people.

HD: Thank you. You sort of named these two aspects of being Muslim, is this social identity and context, and also the spirituality ethical side. Could you talk a little bit about what that meant for you at Wake specifically?

RN: Yeah. There's a lot of particular instances I can think about. But I think overall.....OK, so socially at Wake, you, in particular, you have to always start from the lens of you have a predominantly white, heterosexual population at Wake Forest. You have to start from that standpoint. And then you, that kind of, it's an important lens to view how all social dynamics work at Wake. And obviously it has different opacities in different areas but I think it's a pretty wide, overwhelming force throughout Wake Forest. So, I think what that causes different groups to do is, some groups are forced to wear their identity on their sleeve, even if they normally would not do so. And that means that some people try to wear a

long sleeve shirt..some people would try to wear...there's no short sleeve shirt. There's either a tank top or a long sleeve shirt that people try to deal with this, right? So, some people decide to go away from that identity thing as a means to quell the anxiety of feeling like an outsider. And then there's some people who have to form a tight, who engage in a tight knit group, that's seen as very external to this campus. So I think that's a important way how just the Wake Forest experience intersects with Islam. In terms of the distinction between social and spiritual, I think over, that causes a lot of people to like kind of polarize into, oh I'll be like, I'll do all the religious stuff, and be perceived in that way and be very strict with it. Or, I'll be in the extreme and not really care about any of those expectations. We do have a decent amount of people in the middle, but I think that's only because this sort of environment puts Islam at the forefront, or at least puts it in our brain more than it would at other places, So that means people have to interact with them through suppressing it or engaging it. And that causes people to like experiment and test that part of their identity and that can create some different gradients in between. But it's definitely a wide spectrum of what it means to be a Muslim at Wake which is pretty interesting considering how few Muslims we have at Wake. It's a testament to....there's a lot of diversity....there's no Muslim at Wake that I think shares a similar understanding of Islam than any other Muslim at Wake. So I think that's the way how Wake Forest is structured socially kind of influences and determined that.

HD: I know you've spoken a little bit on this, but is there anything else you could say about what it means for you to be a Muslim at Wake.

RN: Yeah, it's just like there's that whole stuff I talked about earlier and I think it also means, like I have friendly, a lot stronger attachment and a social responsibility to my Muslim peers because of the way how it works. There's a unique and particular struggle that we go through that can, I think it's important, if not people can discuss it directly just kind of be with each other and experience it together. So I think it's important, for me at least, to be a friend to any Muslim that identifies in whatever way to Islam, whether it be someone who is struggling with it and kind of shying away from it, and someone who's more embracing it. Whatever is causing them to do that, is the same force that has been acting on me too. So, I think it's important to share that experience, and also share the diversity of our responses to that force and the diversity of our experiences of being a Muslim at Wake Forest.

HD: Thank you. So these are my words and not yours and you are welcome to say no. From what I've heard, I wanted to ask this question: so it seems like there is this dedication to being a Muslim at Wake among your peers, and then you have your own personal sort of faith story. Is there ever a dissonance between those two and how you identify personally with being a Muslim, and then how you identify to the community.

RN: Yeah. So, I've actually struggled with this a little bit because at one point I was like a little bit on a...this is an extreme...a little bit, like not the full characterization of like a little bit slightly preachy about stuff. Just like I had a strong moral conception of what it meant to be an actual Muslim at some point. I never try to impose my beliefs on anyone but having that conception inevitably kind of causes you to project it a little bit. I feel bad that at some point I might have been perceived as someone who is the good Muslim who did all the things, and now I'm not. So that has created some dissonance in terms of how I presented myself in the past and how I am now. So actually I've been personally troubled and I'm worried it might just be anxiety and paranoia, a small degree of that, that people consider me hypocritical for how I acted and how I am. I'm just a little bit more volatile with how I view the world and how I think about things. So it's not that, and I, even if it's a little bit hypocritical, at the end of the day, I never judged anyone for what they did or who they were, even back then. If I did, then I apologize, it was not intentional. It's been a little bit of a tough thing to deal with in terms of how I view myself and how others view me.

HD: So would you name this sort of way your faith has transformed. It seems like there's one part of it that's really liberating, and there's another part that's sort of you're having these feelings of being hypocritical or something? Do you sort of hold those to intention?

RN: To me, existing in general is kind of like being put in a cage, and sometimes you don't realize you're in a cage. You kind of go through the motions and pretend like you're living a free life, like you're living outside of it. So we don't engage with our limitations sometimes and the restrictions that are put upon us. So that's kind of how I view this. Yes it's liberating to know that these were my restrictions in the past, and like OK, this is the space, the cell that I occupy within existence, right? But now that I know that I am in this cell.....like, I'm still in a cell, you know? It's nice to know what the boundaries are, and like, maybe I can push them,

but essentially, I don't have a lot of control over a lot of things. So, it's been a little bit tough to deal with that.

HD: Thank you. OK, sort of transition and ask about an experience where you've been affirmed with your Muslim identity, whatever that's meant for you at Wake.

RN: I've been affirmed a lot by other Muslims. Just like I'm existing and doing something good and that's always been important to have other Muslims just be my friend. They don't even have to be like oh you're doing a good job being a Muslim at Wake Forest. Just like being my friend, talking to me, like, if you see me say hi, like that to me that's affirming who I am being a Muslim. Because I don't know, it's just that weird bond, it's like another, when you say hi to someone that you share an identity with that influences your life in a complex way. There's another layer when you say hi to them. That's interesting. Also, by the school writ large-having the lounge was a big way of affirming that I deserve a space on this campus. So that was one important way. I'm forever grateful that we have a space, and I know there are lots of organizations that deserve spaces and don't have it. We were fortunate enough to have it, and utilize it. It's a great space, it's very versatile and has a lot of different activities to do. It's an important gathering place now. I think it's like completely leveled up what it means to be a Muslim at Wake Forest. Number two, I've also enjoyed, we had a demonstration, a protest demonstration thing last year in response to the Muslim ban and also the article that Professor Shannon Gilreath made. To me, that event, just having people be there was a sign that I mattered at this university. I really appreciated everyone that showed up, spoke and gave space for Muslims to speak too. And anyone that helped out in that process, even if you didn't engage but were moved too, thought about it a little bit. That to me, means a lot.

HD: Sorry, what was that article that you mentioned?

RN: Yeah. There's this law professor, Dr. Shannon Gilreath. He's also in the WGSS Department, and he writes a lot about LBGTQ issues, specifically focusing on gay issues. So, he wrote an article basically about how we should have a Muslim ban because Muslims are inherently violent and they're homophobic. So, if you're a liberal, you shouldn't be supporting Muslims because of their homophobia, right? He views society through the lens of the very monolithic lens of what helps the gay community the most,

right? I haven't had an interaction with him, but based on a lot of people who have had an interaction with him, it's not the entire LGBTQ spectrum, but specifically gay men, right? So, he wrote this article and it was published in, I forgot what newspaper, it was some national newspaper, and the Wake Forest University Law School website actually had it published on their front page for a bit. That was a whole thing. Right around that time too, there was also in Kernersville, there was a meeting done at a restaurant where there was about 20 people talking about the threat of Islam and they said we should go their mosques and kill them basically. So there was a lot of things going on last year.

HD: What was that like for you at that time?

RN: By that time, I just got on the mode, I was just like in the something needs to get done mode. It occupied a lot of my brain energy and I was like thinking about strategies that we could do to deal with this. First of all, support Muslims, that was the first thing, like how's everyone doing? Most people were angry, so we needed an outlet to get that out, and the protest was helpful for that. I also wrote an article too, just kind of dealing with the article first of all in a logical way, explaining logically why Muslims are not necessarily more violent than non-Muslims. If there is more violence, that's due to political factors. Political instability in regions and not religious ideology. I empathize a lot with, there is homophobia in the Muslim community, and I wholeheartedly admit that, but I also think that focusing on the Muslim community is not really addressing the homophobia in the Muslim community, but its more Islamophobic than anti-homophobic if that makes sense. There's a lot of homophobia outside the Muslim community that was not really addressed in the article, it was seen as more of a guise to support Islamophobia than it was to deal with homophobia.

HD: You named this article in Kernersville at that time. Would you associate that as a sort of negative experience of being a Muslim student at Wake? And then the rally as a positive affirming one?

HD: So outside what you named as happening last semester, was there any other ways that being a Muslim has been tied to a negative experience for you at Wake?

RN: First of all, there was I think, let me try to remember the order of all this. So first there was the bucket of urine at Imam Grigg's door I think my

Freshman year. So what happened was we had our Muslim Chaplain Imam Griggs and someone left a bucket of urine at his door, like right before Thanksgiving break I think. (or was it Spring break?) The timeline isn't that important, but basically and then, the school, because it was right before break, the report of the incident didn't make it out until awhile later. And the university took a long time to respond because of that. And overall, that was an indication that the university needs to deal with how they communicate information better. There was also a campaign to leave flowers at his door and that was really affirming and I enjoyed that he got so much support after that. That to me kind of shows that the whole idea of love can trump any kind of thing. Then we had the Chapel Hill shooting which deeply distraught the whole community. People that wouldn't even identify as Muslim were moved by this. We went over to the vigil and some of us went to the funeral prayers. And actually, someone was so moved by this experience, they converted to Islam on the way back. All these bad things happened but there was also a glimmer of something nice out of all of them, which I think is interesting. Then, my sophomore year I was walking on the Quad, I was on the Subway side, walking. It was 9/11, and I was getting back from, we were hosting the high school debate tournament. It was dark and there was a group of 4 people, and one of them said in a very negative tone: "that terrorist looks like he's performing the Haj." I got mad and started saying some profane stuff, but that's all it ended up being. Let me think if there's anything else I'm missing. Then, before I came here, there was the whole Donalds Woods Mall thing. You had an alumni, who right when Imam Griggs was chosen as our Chaplain, he started up a propaganda campaign saying he was a Jihadi recruiter trying to convert people to be terrorists at Wake Forest. He set up a website, he would call alumni telling them not to donate to Wake and did a whole thing, and yep. The university was very hesitant and never really ended up doing anything to curb Donald Woodsmall's actions because they were worried about the Wake Will campaign. To them, they would rather sweep it under the rug than make a big public issue out of it.

HD: Was that frustrating to you?

RN: Yes. I Understand that's just how the way the world works. Capital drives the world and they needed money and to them there was just a bigger priority to make sure the individual at Wake Forest was maintained. I completely understand that. I'm just frustrated that that's the way how society operates. We need to be concerned about potentially our

perception to people who have a false understanding of the way how people are and preserve our perception of who we are to those people that don't understand really what being Muslim is. And the university as a result has to prioritize that reputation.

HD: When was this happening? Right before you came?

RN: Yes.

HD: So were you sort of aware of this as you were deciding to come to Wake?

RN: No, but as soon as I got here I was aware of it.

HD: So I want to circle back around-if you don't want to talk about it that's fine but what happened at Subway: what were you sort of thinking and feeling during when that happened and sort of after that happened?

RN: What I was thinking first I think I said....what'd I say? I said something like who the 'F' do you think you're talking to, or something like that. Who the 'F' do you think you are? I was just like, in general I'm an articulate person, but during that time, and just like Islamophobic stuff, I'm pretty articulate about it-but this one instance, it caught me so off guard, I just got purely emotional, not rational. Started yelling at him. If he was physically threatening in any way, I probably would have, we would have had a physical altercation. That's how I felt during that: all feeling, no thought. It was all- this guy hates me, I hate him.

HD: What was it like sort of processing that afterwards?

RN: Afterwards, I was just like, thought about it, had those thoughts.....the way how I deal with anger sometimes, I justify it a lot, so sometimes I'll be like, oh I'll rationalize my anger, and so oh that made complete sense, what I did was justified. I shouldn't feel guilty about the way how I acted in that case. Part of me is like, yeah, you're totally entitled to feel like that. If I were to punch him in the face, I'm entitled to do that to some extent. That's not the best thing to do. That's not the strategic thing to do, even though ethically I might be allowed to do that based on my personal ethics, that's not the best way to deal with it logistically and practical outcomes. That wouldn't lead to the best outcomes for either of us. So that's just how I deal with that situation.

- HD: After that happened, were you just sort of...did you feel like it might happen again or did you feel like it was a very isolated incident? I'm wondering did it affect you in ways you were able be on this campus afterward.
- RN: Yes. I think they were drunk, first of all, so that was part of it. It was on 9/11, so I understand maybe Islamophobia was on their mind. It showed to me that just because people aren't saying these things to your face doesn't mean they aren't thinking it. The fact that someone said it to me, opened my mind a little bit to there are people who are thinking these things and not saying them to me. So that was the main way how I changed my view on things. And this made me a little bit more paranoid to make friends with people that might view me in a negative way which might make me a little bit more jaded. But I don't know, that's just the way how it is.
- HD: Do you think it was that experience that sort of changed that in you?
- RN: Yes. It was a realization.
- HD: It was a realization.
- RN: Yes. It was a realization.
- HD: You named quite a few challenges that Muslim students experience on campus but is there anything else you want to talk about, you've heard about or seen Muslim students experiencing on campus?
- RN: Just like in general, there's some other stuff too. Access to halal food has been kind of tough. There's only one place to really get it in the area and the problem is cooking-if you want to cook our traditional kind of dishes, you need a lot of other ingredients which it's difficult to store if you live in a dorm. You need pots, pans and a lot of stuff and it takes a lot of energy to cook that sort of food. Also we don't have the experience and the best way to learn it. They way how my ancestors learned how to cook that food is from spending time with their parents while they cooked and we don;t have that luxury while we are on campus. So that's one thing. We were kind of forced to live on campus, so there's no kind of escape to do that and have your own kitchen and what not. There's a push now to have

halal food every once in a while through Bubble Food Tabling, which I really appreciate and I'm really glad that's happening and it's really a necessity. It's a right step forward. But how the university is hesitant to do all the good things at once for Muslims...part of it is kind of like strategic because if you give someone everything they want right away then they might not be as grateful for it. So that's one part of it. Number two is how the university just kind of prioritizes certain things, they prioritize capital first, instead of student well-being, I feel. You have the Thrive Center and what not but I think a lot of it has to do with capital and the perception of the university in a status sort of way, instead of student's well-being. That kind of leads us to do things that gives us some unnecessary hesitancy to make the experience better for some students even when there's no monetary kind of repercussion for doing so, right? I think there's no supply chain issues with bringing halal food to Wake Forest, it's just kind of, they're just worried about the perception of it all, I think to some extent. So that's part of it. The entire drinking culture of Wake Forest is very strong and that causes people to feel like they have to drink in order to conform. I'll be honest, this is a reality, that's like the straight up reality. 100% empathize with people who end up doing it, because it's so hard to do something if you're not drinking on the weekends on this campus. There's no real good way to have fun. This campus is very closed off. Parking is expensive, so it's hard to have a car here to go out and do other stuff. That's just the main social outlet and that's how people organize together to do stuff at Wake Forest. We have a huge Greek community. They're more than half of our student population, so they control most of the social dynamics. They're also the people who tend to have more social capital too. So they control a lot of how this campus socially is organized. So people are really strongly encouraged to drink, and I'm not even going to judge them one bit for doing so, or feel like they are any less of a person, because it is just so difficult here to not do any of that. There are plenty of Christian people too that like don't engage in those activities. I'm sure they feel some stress of it, but I think it's a little bit different for Muslims because the community is so small that it's hard for us to get together and do something as a group, to kind of combat the strong urge to engage in those types of activities.

HD: Thank you for naming us. Does being Muslim make it more difficult to socialize?

RN: I'm always a little guarded when I meet someone who's non-Muslim. I won't bring up me being Muslim first most of the time, unless like something is going on. If I just meet someone I probably won't, you probably won't find that out about me until it comes up in some other way. It just makes me a little bit like what does this person think about me kind of reaction when I first meet them. Are they cool with me being Muslim sort of thing? That's always added a little edge to my social interactions. There's been a wave of more vocal, right wing, sort of stuff going on and that's made me more hesitant. Now I see like, oh there's more like, and I knew there was a big portion of our population that was on the conservative and right side of things. But those are the most dangerous people to Muslims, I feel. Seeing that more has made me a little bit more afraid. Thankfully nothing has happened so far this year. I came into this year, like if someone asked how do I feel about this year, and I had a bad feeling at the beginning of the year, about something maybe bad happening. But nothing did, which I'm very happy about. I'm still a little bit on high alert than normal because it always feels like the calm before the storm.

HD: What's that like for you? Coming in and expecting something bad to happen and being on high alert?

RN: It's like, being a Muslim in America means being paranoid to some extent. If something happens, I need to be ready right away. There's no time to really process emotionally what's going on. Because I have to react: write something, or support members, or do something as a leader. You don't have time to emotionally process these things. You have to be there to deal with it immediately. You're cleaning up the mess right away. Second, I think too, the thing that adds to that paranoia is I have a strong sense that I'm being surveilled by the government - just Patriot Act and you know how ubiquitous technology is and how easy it is for someone to listen to you get all your information, see what you're looking at on your computer, and all that. I'm using a Wake Forest internet which they have full control over the types of data that goes in and out of that internet. I'm always cognizant about what I'm doing with my technology and making sure that nothing I can do can even be spun as something that can be used against me and mischaracterize me. Really careful about that and I try to be, and I encourage, it's tough because I'm all about the speak out and say your opinion especially I'm super into being provocative and what not. It's

really tough because this is something I just don't want to mess with, a force I just don't want to mess with, even though I'll disagree with it a lot.

HD: You talked about being a leader how it's necessary you take action immediately and you just get to doing it, and correct me if I'm wrong, this emotional processing you just kind of have to put aside, is there a rest space or a time where you can process that, that you are able find to process that?

RN: This is just kind of a long time for me. Everyone has their own thing for it, but all leaders need to deal with their extra responsibilities they are carrying on their back in whatever way. So you need to figure that out for yourself. It was just kind of walking, exploring by myself, spending time alone, that's helped me out a lot.

HD: What is something you would want non-Muslims to know about the Muslim experience?

RN: It's really, really individual and complicated. There are people that get impacted by it in a lot of, it's very, one ubiquitous and two diverse so it will affect the aspect of a person's life in many ways. But it also affects people very differently, which I think is unique in the sense of, it's a very intersecting identity I feel, like there's a lot of, because there's a lot of ways how another identity intersects with it. Each time it intersects it takes a very different form. If you're concerned about it, I don't have all the answers, I really don't know what it means to be Muslim for everyone and it would be arrogant of me to say, and I can only really speak about my own experience. I can speak about some forces that affect a lot of Muslims because I have experience dealing with people that are Muslim and I see that kind of things, but really, it's experience dealing with people, I'm not experiencing it. If you're interested in what it means to be Muslim, you gotta talk with a Muslim about it. Here's the part where it's a little bit difficult-you can't just sit hem down and be like: we're going to talk about what it means to be Muslim today, and that's just going to be all cool, right? They kind of have to do it for themselves. This is where relationships can get really intricate and subtle, so you have to facilitate an environment where someone feels comfortable expressing that about themselves without kind of forcing it, and that requires a lot of subtlety and understanding someone. I think they should be cognizant of that and be aware about how they set up that environment with their Muslim peers.

HD: So, is there anything else that I have missed or need to know about Muslim life at Wake?

RN: Praying is hard to, like we have an obligation to do five daily prayers. So you have to wake up in the morning, before seven o'clock. It's based on the orientation of the sun, so you have to wake up really early in order to do that, and it's hard if you have a roommate, it's hard motivating yourself, especially if you have a messed up sleep cycle. The way how academia works does not encourage high quality sleep, so that affects that whole aspect. And you are also in an environment where you are not reminded about God, or your conception of God in this society, so it's hard to be reminded to pray, you have to do it yourself basically, like motivate yourself. And another aspect of Islam is also it's a very communal kind of experience, and you lack a lot of that too here.

HD: Do you find that as a Muslim at Wake, is there involvement within the community Mosque, and within the larger Winston Salem community.

RN: We have Muslims from the Winston Salem community. I'm sure they just naturally have done that already. Some Muslims in the past would like, would be like, oh I'm going to the community Mosque for Friday prayer today if anyone wants to join, let's do it. We'll do eat prayers there, so I think there's a decent amount of involvement, but it's within the limitations that a college student can do. I think we do a decent amount of what we can.

HD: Alright, I'm gonna ask one more question. What has your classroom experience been like as a Muslim?

RN: You actually reminded me of something. I'm in a lot of science classes and it's not really impacted there to be honest. Sometimes it causes, like I'm in an Evolution class, right now that causes me to think about Islam. But that's like a lot more personal instead of like social forces acting on me. I've taken an Arabic class and that's like put a little bit of my Islamic identity there-because that's like an Arabic class. And there's a lot of non-Muslims in the class so there's like that whole aspect too. It's overall just been like welcoming the professor, just like, my professors have been very good at teaching Arabic and they understand the language a lot and so it has been very language focused for that aspect but has been very

interesting just having that intersection. Having a professor that's Muslim, it has been interesting to have someone I identify with teaching me. I've never had that before actually. I've never had someone teach me who I can actually kind of identify with. So, that was a cool experience. I was in an Islamic Art and Architecture class, which was really interesting. I learned about a subject I didn't have any comfortability with. I was completely new to what architecture is and how art history works. That was a really fun experience. I obviously got to see the cultural and socio-political impacts of Islam throughout history, which was really cool. I also took an Arabic Literature class with Dr. Obiedat. I know this is going to be in the Archives, but maybe you'll hear some interesting stories about him from other means, but he's very cool and interesting, he's the weirdest dude I've met in my entire life. But I love him to death-he's a very smart, intellectually rigorous man. He challenged me so much to look at the world differently. I really respect him a lot. That class was very interesting-read a lot of stuff that changed my entire world view. I was in Intro to Islam with Dr. Nelly (Nelly van Doorn-Harder) and that was a whole thing. She has this habit of calling out Muslim students and like oh, what's your perspective on this? It was very awkward. In my Arabic class for example, I was Muslim but like, there was no like, there was no spotlight shown on me. I was just like a normal student. But in that class, I was a Muslim before I was a student, and it was like a little bit weird to be, it made me feel like less than a student almost. More like a prop and a figure in the class. She also said some problematic things. Like the first class we talked about suicide bombing and that was not appropriate to introduce to someone, to introduce to class of religion. She said things to students that were really problematic like, one Muslim student was wearing shorts, and she said if you were in Saudi Arabia, you would be stoned for wearing that. There were things that, like yes, you might be right technically, but that sort of construction is problematic. Like there's no reason we should be thinking like that, especially in an Intro to Islam class. If you want to talk about that in a space that's more open to provocation, then do that, but that's not the place to have those types of discussions. We talked with the Dean about this and we tried to change her attitude and I've been talking with students now and she's a lot better. She seems a lot better. I also, I hate to play this card but, the students I talked to were Freshmen, and just kind of, the people, they lack kind of the experience of being in a very, like an intellectual kind of level, and college classes are very different from high school classes, and high school class is more like training, like we're preparing you for something. And here it's more about self-discovery and

what not to some extent. I think that Freshmen, although they're very smart kids, I can tell they are very intelligent, very perceptive students, I don't know if they just have the experience to know the kind of subtleties and how, like for example when we went to speak with the Dean, the types of students that spoke were Juniors and Seniors. It was like people that knew how classrooms operated. That's why I'm not 100% sure and ready to say that she's a reformed person or teacher. And I noticed there were like some things that were like a little bit uuuh, like with the way she taught the class, but definitely noticeable improvement. Definitely, Dr. Nelly deserves some recognition for being flexible and changing. Definitely she has improved and it should be noted, but not sure I'm willing to call her my best friend just yet.

HD: I'm curious, do you sort of see yourself in these Freshmen that you're talking about when you're a Freshman, and then sort of where you are now?

RN: These Freshmen, they're their own people. I was at like a party and I overheard these people talking and I was surprised, it added some perspective to me. They were like, these Freshmen, they are so different from us. We are not even in the same generation or time zone. The other dude was like, yes, Freshmen are always different, right? But then this dude was like, yes, you know they started having Snapchat in middle school? And I was like, thinking like, wow, that's true. Those little things are like so important to us, they are like so different I can't understand them. I don't know what it would be like to Snapchat in middle school. I was doing that in Junior year of high school where it was just like me and my friends doing shenanigans and stuff like that. Society is accelerating so fast with technology and everything operates and is working-so their experiences have been very different from mine. So I feel hesitant saying I see myself in them, like there's some things that obviously I do, but they're really different from me. I think that's terrifying and beautiful.

HD: I do have one more question actually. What is your hope for future Muslims students who come to Wake?

RN: Still pressure the university all the time. We've made some big progress. There's no limit to this-the boundaries being pushed. We were like at 10 when I came to Wake Forest for Muslim life, and now we're at 80. I'm not saying 100 is the max but we've made leaps and bounds. And also, I

forgot to mention we have a new Muslim Life Director, Naijla (Naijla R. Faizi), who is the best person imaginable for this position. She is an alum, she also worked at the university, she is really open minded, really open to different experiences, and is really aware of Muslims and what they feel and what they need., She's absolutely perfect for this job and I'm glad we have this position. Those types of things that happened, that progress, only happened because we worked tirelessly to work with the administration to get those changes. That means that Muslim students still need to pressure the university to get what they want. We made some very important foundational changes. I think the next group of people have to think a little bit more creatively than us in order to realize what they want. We had it a little bit easy because the things we needed were so basic, that it wasn't hard to think about what we needed. I can imagine the next group of people being a little bit more complacent with what they have and not realizing that not fully engaging with their Wake Forest experience is fundamentally less than many other students at Wake. So hopefully the next generation thinks creatively. I think that's important.

HD: Is there anything else you want to add or talk about?

RN: I don't know. I've talked about a lot of stuff.

HD: It's been great.

RN: I think that's enough.