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Did Somebody Say ‘Islamophobia’? An Essay on the American Liberal Understanding of Park51 and the 911-Event

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Among the American academic Left, the “polemical” works of Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou have presented points of conceptual discomfort—a discomfort brought about, perhaps, by the theorists’ communist political orientations. Interestingly, however, for all their politically “deviant” notoriety, both men do enjoy something of a fetishized celebrity status within the States—especially Žižek, who seems to be regarded as the charming “bad boy” public intellectual, disarmingly humorous yet dangerously Hegelian. Exotic critical cachet aside, though, in the States, the contemporary European “radicalisms” of Badiou and Žižek are not often explored with respect to their pertinence to American life; of course, such a claim might easily disintegrate into a debate concerning Cultural Studies (and its multivalent, alternatively-signifying counterparts). However, given the respective, fetishized appeals of these theorists, here, I hope to gesture toward a problematic that extends through and beyond contemporary American Studies: that is, regarding the

academic American tendency to keep discussion of contemporary American life/ culture/ politics in the exclusive hands of American “experts.” Certainly, the works of Badiou and Žižek hardly focus upon the United States, as such; nevertheless, here I plan to put them into conversation (rather than their customary isolation) toward productively informing American politics, society and life.

For the United States, Badiou and Žižek present pointed inquiries into those ideas which the American humanities have come to represent and defend—particularly since its rise against the conservative backlash of the 1980s. Some of Badiou’s and Žižek’s most disquieting claims include their respective oppositions to liberal multiculturalism, tolerance discourses and various, particularist “ethics” concerned with respecting the “Other.” And American discomfort is perhaps understandable here, as such dictums form the cornerstones of—not only the academic Left’s discourses, but—the political Left’s position. This is particularly true in recent liberal media coverage of the hotly-debated “Islamic Cultural Center” slated to be built near the ground zero of 911 in Manhattan.

In light of the contradictory press surrounding the building of this cultural center at 51 Park Avenue in Lower Manhattan, New York City, I will argue here that the positions of Badiou and Žižek are extremely valuable toward examining the seemingly benign, “tolerant” position held by the American liberal Left. Within this debate, the denigration of the conservative American Right has become popular in the mainstream media, painting them as the “extremists” of the home front—fanatical nationalists, as it were. At first blush, especially considering their forceful presence in certain media outlets, such indictments of the Right may seem obvious. Within this structure, the tolerant position of the Left is poised to appear as the sole logical, “moderate” stance to assume within the Park51 debate. However, I argue, this is a very dangerous construction, offering Americans a fallacious notion of choice: of course, one has the “freedom” to choose *either* a Right or Left-side stance with respect to the Park51 contention—one need not, necessarily, be in favor of its building—but, one concomitantly risks condemnation if one chooses to stand with the Right. Through Badiou and Žižek, I will argue that this inducement to choose a single camp is precisely what should be avoided. By deploying the very controversial stances for which Badiou and Žižek are known—the very stances, perhaps, which make so many Americans uncomfortable with their work—I seek to approach the Park51 dispute as an object worthy of thought, and a conception of the American liberal Left as something other than the image of “good” that it seems so intent on painting itself.

Noting intersections in Badiou’s *Ethics* (2001) and Žižek’s *The Ticklish Subject*,

(1999) I intend to activate some of the more uncomfortable controversies that they engage surrounding liberal multiculturalism and tolerance discourses. I begin with the assertion that 911 is a Badiouian event: breaking with the ordinary situation of American affairs, 911 is divorced from the sum total of America's structural namings, classifications, distributions and divisions (Badiou 2001: ix). Falling outside of ontology, then, 911 has no objective that can be proven, its 'happening' can only be proclaimed—our only knowledge with respect to the 911-event is that it did, in fact, occur. The American liberal media, however, persists in its evaluation of 911, naming the event an aberration, an act of "terrorism." As a Badiouian event, I will suggest that, post-911, the American liberal media's discourses of tolerance feed a dangerous process of forced choice which redoubles in social reality as Islamophobic violence. In so doing, I will argue, the attendant truth of the Badiouian 911-event is precluded.

With respect to the debated issue of Park51's significance, post-911, fidelity to the 911-event would constitute a "truth procedure": political action (e.g., intervention) beyond the pale of the possible, which would debunk the multiculturalist party line installed in the place of truth, following 911. However, by naming the event as "terrorism," activating a chain of symbolization that links the Muslim Other to the American Left, the Left denies the possibility for truth. Thus, although this truth insistently surfaces post-911, as so many indexical acts of "terrorism" within the States, no instruction or information can come of them within the media's structure of communication; rather, these occurrences of "terrorism" are merely filed as smaller, aberrant occasions of "evil" upon American soil. By translating the post-911 era as a time for increased tolerance for the Muslim Other, the Left strips social reality of its dangerous, but necessary, element of antagonism; likewise, by focusing its stance within the Park51 dispute upon a defensiveness of some acceptably "different" Other, the Left enacts a forced choice of tolerance. Post-911, this only preserves the victimized position of America and refuses to acknowledge the abysmal/abyssal nature of the neighbor.

In this article, I will adapt and expand upon Badiou and Žižek's converging viewpoints in order to fashion an examination of American liberalism's media presence and its self-conception as the force of "good" within the post-911, "Ground Zero Mosque," tolerance debate. Ultimately, I aim to show how the Left's structure of thought within and around the Park51 contention betrays a fundamental infidelity to the 911-event. Concluding that the proposed building of an Islamic cultural center near ground zero represents a new kind of problem that American, liberal media cannot meet head-on, I

propose that we begin to question the central role of tolerating the Other within discourses concerning American “rights.”

About two and one-half blocks from the former location of the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan, a new Muslim-owned, fifteen-story community center is slated for construction. The project was first introduced in a front-page article of the *New York Times* in early December of 2009, foregrounding the “bridge building” ambitions of the “Cordoba House” (as the Islamic center is to be named); after the article went to press, the proposed community center met with little to no mainstream objection, local or national.ⁱ Yet, by early May, 2010, the topic blossomed into a hotly debated issue infused with discourses of “tolerance.” Now, following the ninth anniversary of 9/11, the predominant stances with respect to this debate are equated with one’s position either for or against tolerance. Meanwhile, the internet blogosphere erupts with anti-Islam sentiments; countless debates ignite around televised, print, and internet news pieces. In late August and early September, mosques were burned in Tennessee while Ramadan services were flagrantly disrupted in California; in Florida, a Koran-burning event was threatened by Reverend Terry Jones for the ninth anniversary of 9/11. What is more, President Obama’s support for the Park51 founders’ rights to worship, voiced during an address given in mid-August of 2010, met with incredulous popular criticism—criticisms goaded by, liberal media sources suggest, the intense media presence of Right-wing personalities such as Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich.

By and large, the American mainstream liberal media continues to cite the American Right as the originary source for the “fear-mongering” and divisive sentiments that now surround the Park51 project (a.k.a., “Ground Zero Mosque,” a moniker coined by far-Right blog, [creeping sharia](#), which the Associated Press urged reporters to forego in a statement issued on August 19, 2010). Interestingly, however, both sides heavily tout the importance of tolerance; and of course, both Left and Right media sources wager their respective claims of understanding the stakes and future potentials embedded in the building of Park51. Nevertheless, ruled by an antagonistic Left/ Right dialectic, the media’s cynicism, paranoia and name-calling only muddy the waters of *each* sides’ interpretive hypotheses: in this instance, *of what*, exactly, should Americans be tolerant?—racial difference? Or, religious difference? For both the Left and the Right, a problematic, discursive gap looms large: an anxious absence regarding the *true* stakes of Imam Rauf’s Islamic Center. What would the building of Cordoba House *mean* for America—if anything? What potential, if any, does this building create for America’s future?

Much of America's mainstream media boldly claims that the Right's flagrant Islamophobic attitude conditions an increased risk for future terrorist attacks upon America: such "intolerance" toward Imam Rauf, his associates and their planned community center near ground zero will surely paint America as a country hateful of Islam—and a justified target for terrorist retaliation. According to the media, the Right's discourses even risk the endangerment of America's military troops, who, "experts" are quick to point out, remain peppered throughout the Muslim world. However, the liberal media's offensive on the Right's stance concerning the "Ground Zero Mosque," combined with its name-calling of Right-wing pundits and politicians, is a troubling issue that has gone unexamined by either the American mainstream media or the academy. And tragically, as both the liberal and conservative media attempt to domesticate the "Ground Zero Mosque" through so many competitive and socially-operative fields of knowledge, American citizens' understanding of the issue's root concern—the growing visibility of Muslims and Islam in America—becomes increasingly mired.

In light of the American liberal media's wounded attachment to the 911-event, and its recently-adopted hyper-"tolerance" of Muslim Others, one is perhaps left to wonder where "fear-mongering" actually originates. The liberal media urges Americans to fear the consequences of the conservative Right's "extremism," but not to fear Islam itself. Americans should "tolerate" the presence of an Islamic Cultural Center at ground zero, but not the Islamophobic attitude of the Right; "real" danger, according to the Left, lies within the ranks of American politics (on the Right, of course), but *not* within the Left's politicized rendition of Muslim identity.

According to Badiou's *Ethics*, an event creates the subject: the subject is induced by the truth of the event and stands as a localized incidence of the truth procedure (or, politics as intervention). This subject, according to Badiou, exceeds the individual, or the structurally named, classified actor whose interests only give rise to opinion, representations devoid of truth. However, nine years following the 911-event, the function of the American media has precluded the creation of the Badiouian subject. Yet, the Americans' unfaithfulness to the 911-event is *not* the result of the antagonistic dialectic that has ignited between the American Left and Right, as liberal media might purport. Rather, the projected, politically-interested American *cannot* be faithful to the traumatic event, and instead, reacts with a panic-response. The "translation" of the paradoxical event (as with the abyss of the neighbor vis-à-vis "tolerance") marks a disavowal by the Left. These translations, or interpretations, are nothing more than ontologizations of the event into

homologized knowledge, a more manageable and media-friendly form (Žižek 1999: 149-50). Therefore, interpretations of 911, as well as reactions to the Park51 controversy, are not borne of any *real* contest between Right and Left; rather, these reactions come from a failure to accept the truth of the event.

The Left's methods for disavowal and symbolization, then, are more virulent than the Right's, given their bold foreclosure of social antagonism. Consider how the liberal Left's current command of tolerance appears almost too well-timed: this stance *seems* to leave off attachments to the devastation of 911, in favor of global "progress"; principled "tolerance" certainly *appears* to abandon rhetoric of American victimization and speak—progressively, yet moderately—from a position advocating global order. However, when we then consider the American media's representation of the American liberal position—the amplified antagonism against the Right and simultaneous disavowal of social antagonism—the effect of this liberal stance demonstrates exactly the opposite of what it proposes to be the state of American affairs.

The Left's derogatory and personally-directed media relation to the Right undermines the "anti-essentialist" agenda that it seeks to deploy; its recent defensiveness paints a portrait of American arrogance and bigotry that mirrors the accused Right's. Combining discourses of tolerance with race relations against the Right, the contemporary current of American liberalism links *itself* with victimhood, poised as the protector of victimized Muslims in America. Juxtaposing this stance with the Right's Islamophobia, the Left amplifies its own position as a target of the same, intolerant enemy Other: the American conservative Right. However, within this structure, the hard lines that liberalism attempts to draw between victim and provocateur/ perpetrator, seem to blur rather disconcertingly.

What is more, for all the moralistic, spiritual supplementation provided by its tolerance discourse, the Left betrays its own fear of the very difference presented by the Islamic Cultural Center (Badiou 2001: 23). This is not a racial difference or a religious difference, *per se*; rather, this is a radically tragic and necessary difference whose very form is paradox—a Badiouian "truth"—to which America was first properly exposed with the falling of the World Trade Center Towers on September 11, 2001. Since this event, and particularly in light of the Islamic Cultural Center set for construction two blocks from ground zero, the Left has labored to disown its truth, seeking to define the disaster as a means by which America might improve its faculty for tolerance of Muslim Others—a justification for a newly-emphasized, institutionalized multiculturalism. By seeking to view

911 as nothing more than an aberration, an effect of “terrorism,” and simultaneously situating “change” as merely the necessity of increased American “tolerance,” the Left has foregone the truth of the event (and some important, indexical events, which I will soon explore) in favor of an essentialist view of the contemporary American situation: an effort that, effectively, seeks to keep things exactly as they are.

The mosque planned for construction near ground zero presents an insistent return of this persistently disavowed truth. As the force of the 911-event has failed to engender a perspective change in the coordinates of the contemporary American situation—disavowed and ontologized on the Left—Park51, in Deleuzian terms, presents the eternal return of the past within the present: a simultaneous short circuit in, and dangerous impetus for, the antagonistic, social/ political dialectic of Left and Right; a force that offers a road to real conceptual creation as political and social change, but which concurrently opens up potential for a reinstatement of old dialectics, amplified, perhaps, by the frustrating return of the discursive gap which haunts the Left’s interpretation of the event. In this way, both 911 and Park51 are cracks in the universe—media-amplified, literalized presentations of the abyss of the neighbor, an equally productive and destructive line of flight.

Liberal multiculturalist efforts to symbolize the Islamic community center do not render the originary 911-event containable; such liberal defenses of Park51 do not constitute adequate explanation for 911 or make it any easier for the American public to digest. Instead, the Left’s discourse of tolerant multiculturalism implicitly preserves 911 solely as terror-event. In this way, a virulent iniquity, between interpretation and the truth-force of the event, actually feeds media and social cycles of hatred, fear and confusion for which liberalism blames conservatism. Thus, the liberal media’s simultaneous Muslim-tolerant/ Right-intolerant discourses fuel further violent demonstrations of outrage within the American populous—a population of subjects supposed to believe, as Žižek might say, but possessive of *competing* beliefs. This environment of competing beliefs and implicit desires risks the eternal return of the force of the originary event—so many situations ignited by this very dialectic of competing beliefs, made tragically necessary by an elementary infidelity to the 911 truth-event.

Toward our understanding of this fundamental infidelity, it is perhaps helpful to consider an index—namely, the failed car bomb attempt nearby Times Square in Manhattan, which occurred on May 1st, 2010, perpetrated by Pakistani-American, Faisal Shahzad. Prior to the discovery of Shahzad’s identity, the American liberal news media

exploded with hypotheses and rumors, alleging that the suspect was a “white male in his forties.” Within the unsure thirty hour period before Shahzad’s definite identity was released, the news blogosphere erupted with Left-leaning civilian chatter, alleging that the perpetrator was a “Teahadi”—i.e., an anti-liberal-government member of the Republican “Tea Party” subset.ⁱⁱ However, solid leads quickly began to fill in the mystery of the suspect’s identity; beginning with the would-be car bomb’s Vehicle Identification Number and logs associated with Shahzad’s mobile phone (he had abandoned his prepaid mobile phone inside the vehicle), Shahzad was quickly traced as the attempt’s primary suspect. About two days following the discovery of the smoking SUV, Shahzad was apprehended onboard a flight bound for Pakistan from New York. Little time, interestingly, was given to the media for speculation.

Shortly thereafter, coverage of the perpetrator’s affirmed identity as a naturalized American citizen (with purported ties to Pakistan’s arm of Al-Qaeda) overtook the American news media, igniting an outrage. The American Right’s suspicions of Middle-Eastern terrorist ties had been affirmed; the liberal Left’s careful sidestepping of the terrorist question (and simultaneous, though unofficial, Tea Party blaming) had, of course, been deflated. In the midst of this media storm, mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg—a liberal Democrat who has recently claimed “Independent” status—made a curious statement to the Associated Press; on May 4th, 2010, he is quoted, saying: “[W]e will not tolerate any bias or backlash against Pakistani or Muslim New Yorkers.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Of course, on a simplistic level, Bloomberg’s mention of “backlash” and “bias” can be read as an inverted call to exactly that which he proposes to condemn: intolerance. However, given the media sensation surrounding Shahzad’s discovered identity, we may come to see something more within the structure of Bloomberg’s statement. In an interesting rhetorical sleight, Bloomberg simultaneously cites what he (and, presumably, his law enforcement associates) condones *and* condemns: “we will not *tolerate* bias or backlash [...]” may, perhaps, be reconfigured as, “we will not *tolerate intolerance*.” In his public injunction for tolerance, Bloomberg calls very obvious, intentional attention to *his* (and law enforcement’s) *own intolerance*—but, what does this suggest? If his interests resided *only* with promoting tolerance toward “moderate” or non-“radical” Muslims—differentiating between *these* Others and the “Radical Evil” Others—then, why this circuitous articulation? What Bloomberg demonstrates here is a compelling attempt to simultaneously moralize and penalize particular behaviors: behaviors which are beyond the pale of legislation/ institutionalization and are, in fact, protected under America’s

Constitutional First Amendment. What is more, these behaviors, and especially within a “melting pot” metropolis such as New York City, are generally understood as given—not standardizing, normative regulations, but rather—part of the mundane, everyday functioning of urban life.

Bloomberg’s simplistic, yet significant, statement betrays something more within the act—or even *idea*—of “tolerance”; something, perhaps, arguably apparent, but nevertheless crucial to the structure and function of liberalism’s “tolerance” of the Other. To speak so openly, in the form of public injunction, on this traditionally unspoken topic, is very telling. The discourse of tolerance that appears in the American liberal media today is one of mandate—a normative order which tells Americans how to relate to explicit, life-world experiences. This speaks to an embeddedness of “tolerance” within both the post-political, capitalist structure of America *and* its citizens’ immediate trust in social reality. This normative order relies upon a network of informal rules which tell Americans how to relate to explicit norms, how to relate to one another. So, much more interesting than whether or not tolerance discourse is actually a call (to the Right) to enact the very opposite, is the notion that “tolerance” refers to choice: one has a choice, to be tolerant or not, but within the American capitalist media’s structure of communication/ symbolization, one is automatically expected to make the choice in favor of tolerance.

The structure of this communication directly relates to the desire of the Left as the alleged force of “good” within the United States. The dictates of tolerance are less than legally obligatory; tolerance constructs a set of unwritten rules—or, as Hegel would call it, an ethical substance. The Left’s political correctness, as represented in the media, threatens to penalize for that which should not be legislated, undermining the virtual, unsymbolized sphere of simple, good manners. With such a move, then, the ultimate result of the American capitalist media’s intervention into the Park51 debate seems to yield the exact opposite of what it fundamentally seeks to achieve. Within the dispute, we are presented with a curious dialectic: a basic choice between anti-essentialism and essentialism or, tolerance and intolerance. Yet, there need not be a reductive choice here. This proposed problem of tolerance, as exemplified by Bloomberg, is a false one; there is nothing of depth here that is worthy, as Badiou would say, of being an object of thought. Difference is, simply, what there *is*; differences are part and parcel of the American state of affairs (Badiou 2001: 26). Thus, “appreciating” or “tolerating” difference constitutes anything but a progressive agenda for thinking the Other.

Badiou is a very useful theorist for thinking through the problem of “tolerance” with

respect to [cultural] “difference.” Tolerance’s celebration of difference, Badiou explains in his *Ethics*, only extends as far as the Other in question is recognizable as “good.” This “good,” however, is conditioned upon a similitude, a sameness, of the Other with oneself. That is to say, for the American liberal Left, an Other may be considered “good” under the condition that he/ she is willing to embrace the States’ “democratic, pro free-market” economy *and* is also in favor of “freedom of opinion, feminism [and the preservation of] the environment”; basically, a “different” Other is considered “good” inasmuch as he/ she is willing to accept differences in the same way that the American liberal Left does—*vis-à-vis* discourses of “tolerance,” “respect,” and so on (Badiou 2001: 24). As with the Bloomberg example, we are confronted here with a mirage of choice: of course the Other is entitled to be “different,” but positively-configured “difference” only exists insofar as it is practiced and discussed within a particular, functional paradigm. Within these integrationist, practical *and rhetorical* parameters, an Other may be considered “good” and therefore worthy of inclusion within capitalist media’s celebration of diversity.

Tolerance, in this way, becomes the moralizing stance—a force of “good,” in its own self-conception—to which one turns, panic-stricken, in the face of the ultimate abyss of the neighbor. Is it not so much easier to try to “understand” the Other, to contain him/ her, within so many symbolizing formulations? Is it not easier to claim *knowledge* where *truth* seems, essentially, impossible? Here I see a compelling convergence of Badiou with Žižek: the American liberal propensity for tolerance discourse highlights the post-political status of the United States; which is not to say that the States’ political/ social/ economic system serves to repress the political act (i.e., intervention) *as such*, but rather to completely realign it. The classical, political power-competition between parties and/ or classes has become a contest between so many “experts”—humanitarian multiculturalists, media analysts, journalists, embedded intelligence agents, and so on (Žižek 1999: 236). This reconfiguration of the political process by way of “anti-ideological” thought has thus, very basically, foregrounded the importance of negotiation toward the administration of social matters; in other words, what were once differences divided along ideological and/ or class-oriented lines have become so many (more!) “differences” between life-worlds, lifestyles, cultures (etc.), whose rights are endlessly negotiated in order to serve the needs of market forces within a postmodern, predominantly media-oriented society.

Here, then, the fundamental, pre-political element of *antagonism* inherent in any social collectivity is dangerously precluded. The structure of this ultraliberal post-political situation elides the function of the impossible with respect to the political act; in other

words, “politics” has become the deployment of only so many “good” ideas that are known to “work,” rather than constituting any actual intervention or system-altering change. As both Badiou and Žižek teach us, this is a rather dangerous structure; eliding social antagonism by working only within the realm of what is always already conditioned as “possible,” post-political, liberal American discourses manufacture a precise condition under which the subjective political figure *cannot* remain faithful to the truth of the 9/11-event. With respect to the debated issue of Park51’s significance for a post-9/11 America, fidelity to the event would constitute political action (e.g., intervention), beyond the pale of the possible, cracking the foundations of liberal multiculturalist agendas that have been instated (as a substitute for truth) following 9/11. Whether or not the building of Park51 would result from such a political action, I cannot say, but *that* debate would certainly not find “tolerance” as its ultimate ethical horizon.

What America is encountering with the proposal of the building of a mosque and cultural center near the site of ground zero is a new kind of problem that American, liberal capitalist media cannot meet head-on. While one can hardly argue that the endeavor for tolerance is entirely fruitless and misguided, one might begin to question the central role of tolerating the Other within discourses concerning American “rights.” The conflict regarding anti-essentialism and tolerance that the American Left has created surrounding the Park51 debate is, quite simply, a false conflict—and a false conflict, by the very domestic antagonisms that it conditions, which presents the ultimate success of its enemy: the conservative Right.

Consider the American media’s coverage of Islamic religious leader, Anwar al-Awlaki, through the 1990s and following the 9/11-event. Al-Awlaki was a well-known Imam of Dar Al-Hijrah, an Islamic cultural center located in Virginia, an outfit not much unlike Imam Rauf’s proposed Cordoba House. Liberal-oriented news outlets, such as *The Washington Post*, National Public Radio’s online news component, and the *New York Times* all reported on al-Awlaki and his mosque, touting his “bridge-building” and “moderate” interests, his desire to link East with West.^{iv} However, barely two years following 9/11, al-Awlaki abruptly left the United States for the Arabian Peninsula, where he is believed to reside today. Not long after 9/11, the FBI began investigating al-Awlaki’s suspected connection to the event; he was discovered to have provided spiritual guidance to two of the 9/11 hijackers prior to the event. Today, he is known to have played a similar role in nearly a dozen acts of terrorism within the United States over the last year—including Shahzad’s attempted car bombing near Times Square.

Since its earlier, misguided reports on al-Awlaki, the *New York Times* has tried to rectify their originary claims in a piece published on May 9th, 2010.^v The article's authors state that al-Awlaki simply "turned to evil"—that he, like so many Western Muslims (such as Shahzad), was simply and inexplicably "drawn" to violent extremism. Yet, the liberal media's tolerance-interested, decidedly a-political brand of identity politics, illustrated here in the *Times*, adamantly refuses to acknowledge its ignorance in the face of the impenetrable abyss of another person. Of course, as the twentieth century has repeatedly shown us, the irrational hatred of the Other has effected irreconcilable atrocities. Yet, has not this very logic, illustrated through the liberal media's adamant tolerance campaign which persistently follows a "good" and/ or "just" action, *also* find resonances within the twentieth century's totalitarian regimes? Does not this tolerant party line betray its own fault-lines in cases such as al-Awlaki's mistakenly-politicized identity, thereby justifying the allegedly "extremist" paranoia and cautiousness for which the conservative Right is accused?

The basic problem for the American Left should not be one of tolerating differences, as this modus operandi cannot contain the new configuration of fundamental, social antagonism that bubbles to the surface post-911, particularly when the question of building a mosque near ground zero arises. One cannot *know* whether or not all Muslims harbor anti-American sentiments, as the Right alleges, with any more certainty than one can claim that sanctioning an open doctrine of tolerance (in the absence of *knowing what it is* one claims to tolerate) is a wise decision. Yes, we should tolerate one another; but this tolerance should remain part of the ethical substance of civility, out from under the sway of legislation and institutionalization. To introduce the impossible to American Left (political/ media) discourses, it seems that post-911 American *does* need tolerance, but a tolerance without the Other—*without* a "defined" neighbor, an abyss into which one might hurl endless attempts at symbolization. Taking differences as a given, as Badiou asserts, this Other-less tolerance might force post-911 American political thought to function from the standpoint of the "true act"—that is to say, the act which creates the conditions of its own possibility. This would be the political act, then, that finds its ground not in opinion, the service of market forces, or policing, but in a necessary fidelity to the event, 911.

Throughout this article, I have presumed the categorization of 911 as a Badiouian "truth-event"—but what does such an assertion mean for America, especially in light of the Park51 controversy? And what *is* this truth, by my estimation? What I have been calling the 911-event need not necessarily transform itself into a stable movement of followers, all

unwearyingly engaged in fidelity. Akin to Badiou's account of May 1968, briefly outlined in the appendix to *Ethics*, 911 constitutes an event that continues, perhaps, to produce its truth (Badiou 2001: 122-130). Part of the problem encountered in naming the "truth" of 911 lies in, precisely, the compulsion to name the event, to call it an act of "terrorism," as so many Americans do. Rather, I think, like the abyssal Other (whom tolerance *also* ardently seeks to name), an acceptance of the tragic necessity of 911, of its inherently paradoxical form, is required toward encountering its truth. Further, by refusing to put these interpretive systems of 'naming' under erasure—as they constitute theoretical and interpretive symptomologies that attempt to deny truth—one might begin to note the outlines of 911's truth process.

Events, such as 911, only begin to look rational inasmuch as one subscribes to liberalism's facile *definitions* of tolerance, terrorism and so on; however, the "reason" that inheres to the logic of American liberalism constitutes a mere relation between irrational elements. As a living form of capital (both psychological *and* physical), liberal media—and its appended multiculturalism—will eventually die. Is the reality of post-political, liberal capitalism's terminal decline the truth that cracked the American universe on September 11th, 2001? Is the impending death of America's "freedom," in the form of private property/free markets (etc.), the truth that the liberal media (unwittingly) elides? Will this system collapse upon America, will the nation be exploited by the very principles that it has sought so fervently to promulgate? Unfortunately, with regard to 911 and the significance of Cordoba House, I fear that I cannot make an interpretive summa in the name of some system of truths; doing so, after all, would only make of my efforts the same "poor cousin of theology" that I perceive in liberal capitalist media's structure of communication (Kristeva 1983: 98). Rather, as Badiou might say, I know only that part of my subjectivation was forged in 911, and so my appreciation of the event can strive only for fidelity to it—however obscure, or incendiary, its truth.

i Blumenthal, Ralph & Sharaf Mowjood (2009) "Muslim Prayers and Renewal Near Ground Zero," *New York Times*, Dec. 9: A1.

ii For some examples of American liberal anti-Rightism, see commentary appended to the article available here: http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/05/the_botched_times_square_bomb_what_do_we_know.php#more. Also, see far-Right (anti-Park51) news blog, "Jihad Watch" for an interesting, alternative perspective on the Left's "Teahadi" allegations: <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2010/05/car-bomb-in-times-square-near-comedy-central.html>

iii See Associated Press: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20100504/ap_on_re_us/us_times_square_car_bomb. Accessed on July 29, 2010.

iv For my research concerning these earlier reports on al-Awlaki and his mosque in Virginia, I predominantly consulted LexisNexus, an internet research database to which my home institution funds a subscription. Perhaps due to the liberal media's realization of the error of its politicized, identitarian ways, all of these articles are rather difficult to find as open-source, online pages; through access to an online, subscription-based research database or by simply contacting certain periodicals for access to their archived materials will yield you the paper trail to which I refer above. Some of the newspapers and the specific issues in which you will find assertions of al-Awlaki's once-believed "moderate" position include (in no particular order): *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 2001; *Baltimore Sun*, October 28, 2001; *NPR*, Nov. 1, 2001; *Washington Post*, Mar. 3, 1995; *Washington Post*, Dec. 7, 2001; *Washington Post*, Nov. 18, 2001; *Washington Post*, Sept. 20, 2001.

v Shane, Scott & Souad Mekhennet (2010) "Imam's Path from Condemning Terror to Preaching Jihad," *New York Times*, May 9: A1

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