AN AMERICAN IN PARIS: INVESTIGATING THE DISCOURSE OF “NO-GO ZONES” THROUGH DOCUMENTARY FILM

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ABSTRACT

Despite retractions, inconsistent definitions, and insufficient evidence circulating around claims of “No-Go Zones” (NGZs)—the areas of Europe and the United States allegedly under localized Sharia law—belief in the phenomenon persists. This thesis investigates the validity of claims alleging NGZs in twelve neighborhoods of Paris (Barbès, Belleville/Ménilmontant, Curial Cambrai, Folie-Méricourt/St. Ambroise, La Chapelle, La Chapelle-Pajol, Le Marais, Porte d’Aubervilliers, Porte de Clichy, Porte de la Chapelle, Porte de Clignancourt, and Porte Saint-Denis) via observational and participatory documentary film. Through visual representation, interviews of residents of Paris, and relevant literature, this research (1) analyzes the existence of alleged NGZs using observable assertions within the claims, such as the inability for police or women to enter, and (2) demonstrates how immigration from Muslim-majority nations and Islamophobia in France and the US have shaped the discourse around NGZs. After two weeks of research in Paris, no observable support for the claims of NGZs was found. This thesis also analyzes the spread of misinformation in the context of partisan media, Group Threat Theory, the Backfire Effect, conspiracy ideation, and the historical fear in the US of immigrants and people of color with regard to crime and sexual misconduct.
I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.

- James Baldwin

* 

Many thanks to my thesis committee, Dr. Leticia Bode and Dr. J.R. Osborn.

A special thanks to those who kept me (mostly) sane: Lenika, Mariam and Yasheng.

And all my love to Jesse and Leia, always.

* 

In times of stress or moments of transition, sometimes it can feel like the whole world is closing in on you. When that happens, you should close your eyes, take a deep breath, listen to the people that love you when they give you advice, and remember what really matters. And if you have the ability to go to Paris, by all means, go to Paris.

- Leslie Knope
# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Understanding the Claims ........................................... 4  
1.2: The Method ............................................................. 7  
1.3: Why Is It Important? .................................................. 7  

## Chapter 2: “No-Go Zones” Contextualized

2.1: Muslim Immigration Versus Secularism in France .............. 10  
2.2: Muslim Immigration and Islamophobia in the US ............... 16  

## Chapter 3: [Wo]man with a Movie Camera

3.1: Documentary Modes as Methodology ................................ 24  
3.2: Collecting the Data ..................................................... 29  
3.3: The Editing Process .................................................... 31  
3.4: Concerns and Limitations .............................................. 32  

## Chapter 4: An American in Paris

4.1: A Muslim Majority ..................................................... 38  
4.2: A Lack of State Authority in the Form of Police or Military ... 40  
4.3: An Inability to Visually Document These Neighborhoods without Being Attacked ....................................................... 42  
4.4: Higher than Normal Levels of Sexual Harassment, Assault, and Crime ... 43  
4.5: A Lack of Women ........................................................ 45  
4.6: An Inability, as a Woman, to Use the Subway, Sidewalks, Cafés, Bars, or Restaurants ......................................................... 45  
4.7: An Inability to Enter without Harm or Harassment While Being a Blonde, White Woman, and Wearing a Skirt .......................... 46
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions..................................................47

5.1: 9/11 Rhetoric..................................................................................48

5.2: Othering Men of Color with Claims of Sexual Misconduct.............52

5.3: Group Threat and Racial Bias.....................................................56

5.4: Psychology of Conspiracy Ideation.............................................59

5.5: Partisan Influence.........................................................................62

5.6: Thoughts on the Use of Documentary Film................................69

Appendix: Film Abstract and Treatment............................................72

Bibliography.......................................................................................74
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In January of 2015, my flight from Mumbai touched down at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, France, twelve days after the mass shooting at the office of *Charlie Hebdo*. Getting dinner that night, I passed a large message on the side of a building near the Seine: “Nous sommes tous Charlie” (“We are all Charlie”). Beyond this very visible symbol of solidarity, as an outsider it was difficult to see much of a difference between the Paris I was in and the one I had visited two years prior. That is with the exception of the ubiquitous presence of state authority. French soldiers covered the grounds around the city’s most iconic landmarks, like the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre. Police officers stood watch in Le Marais, a neighborhood in the 2nd Arrondissement (administrative districts, of which Paris has 20), in front of synagogues and street corners. To say the least, Paris was on high alert. In November of the same year, this escalated to a two-year state of emergency when the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for the terrorist attacks on the Bataclan theater, Stade de France, and several cafés that took 130 lives, not counting the perpetrators (Osborne).

I stayed in Paris for one month, and as a non-Muslim, blonde, White woman, I never felt unsafe. To some readers, that sentence might seem full of unnecessary qualifiers, with an unsurprising conclusion. To others, it probably sounds nearly impossible. One of the reasons for this is the debate surrounding the growing number of Muslim immigrants and refugees in Paris, and persistent claims of what are called “No-Go Zones.” To introduce them briefly, “No-Go Zones,” or NGZs as I will primarily refer to them, are neighborhoods throughout Paris, as well as Europe and the United States, where Conservative pundits claim state control has been replaced by Sharia law—areas in which women and non-Muslims should not or cannot go, and are marked by alleged
relatively higher rates of violence, rape, and harassment, stemming from their dense Muslim populations.

In 2015, I got off of the RER train that brought me from the airport to the Gare du Nord Station in the 10th Arrondissement. I spent my time acting like a tourist on both the Left and Right Banks (given their names in relation to the west and east sides of the Seine, respectively), walking the streets between cafés and apartments at night, traveling beyond the Boulevard Périphérique (the circular highway that separates central Paris and its suburbs), and, after my emergency appendectomy in the middle of my trip, primarily walking circles around Le Marais, where I was staying in a small apartment. The reason I list all of these quite typical (mostly) activities, is that, according to the writing of people like Editor-in-Chief of Breitbart News London Raheem Kassam (Kassam), and author Pamela Geller (“You Searched for No-Go Zones”), among others, I should not have been able to do them, or at the very least, with comfort, given my religion, hair color, race, and gender.

These experiences formed the basis of my confusion when first hearing about NGZs from a tweet posted by Geller on February 16, 2017. Under a map with red callouts to neighborhoods of Paris read the caption, “PARIS RIOTS: No-go zones expand as violence spreads ACROSS FRANCE…” (@PamelaGeller). While most of the neighborhoods indicated were in the banlieues (suburbs), three were within the city center: Barbès, Ménilmontant, and Le Marais. After a quick Google search of the term “No-Go Zone,” I learned that NGZs have been in question since Daniel Pipes coined the term in 2006, despite his retraction in 2015, and those made by many others whom have made similar claims (Pipes). Former UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage
described the issue as a “debate we shouldn’t even be having,” not because the claims are false, but because he asserts that they are so obviously true (qtd. in Kassam 16).

However, the vast majority of outlets discredited the claims, including a *BuzzFeed* article that curated a list of response tweets from people in the highlighted neighborhoods containing photos of their riot-free streets (Kirschen and Krishna). The only media outlets that I was able to find that continued to assert the presence of NGZs were Conservative-leaning, such as Fox News, *Breitbart*, and the Gatestone Institute. While this fact alone did not preclude truth to the claims, the argument suffered from what I believed to be a lack of credible evidence. Each source cited another within a small group of “experts” on the topic, and none of them had what I was looking for: visuals.

Kassam is referenced often throughout this thesis for two reasons. First, while there are many people making NGZ claims, there are few that seem to be bringing anything new to the conversation. Pundits on Fox News have almost identical talking points and rarely reference their sources. However, in late 2017, Kassam released what he alleges is a tell-all book on NGZs, and therefore, provided me with the most comprehensive set of claims to analyze. Secondly, he is the only person I could find making claims based on what he said was personal experience within the alleged NGZs. Therefore, his methodology—go there, observe what happened, relay it to the people that were not there—was the only one I was able to address. However, he too provided no visual evidence. He insisted frequently throughout his book, as is discussed below, that collecting visuals was impossible, and yet he has been portrayed by Conservative media as an expert because of his methodology.
This was the starting point at which the rest of my thesis unfolded. Evidence, according to researchers Amann and Knorr Cetina, is “built upon the difference between what one can see and what one may think, or have heard, or believe” (134). I determined that what I could add to the NGZ conversation was to expand on Kassam’s methodology of going to the alleged NGZs in Paris, and attempt to document the areas in question. “Images are potent persuaders” (Penn-Edwards 266), so decided to return to Paris with my camera. While, visuals, of course, can be manipulated to convey a particular rhetorical frame, a video of a blonde, White woman in an alleged NGZ is more difficult to refute than a paragraph saying she went to one. Here entered my core methodology: a short participatory documentary film utilizing observational footage, conducted in Paris, France.

1.1: Understanding the Claims

In Paris, I assessed twelve neighborhoods (Barbès, Belleville/Ménilmontant, Curial Cambrai, Folie-Méricourt/St. Ambroise, La Chapelle, La Chapelle-Pajol, Le Marais, Porte d’Aubervilliers, Porte de Clichy, Porte de la Chapelle, Porte de Clignancourt, and Porte Saint-Denis) for signs of the following definitions of NGZs. In his book, Kassam lays out a foundation of the term:

An area in which the likelihood of being attacked, accosted, or otherwise abused on the basis of your appearance, or the bigotry of locals, is higher on average than elsewhere in the city or country in question. A ‘No Go Zone’ may refer to an area in which police require authorization or acceptance from a religious figure or community leader before entering, or indeed where the rule of law has either broken down or been supplanted by a foreign set of rules. (34)

Relating to the “no-go” in NGZ, Geller says, “Yet while it may be true that there aren’t specific areas of France where non-Muslims are prevented from entering, there are many that, if they do enter, they must conform to Islamic norms” (Geller, “Inside
France’s”). Of the lack of state control, Dr. Fabrice Balance of the Washington Institute claims NGZs are areas “where police will not step foot, where the authority of state is completely absent, where mini Islamic states have been formed” (qtd. in Kassam 31).

Kassam walks back the “no-go” aspect at certain points by saying, “If you look like me, or rather, if you don’t look like a white blonde woman or an undercover police officer—you can indeed go there” (45). This notion of a “white blonde woman” is brought up several times in his book and echoed by Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, a politician in France’s National Front party: “I am very well known … But if I were a normal citizen and being a young white woman in a skirt, to be sure, I would be harassed, or physically [assaulted]” (Kassam 148-149, change in original). Kassam also describes, “No Go Zones are not just physical localities in the suburbs of major European cities. They’re also a mindset. A mindset of ghettoization and, curiously, a mindset of both supremacy and victimhood that occurs concurrently in minority and majority populations” (267).

Regarding Kassam’s lack of visual evidence, Farage said of critics’ inevitable question, “‘If these places are really ‘No Go’, how come you were able to go there?’ … Raheem timed his visits carefully, didn’t seek to antagonize locals with video cameras…” (qtd. in Kassam 15). Kassam elaborated later in his book, “I was constantly advised during my visits to No Go Zones across Europe not to take pictures. ‘They don’t like it, they will come after you,’ one Parisian guide warned me” (51). Perhaps the most drastic claims were made by Yves Mamou:

There are several hundred square meters of pavement abandoned to men alone; women are no longer considered entitled to be there. Cafés, bars and restaurants are prohibited to them, as are the sidewalks, the subway station and the public squares. For more than a year, the Chapelle-Pajol district (10th-18th arrondissements) has completely changed its face: groups of dozens of lone men, street vendors, aliens, migrants and smugglers harass women and hold the streets.
From these claims I developed two main research questions:

RQ1: Is there observable truth to any of the claims made about NGZs in Paris?

RQ2: As a blonde, White woman, what is the experience traveling to these neighborhoods?

Based upon my experience in Paris in 2012 and 2015, and the literature that is discussed in Chapter 2, I hypothesized that NGZs in central Paris, as currently defined, did not exist (H1), and that, as a blonde, White woman, I would not experience increased hardship within the alleged NGZs (H2). This was supported by the results gathered during my on-the-ground research, as discussed in Chapter 4, and seen in the resulting documentary, which can be found on Digital Georgetown (bit.ly/parisNGZthesis, case sensitive) and at www.hollykoch.com/paris-ngzs.

As I began to address my hypothesis, I first wondered how I would prove a negative. This, however, was the wrong question. My concern was not with disproving NGZs “beyond a shadow of a doubt,” as Kassam said he did in the affirmative (30); it was with analyzing the theoretical framework going into the assertion of their existence. To do this, I distilled the definitions and claims, into the following (mostly) observable factors to analyze the alleged NGZs, as well as other neighborhoods I visited:

1. A Muslim-majority
2. Higher than normal levels of sexual harassment, sexual or physical assault, and crime
3. A lack of state authority in the form of police or military
4. An inability to visually document these neighborhoods without being attacked
5. A lack of women

6. An inability, as a woman, to use the subway, sidewalks, cafés, bars, or restaurants

7. An inability to enter without harm or harassment while being a blonde, White woman, and wearing a skirt

As I am sure is evident, some of these were easier to observe than others.

1.2: The Method

The primary method of research for this thesis is documentary film, using observational and participatory modes to gather data. Observational footage was collected to document my experience in these areas as authentically as possible (Penn-Edwards 271). The purpose of the film is to represent these areas as they were experienced, not to insist that they are without problems. This thesis also explores the participatory documentary mode. As a non-Muslim, blonde, White woman, I identify with several categories that have been claimed to be unwelcome in these neighborhoods. With the aforementioned emphasis given to “blonde White women” as especially problematic within NGZ claims, my experience was well-suited to investigate the alleged Paris NGZs. In addition to these modes, I also interviewed residents of Paris.

1.3: Why Is It Important?

NGZ claims are rarely discussed solely in terms of the implications on the countries that are said to contain them; they seem to primarily be used to engender fear of the potential spread to the United States, and to assert that stemming immigration and refugee resettlement from Muslim-majority nations is necessary to prevent it. Therefore, the discourse surrounding alleged NGZs in Paris can be used as a lens to look at
immigration and Islamophobic discourse in the US, as well as the potential implications of the rhetoric used.

While one interviewee described NGZs as “the silliness from Fox News and Breitbart”, if Americans, including the President of the United States (Chadwick and Dallison), believe in them, the implications of the spread of misinformation regarding these areas makes the veracity of the claims worth investigating. A 2016 study by PRRI and Brookings found that 83% of Trump supporters believe Islam to be irreconcilable with American values and its “way of life” (Cooper et al. 20). With the population of Muslims in America is also increasing, as understood through ideas such as Group Threat Theory and Self-Interest Theory (see Section 5.3). The conflation of Islam and terrorism within American discourse, such as in the rhetoric used during the 2016 US Presidential Election, has added to the othering of Muslim Americans (see Section 2.2).

I have two primary concerns about the proliferation of NGZ claims. I posit (1) that NGZ claims stoke fear by using rhetoric paralleled with the War on Terror that followed the events of 9/11 (Section 5.1). Fear, especially that evoked by 9/11, has been found to lead to a resistance to immigration (Section 5.3), a solidifying of false information (Section 2.7), and naturalized violence (Section 5.1) leading to hate crimes toward Muslims (Section 2.2). I also posit (2) that NGZ claims have gained prominence via the “Republican Transmission Belt”, which amplifies unsubstantiated claims made by the Conservative opinion media into mainstream discourse (Section 5.5). The elevation of claims of NGZs in Paris into American discourse, including the talking points of President Trump, suggests that the claims will be difficult to unrest from his followers.
because of his prominence within the Conservative in-group (Section 5.5), the insistence that the mainstream media is covering up evidence of the claims (see Section 5.4), and that the media echo chamber leads to reinforcement of claims (see Section 5.5).

Therefore, investigating claims of NGZs in Paris is important to protect American discourse from the spread of misinformation and the implications the claims have on Muslim Americans.
Investigating the discourse around NGZs requires an interdisciplinary approach. The claims themselves draw upon issues of human migration (e.g. immigration from Muslim-majority nations to France and the US, Section 2.1) and religious intolerance (e.g. the fear that Islam is irreconcilable with the West, Section 2.2). The following chapter uses the research relevant to these topics to explore the implications of NGZ claims on Muslim communities in the US.

2.1: Muslim Immigration Versus Secularism in France

If I was going to travel to Paris to investigate the veracity of NGZ claims, I first needed to build an understanding of the sociopolitical landscape that I would be observing. By researching the history of immigration to France, tensions between Islam and French secularism, and the strain of the influx of refugees on the state’s infrastructure, I was able to contextualize the claims themselves, as well as the interviews I conducted with Paris residents.

*Immigrants and Refugees in France*

Looking to rebuild after WWII, France opened its borders to low-skilled migrant labor from nearby European and North African countries from the late 1940s to the early 1970s (Hamilton et al.) The arrangement was thought to be temporary, but many chose to stay, obtain citizenship, and send for family members from their countries of origin (Bleich). During this period, Algeria, France’s last colony, won its independence at the end of the long and devastating Algerian War in 1962 (Hitchens). Free movement between the two countries was reestablished, and many Algerians immigrated to France (Hamilton et al.). This catalyst for multiculturalism remains a point of contention among
White native French citizens, many of whom still believe these immigrants and their French-born progeny to be outsiders (Bleich). Interviewee responses to this issue are discussed in Chapter 4.

While immigrants to France ended up all over the country, a large portion of them headed to Paris, where they were often relegated to low-income areas of the city’s suburbs (Packer). Many of these neighborhoods—characterized by high unemployment and large, degraded public housing—were deemed Zones Urbaines Sensibles, or Sensitive Urban Zones (SUZs), by the French government (Géoportail). It was these areas that Daniel Pipes began calling NGZs in 2006, deeming them to be outside of the state’s control and dangerous due to their Muslim inhabitants. While he walked back the severity of the claims in 2015, the characterization of the areas was long beyond his control (Pipes), as evidenced by Kassam’s continued use of the claim after the retraction (33). However, I have found no support for the claim that France has ever claimed the interchangeability of ZUSs and NGZs. According to the government’s list, the alleged NGZs of Porte Saint-Denis, Porte de Clichy, Porte d’Aubervilliers, Curial Cambrai, and Belleville/ Ménilmontant are considered ZUSs.

Contributing to the population of low-income areas has been the influx of refugees into the country. After the closing of the Jungle, a large refugee camp in Calais, in October of 2016, its roughly 8,000 residents were dispersed, with many of them heading to the capital (Chrisafis). While the city’s mayor, Anne Hidalgo, insisted, “Paris will not stand by and do nothing while the Mediterranean becomes a graveyard” (Collins), and President Macron declared, “I do not want to have men and women on the streets, in the woods, by the end of [2017]” (qtd. in Brown), refugee assistance has
remained slow and problematic. Despite the opening of service and administrative processing centers, where refugees are provided access to food, water, medical aid, and asylum applications, keeping up with the constant flow of asylum seekers has tested the limits of the established infrastructure. Most centers limit stays to ten days and only allow for approximately 400 people (Brown). With around 80 new arrivals a day (Samuel), people are quickly turned away and must resort to “sleeping under road bridges and on the side of the road with almost no access to water, sanitation and food” (Chrisafis). In November of 2016, a camp of 4,000 asylum seekers that had formed near the bridge of the Stalingrad Metro (contributing to claims of the alleged La Chapelle-Pajol NGZ) was broken up by police, with officials assuring individuals that they would be given housing (Willsher). Over 30 of these police removals of large groups of refugees have taken place in Paris since 2015, in an attempt to disperse them from the city center (Chrisafis). Some of the displaced are bused to the longer-term shelters outside of Paris (Sansom). Those in long-term housing can wait weeks or months for their asylum appointment, and risk eviction due to strict rules including curfew or visiting policies, which are rarely communicated in an asylum seeker’s native language (Brown). The city makes an effort to provide housing to people on the street during particularly cold weather, putting them up in makeshift shelters predominantly in gymnasiums (Chrisafis), a point of contention for some native French (Sansom).

In September of 2017, Utopia56, a refugee aid organization working with the city of Paris on their aid center in Porte de la Chapelle, pulled out of the project, citing the city’s handling of the administrative process. They said, “The administrative treatment of the refugees with the center is anything but humanitarian and devalues the refugees,”
referencing the Dublin Agreement requiring asylum seekers to apply for status in the country where they first arrived, and the 120-day limit on applying for asylum, beyond which individuals face deportation (qtd. in Doezema).

Laicité

France is said to balance upon the three pillars of its motto: liberté, égalité, and fraternité (liberty, equality, and fraternity, respectively). To achieve these, the state puts the Republic over the individual: “The bond of citizenship would be eroded if society were fragmented into a collection of identity groups seeking recognition of their differences instead of working toward the public interest” (Laborde 720). To this end, lawmakers passed legislation in 1978 banning the collection of race-based data (Bleich). As the Muslim population grew in France, many believed Islam to be in conflict with the nation’s laicité, or secularism, going so far as to call it “alien and potentially both culturally and politically inassimilable” (Tonneau). Unlike secularism in the United States aimed at protecting religion from the state, French secularism seeks to protect the state from religious influence (Packer). That Islam is considered a threat to France’s laicité has been the source of great controversy, encapsulated in the argument over the burqa ban.

In an unprecedented move, French prime minister François Fillon banned women from wearing the burqa—a full-body Muslim garment which covers the face—in public places in 2011 (Weaver). While French Muslims took this as an act of “gratuitous hostility” (Packer), the European court of human rights upheld the decision, supporting what it identified as the nation’s attempt to foster assimilation (Weaver). The hijab, or
Muslim headscarf, is still legal in public spaces, but is cause for concern among many, such as in Kassam’s NGZ claims (49) and among my interviewees (see Chapter 4).

A complication of the integration of Muslim immigrants and citizens has been the conflation of followers of Islam with radicalized Muslims whom have carried out terrorist attacks in France during the last several years. The nation has seen a series of vehicle attacks on pedestrians, such as in Nantes (2014), Dijon (2014), Valence (2016), and Nice (2016); the targeting of soldiers and police, such as in Toulouse (2012), Montauban (2012), Joué-lès-Tours (2014), Nice (2015), Valence (2016), Maganville (2016) and Paris (2013, 2015, 2016); and has experienced mass shootings and bombings, such as the February 2015 attack at the Paris offices of Charlie Hebdo, and the near simultaneous attacks in November 2015 on the Bataclan theater, Stade de France, and several cafés, in Paris (“Timeline: Attacks in France”). Despite an end to the two-year state of emergency (Osborne), the country maintains a strong military and police presence in its capital, especially in the higher tourist areas, as discussed in Chapter 4. These incidents have contributed to several outcomes. After the attack at Charlie Hebdo in early 2015, hate crimes against Muslims and mosques tripled in France over the course of the year. Crimes against individuals included harassment and assault, with women allegedly being singled out. Mosques were vandalized with graffiti, arson, and pig heads (Chazan).

According to an aid worker with Utopia56, “the words ‘refugees’ and ‘terrorists’ [have] become synonymous in Europe” (qtd. in Brown). To combat the treatment that has been said to have followed this conflation, immigrants, refugees, and their allies have taken to the streets over recent years to decry the mistreatment they claimed by French citizens and police (Bulman). According to a study conducted by Open Society in 2009
citing the presence of racial profiling, ethnic Arabs were 7.8 times and Blacks were six times more likely to be stopped by police than Whites (28). Protests have also focused on the physical and sexual abuse of immigrants living on the streets by French citizens (Bulman). Possibly the most destructive demonstration took place in 2005 when protesters participated across 300 cities, with 4,000 people arrested, 125 police officers injured (Open Society 15), 10,000 cars burned, 300 buildings set on fire, and a state of national security invoked (“Mass Rally in Paris”). The demonstrations were prompted by the deaths of two teenagers in pursuit by police officers (“Mass Rally in Paris”). Demonstrations in 2017 were motivated by the alleged rape of a 22-year-old man by police in a suburb of Paris, wherein tear gas was deployed on protesters. A recent protest took place in March of 2018 during my observation period in Paris, involving thousands of participants (Bulman).

The attacks have also been used as fodder for France’s political Right. As a candidate in the 2017 French Presidential Election, National Front (FN) leader Marine Le Pen was credited with pushing the nation’s rhetoric to the Right (Nossiter, “As France’s Towns Wither”). She has led the party since 2011 (Melander), when she took over for her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party’s co-founder, and a convicted Holocaust denier (McAuley). As Adam Nossiter reported, Marine Le Pen “made a visceral promise to voters: to protect not just France, but Frenchness” (“As France’s Towns Wither”). She stoked fear in her audience, referring to immigrants as “interlopers,” said they wanted to turn France into a “giant squat,” and insisted that “the third-world demographic push is accelerating.” Throughout her campaign she promised, if elected, she would halt immigration into France, deport those whom had entered illegally, and end medical
assistance to immigrants (Nossiter, “Marine Le Pen Leads”). Despite her higher than expected performance during the election, Le Pen received just under 34% of the run-off vote against Emmanuel Macron, and secured only eight of 577 parliament seats for the FN (McAuley). Le Pen is now facing further scrutiny with charges of circulating “violent messages that incite terrorism or pornography or seriously harm human dignity,” due to photographs she tweeted in condemnation of ISIS-committed atrocities. Her actions are punishable with up to three years in prison or a €75,000 fine (France-Presse). Because of the controversy surrounding FN and the Le Pen family, the decision of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in the US to invite Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the granddaughter and niece of the aforementioned Le Pens, to speak at its 2018 event, “dismayed some establishment Republicans, who were not eager to associate with a political faction linked to the dark remnants of European fascism” (Tharoor).

2.2: Muslim Immigration and Islamophobia in the US

After the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and their related coverage, American search queries showed a 100% increase in opposition to Syrian refugees entering the United States (Soltas and Stephens-Davidowitz). The work by Soltas and Stephens-Davidowitz showed a positive correlation between negative Muslim-related searches and hate crimes against Muslims. Within that year there was also a resurgence of NGZ discourse by pundits, such as Steve Emerson (“Europe is finished”). Building off of the concerns of the terrorist attacks, they warned of the alleged Sharia-controlled areas that were taking over Europe and would make their way to the US. By discussing these issues in tandem, they linked NGZs with terrorism in the American discourse. Therefore, it is possible that NGZ discourse will lead to an increase in hate crimes against Muslim
Americans. This highlights the importance of investigating the claims, as well as demonstrates repercussions of the rhetoric on Muslim communities in the US.

*Muslims in America*

Within the melting pot that is American demographics, the proportion of Muslims is growing. In 2007, there were an estimated 2.35 million Muslims, increasing to 3.45 million over the next ten years (Mohamed), 58% of whom (over the age of 18) were born outside of the United States (“U.S. Muslims Concerned”). By 2040, it has been predicted, Islam will be the second most practiced religion, outsizing Judaism. It is also estimated that in 2050, the American Muslim population will have grown to 8.1 million, or 2.1% of the total population (Mohamed). Reasons for this growth include higher fertility rates and continued international push factors leading to migration (Mohamed).

Like France, the US has seen its share of terrorist attacks carried out by individuals or groups professing to be of the Muslim faith. Since the attack in New York City on September 11, 2001, there have been shootings in Los Angeles, CA (2002), Little Rock, AK (2009), Fort Hood, TX (2009), Chattanooga, TN (2015), San Bernardino, CA (2015), and Orlando, FL (2016). Other attacks include a bombing in Boston, MA (2013) and a vehicle attack in New York City, NY (2017) (Jacobs). Also similar to France, these incidents have led to a difficulty among Americans as a whole to separate Muslim Americans from the radicalized individuals who share their faith (Cooper et al.).

A recent example of this tension has been the implementation and rhetoric of Donald Trump’s Muslim ban. In an alleged attempt to stymie terrorism, the Trump administration sought to drastically reduce the number of Muslims able to enter the country. On December 7, 2015, during the 2016 US Presidential Election, Trump read a
statement, to ample applause, at a campaign rally in South Carolina stating, “Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what the hell is going on” (Johnson). This announcement was made just weeks after he told an NBC reporter at a campaign event in Iowa that he “would certainly implement” a database of Muslims in the United States (Hillyard). These proposed policies shocked many, including his fellow candidates and his future colleagues (Watkins), with Jeb Bush taking to Twitter to say that they were “not serious” (@JebBush). However, on January 27, 2017, Trump signed Executive Order 13769, named the “Protection Of The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States,” which halted the entry of refugees for 120 days, Syrian refugees indefinitely, and individuals from the predominantly Muslim nations of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen, for 90 days (Shear and Cooper). Trump faced immediate backlash from protestors, leading politicians, and federal judges, the last of whom ruled against the deportation of valid visa holders (Collingwood et al. 5).

After a second version of the law was shot down, the Trump Administration released a third iteration (3.0), still in place at the time of this writing, which now includes North Korea and Venezuela in its list of countries, and made the restrictions “essentially indefinite” (Laughland). While a three-judge panel in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals deemed that 3.0 exceeded presidential authority and failed to justify the danger posed by individuals from the named countries, the US Supreme Court has allowed the ban to take effect until it hears the case in April of this year to determine whether it has violated the Establishment Clause of the Constitution (de Vogue).
Along with a 37% drop in the resettlement of refugees in the United States in the 2017 fiscal year, compared to the previous year (Zong et al.), the ban has caused other concerns. Peter Cook, a spokesman for the Pentagon in 2015, warned, “Anything that bolsters ISIL’s narrative and pits the United States against the Muslim faith is certainly not only contrary to our values but contrary to our national security” (Kopan and Bradner). The Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center cautioned that the ban was, “driving online chatter among white supremacists and [was] likely to inspire violence against Muslims.” They also highlighted that the Ku Klux Klan was using Trump’s rhetoric in their outreach efforts and that White supremacist websites were upgrading their servers to handle increased traffic due, in part, to Trump (Schreckinger).

Islamophobia in America

Kassam describes Islamophobia as “a funny old word” used by Liberals and created by theocratic fundamentalists “to shield political Islam from criticism” (152). However, mistrust of the term is not as simple as he suggests, with prominent Liberal thinkers such as anti-theist Sam Harris describing its use “as a means of shutting down conversation [on] important topics” (qtd. in Basu, change in original). Regardless of the controversy surrounding the word, there has been a significant increase in hate crimes against Muslim Americans and mosques (Kishi). While Kassam describes these incidents as “endless scare stories” and that many are “demonstrably fake” (20), the number of aggravated and simple assaults rose from 91 in 2015 to 127 in 2016, higher than the peak in 2001 after 9/11 of 93. There has also been a rise in property damage from 70 (2015) to 92 (2016) (Kishi). Forty-eight percent of Pew survey respondents said they experienced at least one incident of discrimination within the previous 12 months, up from 43% in
2011, and 40% in 2007 (“U.S. Muslims Concerned”). According to interviews conducted by Soltas and Stephens-Davidowitz, this has left many Muslim Americans with a “constant sense of fear and paranoia,” with some buying Mace spray and ordering dashboard cameras after incidents of harassment while driving.

During the 2016 US Presidential Election, many Muslim Americans were disappointed by the rhetoric being used by both candidates. Muslims were only discussed in relation to radicalization or their responsibility to help root out terrorist threats (Hassan). In June of 2016, former President Bill Clinton said in a campaign speech for candidate Hillary Clinton, “If you are a Muslim, and you love America and freedom and you hate terror, stay here and help us win and make the future together.” Many felt that, while likely well-intentioned, this was putting implicit conditions on their citizenship and asking them to prove their loyalty (Kai-Hwa Wang). In October of the same year, at a presidential debate in Missouri, Trump reiterated his stance that Muslim Americans needed to report radical behavior. He insisted that neighbors had seen explosives in the apartment of the of the San Bernardino shooters prior to the attack, but had said nothing to authorities, an unverified claim. This echoed a similar statement made after the mass shooting in Orlando, Florida when Trump said, “For some reason, the Muslim community does not report people like this” (Hassan). However, according to a study by the Muslim Public Affairs Council, last updated in 2012, “Muslim communities helped U.S. security officials to prevent nearly 2 out of every 5 Al-Qaeda plots threatening the United States since 9/11” (“Data on Post-9/11” 3). Hillary Clinton’s response was seen as unsatisfactory when she said, the US needs “to work with American Muslim communities who are on the front lines to identify and prevent attacks” (Mangla). Some
took the stance that, “Clinton’s rhetoric only serves to heap further blame and suspicion on a community that is already suffering from heightened anti-Muslim bias” (Mangla), with one Twitter user saying, “American-Muslims are not on the front lines of terrorism. Do I ask you to stop the KKK?” (@imankzfilm).

The following is a short summary of results relevant to this research from a 2017 Pew survey of 1,001 Muslim adults in the US (“U.S. Muslims Concerned”). Fifty percent of respondents said being Muslim in the US has become more difficult in recent years (44% say not much has changed), 62% believe Americans do not see Islam as part of mainstream society, and 75% say there is “a lot” of discrimination against Muslim Americans. Respondents who said it was becoming more difficult to be Muslim in America cited “Muslim extremists in other countries, misconceptions and stereotyping about Islam among the US public, and Trump’s attitude and policies toward Muslims.”

Sixty-four percent say they are dissatisfied with the direction the US is currently moving, 74% believe Donald Trump is unfriendly toward Muslims in the US, and 68% say he makes them feel worried. Across the three iterations of this survey over the last decade, at least 50% of respondents have consistently responded that they find Muslim-related media coverage to be unfair. Despite the beliefs of 57% of Americans, 79% of Republicans, 83% of Trump supporters, and 42% of Democrats, that “the values of Islam are at odds with American values and way of life” (Cooper et al.), 65% of Muslims do not believe there is a “natural conflict between the teachings of Islam and democracy” (“U.S. Muslims Concerned”). Additionally, 64% of Muslim Americans “say there is more than one true way to interpret the faith’s teachings,” and 52% say “Islam must be reinterpreted to reflect contemporary issues” (Podrebarac Siupac). Eighty-nine percent of
Muslims report being “both proud to be American and proud to be Muslim” and 70% believe success in America comes to those who work hard (emphasis in original). To survey respondents the top five “essential” aspects of being a Muslim included believing in God (85%), loving the prophet Muhammad (72%), working for justice and equality in society (69%), working to protect the environment (62%), and following the Quran and Sunnah (59%). According to responses over the last ten years, “American Muslims are growing more religiously and socially liberal,” with acceptance for social issues like homosexuality nearly doubling. Sixty-six percent identify as, or lean toward, the Democratic party, with only 13% identifying, or leaning toward, the Republican Party (“U.S. Muslims Concerned”).

Another point worth noting is that in response to whether the targeting and killing of civilians to further a political, social, or religious cause was justified, 76% said never, 8% rarely, 7% sometimes, and 5% often (“U.S. Muslims Concerned”). While Muslim sentiment polling has been conducted by others, cited by many, and used to justify accusations that Islam is incompatible with the West, such as by Kassam (20), context is important when understanding what respondents were thinking when answering the question, and how different their answers may or may not have been from the rest of American respondents. Regarding the Pew survey, 5% of Americans as a whole said the above referenced violence against civilians was often justified (a statistically insignificant difference, according to the analysis) and only 59% said it was never justified (17 points lower than Muslim American respondents). While any percentage above zero for this question has the potential to be manipulated to cause fear of terrorism, when respondents...
(Muslims and Americans as a whole) were asked to clarify, they cited military-related incidents or self-defense ("U.S. Muslims Concerned").
3.1: Documentary Modes as Methodology

After parsing through the claims and denials of NGZs, it became evident that visual methods of representation have been the least employed, especially those inextricably linked to the areas in question. While some of the discussion has taken place via visual platforms, such as cable news and social media, much of it has been conducted through the writing of blog posts, news articles, books, and text-based tweets. As discussed in the first chapter, Kassam claims several times throughout his book that his ability to enter and explore the alleged NGZs was largely due to not gathering visual materials, which he said was too dangerous (e.g. Kassam 51). There have, of course, been exceptions to a lack of visuals; Geller’s posts are densely hyperlinked with videos and photographs of events. However, these materials are largely unclear, delocalized, and decontextualized, such as footage of political demonstrations, like those discussed in Section 2.1 that she insists are evidence of NGZs (Geller Report, “Paris Riots”). On the side of NGZ skeptics, there are also instances of visuals, such as the photographs tweeted in response to Geller’s remarks on Fox News, Geller Report, and Twitter. Articles, such as those by VICE, have involved interviews with residents within alleged NGZs accompanied only by photographic portraits that do not speak to a sense of place (“Residents of Europe’s”). There have also been instances of individuals creating Twitter threads of their trips into alleged NGZs, wherein they document their time there with photographs, usually with a comedic tone (@mikestuchbery_, @DanKaszeta).

According to Stephen Reed, “Our cognitive abilities to comprehend, remember, reason, solve problems, and make decisions depend on a rich combination of words and
images” (13). This supports the use of a multi-modal thesis (visuals and text) to address NGZ claims. As discussed in Chapter 1, “Images are potent persuaders” (Penn-Edwards 266). Video, specifically, “enables spontaneous and transitory information to be captured,” therefore, acting as an “illustration of actuality, if not reality itself” (267). Some even believe it to be more effective than reality to convey information because it can be endlessly reviewed (270). While different people are likely persuaded by different approaches, such as the verbal claims made by Conservative outlets or the satire deployed by some of the denials, a more well-rounded approach to the conversation is needed to understand Paris NGZ claims and to portray the neighborhoods within them. In light of this scholarship, it was determined that the alleged Paris NGZs would be investigated through observations collected via documentary film.

According to Bill Nichols, considered to be the pioneer of contemporary documentary filmmaking, documentaries inspire “a desire to know” (40). They are used to explore debated issues (101) and at times employ a refutative argument to contest claims (Spence and Navarro 121). Documentaries can also be used to bridge the gap between communities that may otherwise not have the opportunity to interact (104).

Documentary Modes

These insights into documentary film get to the heart of its use as a method for this research. However, as Nichols explains, it is the film’s “stylistic and rhetorical power,” combined with what the audience brings to the experience, that determines how effective it will be in its intention to persuade (110). This brings us to the various modes of documentary filmmaking that were used in the production of the film component of the thesis. Modes are often used together, whether at different times throughout the film,
or simultaneously (32). The following dives into the methodology behind the modes deemed appropriate to the discourse around alleged NGZs.

First, the documentary relies on observational filmmaking, which is closest to a fly-on-the-wall mentality, wherein the camera is within the space, rather than just about a space (Nichols 31). This mode is used for two primary reasons: (1) to address the perceived underutilization of visuals in the NGZ conversation, and (2) because the act of collecting footage is in direct contradiction with claims made about NGZs. The investigation of NGZs could have revolved solely around the textual analysis of claims and denials, and the methods employed by each. However, going to Paris provided context to the debate by orienting it in a place. According to Spence and Navarro, “Documentary settings provide information. They can also function to organize that information in a manner that guides the viewer’s interpretation of the world presented” (220). Documentary, and the observational mode, allowed for the camera to respond to specific claims made about NGZs, rather than relying on the information made available by others. With regard to reason one, as previously mentioned, the visuals available largely fail to orient their contradictory evidence in a specific place. While the authors of tweets sent in response to Geller’s comments claimed to be residents of the neighborhoods she mentioned, the photos posted often lacked location-specific markers, such as street signs or identifiable landmarks. The footage collected for this research included these whenever possible. This also provides support for reason two, in that, by orienting the footage specifically within the alleged areas, the act of filming extended beyond simply a method, into data itself. Because it was claimed that collecting visuals in
these spaces is not permitted, and is suggested not possible, the presence of the camera, 
like the footage it captures, was important to addressing the NGZ claims.

The second mode utilized by this research is participatory, which can be 
understood as the process by which the presence of the filmmakers “motivate the 
situations that take place in front of the camera” (Spence and Navarro 221). This had the 
potential to play out in two very different ways with regard to the seven aspects of NGZ 
claims discussed in Chapter 1: (1) if my hypotheses were correct (see Chapter 4), my 
movement through the alleged NGZs would be unimpeded by the presence of the camera 
and being a blonde, White woman, and would, thus, speak to a lack of credibility of NGZ 
claims; or (2) if my hypotheses were incorrect, the presence of the camera and how I look 
would be the source of difficulty when trying to enter and remain in the alleged NGZs, 
speaking to the validity of claims. This mode, and the documentary as a whole, invites 
the viewer to participate, as well. As Nichols says, “When we believe that what we see 
bears witness to the way the world is, it can form the basis for our orientation to our 
action within the world” (xv). Not only does the documentary ask the audience to think 
critically about the material presented, it also invites viewers to disregard claims of NGZs 
in Paris. By traveling to these neighborhoods, or at the very least not avoiding them out 
of fear, their actions themselves would participate in the argument. The documentary also 
challenges those making claims of Paris NGZs to gather the visual evidence they say is 
impossible to collect. My interpretation of this mode also borrows aspects of the 
performative mode, which emphasizes the gathering of information (Spence and Navarro 
73), and utilizes on-camera filmmaker-performers as “mediators between the audience 
and the sociohistorical world” (234).
My choice to be onscreen is based upon two primary intentions: (1) to avoid the voice-of-God effect, and (2) to use my presence as a point of argument against NGZs. To the first intention, the voice-of-God is the faceless commentary often utilized by expository documentaries that evokes an omniscient source of information (Nichols 167). While this documentary will, at times, take on expository characteristics because of instances where the audio from my on-camera speech is used in tandem with other imagery, it stems from the original filmmaker-performer material. This is important because materials identified to have been collected on-location are more likely to be categorized as evidential, while materials deemed to have been created during post-production (the editing stage) are more closely associated with the creative process (Spence and Navarro 242).

The second intention of having myself onscreen is much like the role the camera plays as data in the observational mode. Because I am a non-Muslim, blonde, White woman, my appearance is a specific point of contention within the claims made about NGZs. By exploring these areas, my presence becomes an argument against the claims. The purpose of doing so in front of the camera, instead of solely behind it, is to orient myself (or a person of my appearance/identity) within the clearly defined space to more strongly address the claims.

These modes work together within the documentary creating a critical text of its own (Spence and Navarro 50). While the hypotheses and findings were not in support of the alleged NGZs, the documentary aims to be persuasive of the results of the research, rather than an adherence to a particular viewpoint. After being introduced to the literature relevant to the film, the goal is for viewers to do much of the analytical work themselves.
when comparing the footage collected with specific NGZ claims. In this way, the film does not seek to make blanket statements about NGZs; it holds up individual claims in tandem with relevant and location-specific visuals that the audience can themselves determine the degree to which the footage either supports or retracts from the claims. By creating the space for the audience to do the work, the film tries to in some way avoid barriers of persuasion created by in- and out-group dynamics, as discussed in Section 5.3.

3.2: Collecting the Data

The primary analysis is based upon the footage collected utilizing the documentary modes outlined above. This method involved the use of human subjects (interviews), the evaluation of written and visual texts (outlined in Chapter 2), and traveling to Paris, France.

The bulk of the data collection took place in Paris from March 4-18, 2018. I traveled alone until March 12, and with a partner between March 12-18, wherein night shoots were prioritized during the second week. This was out of concern as a female, rather than a concern of alleged NGZs.

The observational footage is primarily comprised of activities within alleged NGZs in which a normal American tourist would likely engage, such as visiting tourist attractions, restaurants, and public spaces. These areas were analyzed using specific assertions made within the NGZ claims, discussed in Chapter 4. The purpose of this was to look at the claims as a collection of parts, rather than a whole that could be discredited on its own.

The interview process involved speaking to three residents of Paris. The recruitment of these individuals was done through personal networks, such as colleagues
and friends who reached out to their contacts in Paris on my behalf. The interviews occurred during two separate interview sessions. The first was a one-on-one meeting with Interviewee A, a middle-aged White French woman, and lasted approximately two hours. The second meeting was with Interviewees A, B (a senior-aged White French man), and C (a White man in his early twenties), which lasted approximately 90 minutes. Both interviews were semi-structured around questions relating to the interviewees’ familiarity of NGZ claims and their belief in them. However, the interviews were largely set up to allow the interviewees space to discuss the topics as they desired. In the second interview, this often resulted in a dialogue between the three interviewees. The participants had the option to reshoot or withdraw from participation up until post-production began on March 15, 2018. In an effort to get candid comments from the participants, I elected to keep them anonymous. One of the interviewees repeatedly asserted that she could not normally say the things she was telling me because people would say it was racist, suggesting the importance of anonymity to the interview process.

The purpose of the interviews with Parisians was to provide on-the-ground context to the literature of alleged NGZs and what I observed within them.

For gear, I traveled relatively light. After consulting a gear guide co-authored by Johnny Harris of *Vox* (Harris and Harris), I took the following primary items with me: DSLR camera, shotgun mic, wireless lavalier mic, and two tripods. The purpose of traveling light was to be able to cover more ground and attract less attention, but it also caused limitations, as discussed below.
3.3: The Editing Process

Once my observational footage was collected, I had to decide how best to use it to most authentically portray my experience (Penn-Edwards 271). After considering the interaction of the verbal claims with decontextualized visuals on Fox News, as discussed in Chapter 1, I decided that the most effective way to present my footage was to focus on this critical interaction of visuals and audio.

In the film, footage from each of the alleged Paris NGZs is grouped together and is clearly delineated by titles. This prioritization of showing clearly localized footage of alleged NGZs when discussing the NGZ claims themselves, is a departure from most of the existing claims and denials, and therefore, adds to the conversation. Over the footage is an audio track collected on a bridge over the Seine of a street performer playing French accordion music. This gives the footage a light-hearted feel, which was done to represent my experience of these areas. I am not suggesting that my experience speaks for anyone that enters these areas, but that it is possible, and therefore, largely contradictory to the claims. It also creates a counter representation of NGZs to what is usually seen, whether posed as a threat by Conservative media, or satirically by some of the denials.

The film also relies upon juxtaposition by pairing President Trump’s Paris NGZ claims with iconic shots of Paris, as well as his anti-immigrant rhetoric with onscreen text that outlines some of the implications of NGZ discourse on Muslim American communities, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5. This is done to make the viewer question the rhetoric being used to describe these areas and the people within them. By not mirroring the tone of the claims with violent or threatening footage, the calm images of Paris aim to inspire questions within the viewer about what is being said.
The documentary style was modeled, in part, after the 2017 *Vox Borders* series created by Johnny Harris. Episodes within this six-part documentary series vary in length between just under 11 minutes to just over 15, and utilize similar modes as those outlined above, archival footage, and digital animation. To achieve a similar product, in addition to the observational footage collected in Paris, the film’s script was created using archival footage, such as audio/visual clips from various news outlets, in tandem with the literature outlined in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5. Similar to *Borders*, I incorporated digital animation into the film, such as animated maps, titles, and general aesthetics. I also prioritized three tools Harris used throughout his documentary process: (1) videography gear, (2) editing software, and (3) animation software.

The footage was edited using Adobe Premiere Pro. It should be acknowledged that the editing process required the omission of footage. However, this was a necessary process to cut down the many hours of recorded observations. It was not used to exclude “negative” incidents. Animations were created in Adobe After Effects and integrated into the Premiere timeline.

The film can be found on Digital Georgetown (bit.ly/parisNGZthesis, case sensitive) and at www.hollykoch.com/paris-ngzs. The film abstract and treatment can be found in the Appendix.

### 3.4: Concerns and Limitations

According to Nichols, documentaries “activate feelings and emotions; they tap into values and beliefs, and, in doing so, possess an expressive power that equals or exceeds the printed word” (100). While this is encouraging for the persuasive power of a
multi-modal thesis, there still exist concerns about audience perception. As Nichols also
discusses, visuals do not necessarily have an inherent power to prove an argument (36).

Limitations of Footage

There were a few things I chose not to film. In an attempt to respect their privacy, I did not film people living on the street and tried not to single out any individuals, especially because some may have been in Paris illegally. I also largely avoided filming police officers, except for some instances where I tried to do it covertly. Since I was unsure of the law, I wanted to avoid being questioned in a language I did not speak. Because I was less bold about trying to capture these individuals or police officers, I understand the hesitancy to film in an unfamiliar environment. However, unlike was suggested in Kassam’s claims, these limitations were self-imposed. So, while Kassam may have truly felt that he would have been unsafe collecting visuals, based on my experience, his limitations seem similarly self-imposed. See Chapter 4 for my observations regarding police in the alleged NGZs, as well as various incidents I was not able to capture on camera, such as catcalling.

Self-Funding Limitations

Because this research was self-funded, several limitations arose. First, the Paris-based research was conducted over the course of only two weeks. Observational documentaries usually involve integrating with subjects over the course of several months or years, meaning that this documentary may be more appropriately deemed observational-light. A shorter time frame also limited the number of NGZs it was possible to visit, and the amount of time I could spend within each of them. Not only did it limit me on the national level, it restricted me in Paris itself, which is why I focused on
alleged NGZs within the city center: Barbès, Belleville/Ménilmontant, Curial Cambrai, Folie-Méricourt/St. Ambroise, La Chapelle, La Chapelle-Pajol, Le Marais, Porte d’Aubervilliers, Porte de Clichy, Porte de la Chapelle, Porte de Clignancourt, and Porte Saint-Denis using the location-specific claims and maps discussed in Chapter 1.

Regarding the alleged Belleville/ Ménilmontant NGZ, Belleville was not explicitly referenced by the claims, but because Ménilmontant is less of a neighborhood than a metro stop and accompanying street, I included the adjacent Belleville, which is known for its immigrant population, according to interviewees.

The map featured by Fox News (“French ‘no-go zones’ in question”), was the only source that showed alleged NGZs represented by actual borders, albeit on a satellite image that had no labels. I cross-referenced this image with Google Maps to determine my best approximation of the specific locations using visual indicators, such as large parks and intersections. The other sources referred to the alleged NGZs by name. To decide where to limit the boundaries of these areas, I used the delineations made by Google Maps. The resulting map can be found in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: NGZs in Central Paris](image-url)
On-the-ground, in addition to the areas within those identified, I explored the streets directly around the determined borders in case I had mistaken their size to be smaller than the sources intended. The Boulevard Périphérique provided a clear dividing line between the capital and its suburbs. By restricting myself to the city center, I was able to spend more time within the alleged NGZs, and less in travel time. The only alleged NGZ mentioned by claims within the city center that I did not visit was a highlighted portion on the map aired by Fox News (“French ‘no-go zones’ in question”) that overlapped with what I determined to be a small park called Square Ménilmontant in the east of the city. Due to time constraints, I did not make it to this park. While the alleged NGZs in the Paris suburbs are more commonly cited than their city center counterparts, the latter felt more in line with a discussion of the spread of misinformation given the high levels of tourism within the capital.

The shorter period of time also limited the number of interviews possible to conduct (scheduling conflicts), which is also a limitation of the research in general due to the semester-based timeline, further compressed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process (applies to studies involving human subjects). A lack of funding was also prohibitive in the ability to hire translators. A lack of non-English-speaking interviewees could have potentially slanted the data by privileging the type of people that have had the ability to learn English fluently. This could have had a disproportionate exclusionary effect against the community members of alleged NGZs, such as immigrants or refugees. While the absence of these interviews does not necessarily impact the ability to look for the seven NGZ factors, rich context could have been gleaned from their participation. By conducting interviews only in English, English as a
Second Language (ESL) speakers may also feel less comfortable answering certain questions outside of their native tongues. One issue I ran into regarding Interviewee A during our first meeting was that she changed her mind about being filmed after I arrived, saying she was embarrassed about her level of fluency in English. Fortunately, this was not a problem during our second interview.

Beyond reducing the interviewee population, a lack of French and Arabic language ability may have also caused me to miss valuable context while filming in Paris. This might have affected my ability to analyze what I observed, and my confidence in social situations, leading to missed opportunities to film or understand.

Access to equipment also led to limitations during the filming process. While access to quality equipment is due, in part, to a lack of funding, it was also affected by a need to conserve luggage space when traveling to Paris, and backpack space while filming. Gear I had to leave behind included, multiple cameras, lighting, and accessories, such as a light reflector. The main concern of the limitation of gear was of a lower quality final product, and the extra time that was needed to compensate. Examples of this included the need to sequentially move the camera to multiple locations, rather than setting up multiple cameras and letting them run simultaneously. Lighting and weather (rain) was also a major concern, and required strategic planning to take advantage of optimal times for natural lighting.
CHAPTER 4: AN AMERICAN IN PARIS

After arriving at Charles de Gaulle Airport on the afternoon of March 4, 2018 for my research, I made my way to Gare du Nord via the RER B train. The nearly 30-minute ride passed through the suburbs some insist are teeming with alleged NGZs, before pulling into northern Paris. As I stepped onto the street in front of the station, it was the golden hour, it had just stopped raining, and I set off for my apartment in the alleged Porte Saint-Denis NGZ.

Over the first couple of days, I began by exploring the alleged NGZs closest to me—Porte Saint-Denis and Le Marais—before conducting my first interview. Interviewee A and I met at a busy café in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, an affluent area on the Left Bank. She was a middle-aged White French woman who works with American students studying abroad in Paris (not affiliated with Georgetown University). When I asked her if she was familiar with the alleged NGZs, she said with a laugh, “Do you mean the silliness from Fox News and Breitbart?” As I asked my follow-up questions, however, it became clear that her laughter stemmed from the claims that NGZs existed within the city center, not with their premise, or that they could be found in the suburbs. There were several instances when her responses made me wonder if some of my hypotheses would be proven wrong, such as when she brought up “no-go zones for women,” but each time I asked her if she had experienced the things she was telling me firsthand, she said she had heard it about them online or from the news. It was then that I realized I recognized a lot of the wording she was using and that I had read many of the articles from which she seemed to be getting her information. This was an outcome I should have, but had not, anticipated: a microcosm of the spread of unverified
information. As we wrapped up the interview, she offered to meet for a second session so I could tell her what I had seen in the remaining areas I planned to observe.

After visiting each of the 12 alleged NGZs, I met with Interviewee A for the second time, joined by Interviewee B (a middle-aged to early-senior-aged White French man), and Interviewee C (a White French man in his early twenties). The following are the results, albeit more thorough, that I relayed to the three of them with regard to the seven NGZ factors I used to analyze the claims.

4.1: A Muslim Majority

Apart from various clothing or accessory markers, such as the hijab (female headscarf) or thobe (male body-length tunic), linking an individual to a specific religion by their appearance is difficult. I saw women wearing the hijab in each alleged NGZ I visited, but did not see men wearing the thobe as frequently. Individuals were seen wearing these garments outside of the alleged NGZs, as well. However, these garments cannot be used as the sole indicator of the prevalence of Islam, as not all followers of the faith dress in this way. I also did not hear the Adhan (Muslim call to prayer) being broadcast or see individuals observing the Salah (five daily times of prayer) at any point during my trip to Paris.

To get a sense of the demographic in these areas, I also tried to pay attention to the languages the people around me were speaking. This seemed like a reasonable way of trying to gain a rough understanding of who might be native to France or have immigrated from elsewhere. In most areas, the overwhelming majority of non-White people I heard were speaking in French. In Barbès and La Chapelle-Pajol, I heard more
non-French languages (such as African languages and Arabic) than in other areas, but I was not able to make the distinction that I heard more non-French spoken than French.

When looking at the racial makeup of these areas, Le Marais, Porte Saint-Denis, and Folie-Méricourt/St. Ambroise, appeared to have a clear White majority. In most of the alleged NGZs, the proportion of Whites and non-Whites seemed to be roughly even, such as in Belleville/Ménilmontant, Porte de la Chapelle, Porte d’Aubervilliers, Curial Cambrai, Porte de Clichy, and Porte de Clignancourt. Of the alleged NGZs I visited, the only two I felt possibly had more observable non-Whites were Barbès and La Chapelle-Pajol. Within those areas there was a consistent presence of White people (men, women, and children), but there were a couple of instances where there were very few, such as a corner near the Château Rouge metro (Barbès), a street market on Rue de Jessaint (a bridge between Barbès and La Chapelle-Pajol), the square near the La Chapelle metro (La Chapelle-Pajol), and Porte de la Chapelle. Among the other areas where I observed this was a street market just outside of the Ménilmontant metro and the first time I visited Parc de Belleville (the second time, there was a clear White majority). Each of these instances were in very small areas and were not consistent with what I observed elsewhere within their respective zones, and were often not consistent with other times I visited them. It should be noted that because Porte d’Aubervilliers is such a small residential area, I only saw a few people within it (approximately 6), so while I saw an even number of White and non-White people, I do not know if that is indicative of the makeup of the area.

While physical appearance, language, and race are all insufficient in determining the prevalence of Islam within these areas, even if it was assumed that all non-White
(specifically Black and Middle Eastern), non-French-speaking people were Muslim, the results would still not provide sufficient support to the claims that the alleged NGZs in Paris have a Muslim majority, thus supporting my first hypothesis (H1). This is also contrary to comments made by Interviewee A who said of Barbès and La Chapelle-Pajol, “There are only black people there.”

4.2: A Lack of State Authority in the Form of Police or Military

While walking through each of the alleged NGZs, Porte d’Aubervilliers was the only area that I did not see either a police or military presence. As mentioned previously, the small geographical space made it unlikely that I would have been there at the right time had a need for them arisen. In the other areas, I observed police officers on foot, driving, and sitting in their parked cars. I also walked by police stations and empty parked police cars. All of the officers I saw were patrolling, rather than responding to criminal activity, and I only saw them interact with the public a few times. While staying in Porte Saint-Denis, I heard police sirens a few times a day from my apartment, suggesting their presence in the area. When transporting my luggage from my first apartment to the second, located along the border of the alleged Barbès NGZ, the ethnically Arab Uber driver was asked to pull over near the destination to show his documentation (after what appeared to be no breaking of traffic laws), and then was waved on his way. In Parc de Belleville, a few police officers approached several Black men playing music on a stereo before walking away. During the protest/march against police brutality, police officers were on every corner for several blocks surrounding l’Opéra.
According to a Google Maps search for police departments in Paris, within the alleged NGZs they have locations in Porte de Clignancourt, Barbès, Curial Cambrai, Porte de Clichy, La Chapelle, Belleville/Ménilmontant, and Folie-Méricourt/St. Ambroise. I observed military personnel patrolling in areas with the most tourists, such as the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre, as well as on Rue de Rosiers in Le Marais. Therefore, my results contradict the claim that police are unable to enter the alleged NGZs in Paris, thus support my first hypothesis (H1). The results in Porte d’Aubervilliers neither contradict the claims, nor support them.

All three of the interviewees disagreed with the claim that there were areas in central Paris where police were unable to go. However, Interviewees A and B said they were certain there were NGZs in the suburbs and in other areas of France where this was true. At this assertion, Interviewee C turned to the others and asked if they had been to these areas themselves. They said they had not. When he asked where they were getting their information and why they were presenting secondhand information as fact, they said, “Because it’s true.”

When asked about the tensions between police and immigrants, in light of the (then) upcoming march against police brutality, Interviewee B simply laughed. When pressed, he said, “Maybe from the perspective of the immigrants, it’s brutality, but it’s not the job of the police to be kind and gentle.” To understand the actions of the police, he said people needed to understand the position the police have been in and the violence that has been committed against them by immigrants, citing events such as the attack on a policewoman on January 1, 2018 (Miles). He said that these were lesser known because
the media is covering up stories to avoid being labeled Islamophobic. When I asked how he was learning about activities that were being covered up, he cited social media.

Interviewee B also said he believed the strong military presence in Paris was responsible for reducing the levels of crime and terrorism. He described being both relieved at their effect, and resentful that they were needed.

4.3: An Inability to Visually Document These Neighborhoods without Being Attacked

At no time during the trip did anyone try to stop me from filming, and I was not harmed or harassed in any way for using or having my camera, which I brought with me everywhere. There were two instances that I noticed where people nonchalantly covered their faces as they crossed in front of the camera. An ethnically Arab man did this at Square Leon, a small park in Barbès, and a White man did this in front of Église Saint Ambroise, a church in the alleged Folie-Méricourt/St. Ambroise NGZ. The only time I felt that someone was unhappy with me filming was on Boulevard Ménilmontant when a man speaking Arabic said something with an unhappy tone and I heard the word “photo”. However, he said it as he walked by, and tried to neither approach nor stop me.

Therefore, the results suggest the claim that cameras cannot be carried or used in the alleged NGZs of Paris is observably false, thus supporting my first hypothesis (H1).

None of the interviewees thought a person would have any trouble photographing or filming anywhere in Paris. When I asked if people covering their face made them (the interviewees) suspicious that those covering their faces had something to hide, all three interviewees expressed that they did not. Interviewee C explained that Parisians are constantly bombarded with tourists taking photos of them and feel they are expected to
always present a happy face for the camera. He said that many people get annoyed and do not like to be in visitors’ photos. Interviewee B suggested the people who had covered their faces might have been of a culture that believed photographs could steal the soul.

I did feel that my camera drew more attention than I was used to in the United States, but this seemed to be irrespective of race. Unless I was in a touristy area, such as near the monuments or in Le Marais, people seemed confused about why I was filming; they would stare at my camera or look to where the camera was pointing.

4.4: Higher than Normal Levels of Sexual Harassment, Assault, and Crime

During the two weeks that I was in Paris, I experienced street harassment twice. The first time was at République, which is at the northern-most point of the alleged Le Marais NGZ, when a man made kissing noises as I walked passed. While I did not get a good look at him (it was dark), he appeared to be White and was speaking French. The second time was outside of the Ménilmontant metro, within the alleged Belleville/Ménilmontant NGZ, by a man who said something in Arabic as he walked into the metro. While I cannot be sure of what he was saying because of the language barrier, his leering tone suggested that it was inappropriate. Other than the two instances mentioned, I did not witness anyone else street harassed, and neither experienced nor witnessed any kind of assault during the trip. It should be noted for context that while, as Interviewee B insisted, “Two is still two too many,” I typically experience street harassment at least twice in one day back home in Washington, DC.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Interviewee A commented on street harassment in Paris. She asked, “Do you mean no-go zones for women?” After encouraging her to go on, she described neighborhoods where it is almost impossible to
go without experiencing street harassment or assault, such as the alleged La Chapelle and Barbès NGZs (not that they were not allowed in). I asked if she had experienced this herself when she had visited these areas, and she replied that she had not. While I cannot speak to the experiences of other women, my results conflict with the characterization made by Interviewee A that it is “nearly impossible” to go there without being sexually harassed or assaulted.

To the prevalence of criminal activity, the only crimes I noticed were creating graffiti and street vending (potentially) without a license. The graffiti was being done by a young White man in Rue Denoyez (alleged Belleville/Ménilmontant NGZ), which is known for its street art. However, message boards suggest that while not legal, police do not enforce the law on this street (“Denoyez”). Regarding the street vending, I do not know who of the street vendors selling souvenirs had a license (and all of them may have), but I was told that they often do not. I saw what looked like unofficial street vending in the two street markets mentioned previously (Rue de Jessaint in the alleged Barbès NGZ, and the Ménilmontant metro in the alleged Belleville/Ménilmontant NGZ), as well as near tourist attractions. This is not to say that anything in these categories—harassment, assault, crime—was not more prevalent, but I did not observe them myself. Therefore, my observations are insufficient to support claims that there are higher than normal rates in the alleged Paris NGZs, thus supporting both hypotheses (H1, H2).

Interviewees A and B had noteworthy responses to the crime category. During our first meeting, Interviewee A mentioned high rates of crime in Barbès and La Chapelle. When asked if she had been the victim of a crime in these areas, she said she had not, but that she would “of course” feel uncomfortable as a White woman if everyone around her
was Black. She said the last time she was in Barbès she had shopping bags and felt like a target because she looked “posh” in such a poor neighborhood. Echoing her comments, Interviewee B insisted, “Just like in Washington, DC or New York City, you can’t say that all Black people are bad. But it’s a fact that you are more likely to be the victim of crime by a Black person than a White person.” His comments evoked the Black brute rhetoric discussed in Section 5.2. When asked if he would feel uncomfortable in a Muslim-majority neighborhood, irrespective of crime, he said he would. “It’s too much. You have people walking around wearing the thing on their heads and the long shirts,” he said, in reference to the hijab and thobe, “At a certain point, it’s just too much.”

4.5: A Lack of Women

Given that I was able to carry out the research, it should be clear that women are able to enter the alleged NGZs of Paris. There were women (White and non-White) in every alleged NGZ I visited. I did not see any women at the intersection of Rue de Pajol and Boulevard Ney in Porte de la Chapelle, but I did not see many people there in general. One reason for this could be that the refugee outreach center discussed in Section 2.1 is located on this stretch of Boulevard Ney, and they do not accept women or children into the shelter. The results of my research suggest the claim that there are no women in the alleged NGZs of Paris is false, thus supporting my first hypothesis (H1). None of the interviewees were surprised by these findings.

4.6: An Inability, as A Woman, to Use the Subway, Sidewalks, Cafés, Bars, or Restaurants

Within the twelve alleged Paris NGZs, I had no trouble using public spaces or entering dining establishments. While I did not try to go to bars or cafés in every alleged
NGZ, it did not feel necessary, as I was able to observe White women doing so everywhere I went. I also did not observe anyone, female or otherwise, being intimidated into not using or partaking in any aspects of public infrastructure, such as sidewalks or public transit. Therefore, my results show this claim of alleged NGZs in Paris to be false, thus supporting both hypotheses (H1, H2).

4.7: An Inability to Enter without Harm or Harassment While Being A Blonde, White Woman, and Wearing A Skirt

A common refrain, as mentioned previously, was that alleged NGZs are largely benign unless you are a blonde, White woman. I was never the only woman in the areas I traveled, and many of them had blonde hair. While I only wore a dress once during the trip because of the rain and cold weather, many of the women I saw on the street wore skirts or dresses. Even in the few areas mentioned where there were very few White people or women in the vicinity, no one appeared concerned with my presence and I was largely ignored. At no point did I see a blonde, White woman singled out for her appearance. Therefore, the results are strongly in contradiction with this claim of alleged NGZs in Paris, thus supporting both hypotheses (H1, H2).
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

After spending two weeks in Paris, walking 100 miles, and finding a lack of support in all 12 of the alleged NGZs I explored, I feel comfortable drawing upon the following literature and the observations outlined in Chapter 4 to make several conclusions.

As discussed in Chapter 1, NGZ claims have become a visual argument in two ways: (1) they are often featured on Conservative cable news—a visual medium—and paired with decontextualized threatening imagery, rather than with footage of alleged NGZs, and (2) according to several claims by Kassam, visuals are impossible to collect within NGZs without fear of harassment and/or assault (e.g. 51). In his book, Kassam invited people from various media outlets to adopt his methodology of going to the alleged NGZs and reporting observations (50). While, according to Kassam, they did not take him up on his offer, I did.

According Amann and Knorr Cetina, “The notion of evidence is built upon the difference between what one can see and what one may think, or have heard, or believe” (134). However, without visual evidence, NGZ claims do not rely on evidence as thought of in this way. Therefore, if evidence is not driving the discussion, it is important to look into what factors of persuasion are in play to understand the persistence of the claims, such as 9/11 rhetoric, the historical precedence othering men of color, Group Threat Theory, conspiracy ideation, and partisan influence.
According to Jack Holland, “There are two common responses to 9/11: one, the notion that 9/11 was a date on which everything changed; the other, the notion that 9/11 was a date on which nothing changed at all” (78). As reporting of the hijacked planes hitting the towers of the World Trade Center overtook other news stories, “the public also quickly dropped the usual demands of work and life to follow the coverage” (Monahan 57). Because people “were accustomed to seeing images of chaos, violence and terrorism 'out there', but not 'here'” (Geller, *Fatwa* 85), their lack of ability to reference similar events made it difficult to process what they were seeing (Monahan 62). The media began to invoke a “responsibility and retaliation frame” within their coverage which “advanced the twin notions of American victimization and the need for a militaristic hunt for justice” (64). With a 24-hour audience, those creating the discourse—individuals with social power—defined the crisis (radical Islam versus the West) and solidified the rhetoric around the burgeoning War on Terror (Holland 88). Having defined the crisis, they held “the key to define the appropriate strategies for its resolution” (96), with the media discourse “centered on a desire for retaliation” (Bernard Debatin, qtd. in Monahan 64-65). Muslims were redefined as terrorists, beards and hijabs were perceived as symbols of extremism (Soltas and Stephens-Davidowitz), and the Quran was labeled the “enemy’s book” (el-Aswad 44).

After the trauma that Americans experienced either first-hand or through the media due to the events in 2001, “9/11 has come to act as a somatic marker” (Holland 92). These markers are a result of “affect-saturated memory” that operate in the mind “below the threshold of reflection.” When the mind experiences something associated
with these somatic markers, it allows thought processes to continue without “higher-order contemplation” and can lead people to act on “gut feelings” (93). According to Holland, “The intense collective memories held by many Americans of 9/11, experienced through their shared position as viewers, have frequently been triggered and invoked in the ensuing War on Terror” (93).

The discourse of NGZs appears to benefit from 9/11 as a somatic marker by invoking a similar rhetoric that allows those making the claims to evoke fear of Muslim communities on the whole without specific evidence as to why it is justified. Kassam’s book is rife with paralleled rhetoric to 9/11. His title, *No Go Zones: How Sharia Law Is Coming to a Neighborhood Near You*, plays on the “shattering of American security culture” after 9/11 (Geller, *Fatwa* 85). Discourse of foreign NGZs has been circulating since 2006 (Pipes), but it is Kassam that insists that they are now in the US, and, therefore, stokes fear within Americans of a more pressing threat. As discussed in Section 5.4, the more threatened his audience feels, the less open they will be to counterpersuasion by conflicting reporting, thus, likely solidifying their belief in his argument, as a whole (Garrett et al. 618). Kassam’s book frequently disparaged the Quran, such as when he insisted that it is the primary source of radicalization (217). He said, “Hate preachers are not so much telling lies about the Quran as they are telling the blood-curdling, honest truth about it” (219). In a similar vein, Geller declared, “Moderate Islam is a Western fantasy” (*Fatwa* 46). There were several instances throughout Kassam’s book where he made a statement about Muslim communities with a negative tone, without providing ancillary support to justify it, ranging from asserting a Muslim majority within a neighborhood, to comments such as, “Chadors and hijabs are sold
alongside fruit and vegetables” (49). His language suggests that the very presence of chadors and hijabs is cause for alarm. By insisting radicalization is inherent to the Muslim faith, Kassam and Geller imply the need to be fearful of its followers. With a population of under 1% of Muslims in the US (Chalabi), “the lack of direct contact and reliance on second-hand information go hand in hand with persistent monolithic views on Islam and Muslim communities” (el-Aswad 44). This is likely to make it difficult for audiences of Conservative media to interact with members of the Muslim community in a way that will be able to subvert the rhetoric they are being given by the powerful members of their in-group (see Section 5.2). This disconnect between communities is a problem that documentary filmmaking seeks to remedy (Spence and Navarro 104).

Kassam also evokes harboring rhetoric from the War on Terror. On the night of the 9/11 attacks, George W. Bush’s remarks assured that “no distinction should be made between terrorists and those who harbour them” (Holland 99). Holland also asserts that the idea of harboring was used “to collapse the distinction between terrorists and the states where they were (deemed to be) based, trained or sheltered” (99). Kassam’s rhetoric parallels these ideas in two ways: (1) his insistence on the danger of Muslim immigrant communities simply because there have been radicalized individuals that have lived within them, demonizes entire neighborhoods based on the actions of a few people, and (2) his frequent urging that Democrats/Liberals are responsible for the proliferation of radicalized individuals within the Muslim faith implies a harboring of, or collusion with, terrorists by the political Left. To this second point, Kassam refers to victims of terrorist activity as “victims of liberal immigration policies” (99-100), and insists culpability with phrases such as “violence enabled through liberal-left or neo-liberal mass
migration policies” (98, emphasis added), and “effective complicity from the state and media” (99, emphasis added). He declared, “The West has become lazy when dealing with Islam. This is mostly thanks to social democrats, liberals, and their media colleagues who jump to the defense of fundamentally un-Western cultural characteristics, such as support for Sharia law and the hijab” (242). Perhaps the most partisan statement he made was, “When one considers the reliance the Democrat Party has on minority votes, it’s easy to imagine that the party wouldn’t be above pursuing an agenda that either excuses or lends legitimacy to a lot of problematic groups, including ‘under the radar’ radical Islamists” (378, emphasis added). Geller has made similar claims, such as insisting the presence of a “Leftist–Islamic alliance” (“Gellar” [sic]).

One of the most concerning aspects of paralleling 9/11 rhetoric is the dehumanizing discourse employed during the War on Terror. Former President George W. Bush used metaphors likening terrorists to animals and parasites, calling them evil and ‘cold-blooded killers’ (Holland 111). According to Holland, rhetoric of a “purely evil” opponent facilitated two political ends: (1) it took away the onus of finding a reason for the attacks, and (2) it removed the responsibility and/or ability to engage in a discourse with the other side. Or as Yellow Peril! authors Tchen and Yeats posit, “The messy details of Western violence need not complicate the story of Western purity and innocence” (5). Holland asserted, “The political effect of such language was to naturalise violence – even extermination” (111). The rhetoric evoked a new “apocalyptic contest of Good vs. Evil, us versus them” (Tchen and Yeats 278). While the former president was speaking specifically about terrorists, the fact that members of the Muslim community and the radicalized individuals or factions within it have been lumped together in NGZ
discourse, makes the comments relevant. The adoption of 9/11 rhetoric about Muslim immigrant communities, and NGZs in particular, simply based on their religious makeup is worth questioning, when it has been found to naturalize violence and relinquish a duty to engage in dialogue with the other party.

5.2: Othering Men of Color with Claims of Sexual Misconduct

In 2017, the alleged La Chapelle-Pajol NGZ was the subject of a petition and protest calling out what “has become an all-male ‘no-go zone’, where any female daring to venture out alone is subject to severe sexist harassment or worse” (Burrows-Taylor). In the words of one woman, “Being whistled at is almost constant” and while it also happens elsewhere, she insisted that it is much worse in La Chapelle-Pajol (Clement). However, another woman described the protest as a “witchhunt against immigrants” (qtd. in Burrows-Taylor), which is exemplary of the split in sentiment in the area (Clement). As discussed in Chapter 4, I experienced no sexual harassment in the alleged La Chapelle-Pajol NGZ.

While this thesis does not seek to cast doubt on the claims women have made of sexual harassment, it does aim to present context on two fronts: (1) the larger sexual harassment conversation in Paris, of which the behavior of immigrants in alleged NGZs is only a part, and (2) the precedent in the US of singling out men of color as a sexual danger to White women.

In response to the Chapelle-Pajol protest, Mayor Hidalgo said, “We will not tolerate an area being prey to acts of discrimination against women” (qtd. in Burrows-Taylor). However, like the United States amid the #MeToo movement, stemming from the Harvey Weinstein sexual harassment scandal, Paris is having its own anti-harassment
movement (#BalanceTonPorc, or “Expose Your Pig”). In a Change.org petition addressed to President Macron, over 130,000 people have signed, “urging him to treat sexual harassment as a national emergency” (Rubin). Among other demands, it calls for better workplace sexual harassment training, the training of the professionals in contact with victims, and a nationwide prevention campaign (“Sign the Petition”). In addition to workplace harassment, sexual misconduct on public transportation has been deemed a top priority by Paris residents (McPartland). To address growing concerns, Parliament began discussing on-the-spot fines, totaling between €90 and €750, said to be enacted sometime in 2018 (Samuel, “Paris Launches”). Other efforts include anti-harassment advertising in subways, a text alert system for reporting harassment, and the training of transportation staff (McPartland). While sexual harassment by immigrant men on the streets of Paris should not be discounted, it is important to remember that it is part of a larger sexual harassment issue in France (and worldwide), and not specific to immigrant communities.

Claims that sexual harassment and assault are worse in NGZs because of their Muslim and immigrant population are likely to increase the fear of these communities, leading to implications such as a shift toward Conservative policies, which are often unfavorable toward immigrants and refugees (Quillian 588), which is addressed in Section 5.3. As discussed in Chapter 4, I only experienced sexual harassment twice in the alleged Paris NGZs during my entire two week stay in Paris.

To the second point of singling out men of color as risks to the safety of White women, this is a phenomenon that extends beyond the idea of “terrifying Muslims” (Rana). It can be seen in stereotypes such as “Yellow Peril” (Tchen and Yeats), the black “brute” (Smiley and Fakunle), and Hispanic criminals (Welch, et al.). At the heart of
these stereotypes is the idea that “Westernizing innocence is forever violated by foreign evil” (Tchen and Yeats 15). When describing the stakes of NGZs, Kassam said, “This is an international issue that, if left misrepresented, will continue to spread until it overpowers the establishments that oppose it.” He went on to argue that it is a fight for “the heart and soul of Western civilization” (28). This is evocative of the Yellow Peril, or moral panic over the “barbarous East” (Tchen and Yeats 277), illustrated in propaganda during the wars of the 20th century, and dating back to the mid 1600s (11). It is exemplified in the representation of the character Dr. Fu Manchu, who uses “his Western intellect and Eastern cunning to try to destroy Western Civilization” (5). In the 1916 film *Devil Doctor*, he orders his subordinates to, “Conquer and breed. Kill the white man and take his women!” (9). This is a theme that seems to run through America’s rhetoric of its non-White immigrants and citizens.

During the speech in which Trump announced his candidacy for President of the United States in June of 2015, he invoked the stereotype of the Hispanic criminal. To a crowd he said numbered in the thousands, he insisted, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best . . . They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists,” tacking on at the end, “And some, I assume are good people” (“Full Text: Donald Trump”). When later given the opportunity by CNN to expand on these remarks, he said, “Well if you look at the statistics of people coming, you look at the statistics on rape, on crime, on everything coming in illegally into this country it’s mind-boggling!” After Don Lemon pressed him on these claims, Trump responded, “Well, somebody’s doing the raping, Don! I mean somebody’s doing it! Who’s doing the raping? Who’s doing the raping?” (qtd. in Scott). This rhetoric was used throughout the
campaign and into Trump’s presidency to fuel support for the US-Mexico border wall ("Full Text: Donald Trump").

From attempting to justify Black slavery by suggesting the practice “suppressed their animalistic tendencies,” and anti-Black propaganda emphasizing the “black rapist” ("The Brute Caricature"), to Dylann Roof’s declaration in 2016, “You rape our women, and you’re taking over our country, and you have to go,” before killing nine people in a Black congregation (qtd. in Bouie), America has a long history with the stereotype of the Black brute. This fear of an animal nature led to the lynching of over 4,000 Black people between 1877 and 1950 ("Lynching in America"). For many White people during that time, this practice was necessary “to preserve the racial purity of the white race, more specifically, the racial purity of white women” ("The Brute Caricature"). It was the 1955 kidnap, torture, and murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi after whistling at a White woman that became a spark in the civil rights movement (Callard).

The point of this historical context is not to suggest immigrants or people of color do not commit acts of sexual violence, but that White people “overestimate the proportion of crime committed by people of color, and associate people of color with criminality” (Ghandnoosh 3). According to Bloom, “when blacks violate the law, all members of the race are considered suspect,” in a way that White people are not penalized by the actions of members of their race (230-231). This is likely heavily influenced by the fact that, “Television news programs and newspapers overrepresent racial minorities as crime suspects and whites as crime victims” (Ghandnoosh 3).

Kassam uses the threat of rape by Muslims as a common thread throughout his book, with one of his chapters entitled, “From Sweden, with Rape.” This insistence that
Muslim men are a threat to women echoes the rhetoric used in the US about Latino, Black, and Asian men. Like the linking of Islam to an inherent risk of radicalization, by linking Muslim men with an inherent threat of sexual violence, Kassam increases fear of both Muslim men and inhabitants of the alleged NGZs. The implications of this fear are discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

5.3: Group Threat and Racial Bias

This demonizing of men within the alleged NGZs and the historical fear of people of color can be explained, in part, by Group Threat Theory: “the idea that when minority groups grow in size or power, the majority group feels threatened” (Skinner). The theory is predicated upon in- and out-groups, and is “a largely collective phenomenon in which individual attitudes are crucially affected by intergroup relations” (Quillian 586). It has been linked to two relevant outcomes: (1) an increase in racial bias (Skinner), and (2) “a shift in political opinions toward conservatism” (Craig and Richeson 1189). Positioned as the out-group, people within the alleged NGZs, and Muslims in general, stand to bear the brunt of the implications associated with these outcomes, as discussed below.

According to projections made by the US Census Bureau in 2008, non-Whites will supplant Whites as the majority of the US population in 2042. When researchers Craig and Richeson studied the effect of this information on White Americans, their participants were more likely to endorse “conservative political ideology and policy positions” (1195). Skinner’s study with similar methods revealed that citing the Bureau’s projection led White participants “to show more implicit racial bias against black people.” This is likely enhanced by reminders that the Muslim population in the US is growing, and is projected to reach 8.1% by 2050 (Mohamed), like in a segment on
*Hannity* discussing the threat of NGZs in tandem with the growing Muslim population in the US (“A look at”).

Racial bias against people of color in the US has led to the phenomenon of White Flight. This refers to demographic shifts created by the movement of White people in relation to people of color within a given geography, whether on the neighborhood or city level. While this was a term used in the 1960s to describe the “fleeing” of Whites to the suburbs as Black people moved into historically-White neighborhoods, it is now “more about decisions that people make when looking at where they’re going to move next” (Chang). In a study on the race- and ethnicity-related decisions that go into choosing a place to live, Havekes et al. surveyed Whites, Blacks, and Latinos, regarding the percentage of their own racial group they preferred to be within the neighborhoods they moved. The researchers compared the percentage of the respondents’ racial group in the areas they searched for a home and in the areas to which they ultimately moved. The study revealed that Whites were much more likely to search in and move to an area with a much higher proportion of their own race than the proportion they said they preferred, while Blacks and Latinos were more likely to move to an area with a higher proportion of their own race than they both searched in and said they preferred (117). When asked to rank the desired proportionality of each race, “the neighborhood [respondents] least desired had a lot more African Americans and Arab Americans” (Chang). The authors hypothesized that this could be “due in part to whites not being as open to integrated neighborhoods as they say they are” (Havekes et al. 120). In an interview with *Vox*, Maria Krysan (one of the three authors of the study) said these results revealed “that it’s not black and Latino people who are self-segregating into neighborhoods” (Chang). This
study is relevant to NGZ discourse because Muslim immigrants are often cited as self-segregating due to an unwillingness to assimilate or integrate with the encompassing society (e.g. Kassam). The notion of NGZs is predicated upon the inability to enter these alleged Muslim-majority communities because of a prohibition by the people within them. However, the research of Havekes et al. suggests that the density of the Muslim or immigrant communities within them could have more to do with White French people electing not to live there, and the socioeconomic restrictions experienced by immigrants and people of color when attempting to move elsewhere (Havekes et al. 106), than the anti-Western behaviors suggested by the NGZ claims.

Racial bias is also a component of Self-Interest Theory, wherein “individuals develop negative affects and rigid stereotypes toward individuals with whom they are in competition and conflict” (Quillian 587). This theory suggests that members of the dominant group “may express a desire for immigration restrictions or espouse prejudicial attitudes.” Quillian draws upon Herbert Blumer’s four “feelings” that lead to racial bias: “(1) a feeling of superiority, (2) a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien, (3) a feeling of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, and (4) a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race” (588). NGZ discourse plays on these four feelings, such as by claiming that Islam is intrinsically alien and incompatible with the West (Kassam 20), and that Islam desires to overtake Western civilization (28). Racial bias and its effects lined out in this section has led, in part, to 50% of Muslim Americans saying that being Muslim in America has become more difficult (“U.S. Muslims Concerned”), as discussed in Section 2.2.
5.4: Psychology of Conspiracy Ideation

“Fake News!”—in the words of President Donald Trump—or more mildly, the spread of misinformation, is not a new problem, but an evolving one. Because I found no observable evidence of NGZs in Paris, it is worth delving into research on misinformation and conspiracy ideation to understand the persistence of the claims. The World Economic Forum has deemed “massive digital misinformation as one of the main risks for modern society” (Bessi et al. 2). Whether about NGZs or the recent “Pizzagate,”—the conspiracy that the then presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was involved in a child sex-trafficking ring operated out of a Washington, DC pizza parlor—when it comes to conspiracy theories, facts, half-truths, and false information form “informational blends” (Bessi et al. 1). According to the research of Bessi et al., there are many factors that go into the spread of false rumors, and once they become false beliefs, they are “rarely corrected” (2). These factors will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Douglas et al. have pulled three psychological motivations of ascribing to conspiracy theories, such as NGZ claims, from Jost et al.’s system-justification theory:

They promise to satisfy important social psychological motives that can be characterized as epistemic (e.g., the desire for understanding, accuracy, and subjective certainty), existential (e.g., the desire for control and security), and social (e.g., the desire to maintain a positive image of the self or group). (538) The epistemic motivation includes the desire to fill information gaps, clarify conflicting information, ascribe meaning to seemingly random events, and resist disconfirmation (Douglas et al. 538). When it comes to conspiracy ideation, “the need for cognitive closure”—the tendency to seek to remove ambiguity or uncertainty—is the primary force behind the spread of misinformation (3). As portrayed in Chapter 1, the definitions of
NGZs are wide ranging, inconsistent, and conflicting. This, combined with the denials (e.g. Graham; “Residents of Europe’s”), undoubtedly cause uncertainty within the audience of those making the claims. The epistemic motivation also speaks to conspiracy theorists’ belief that they are unveiling “actions that are hidden from public scrutiny,” that the conspiracies involve “the coordination of multiple actors,” and that they, themselves, are “resistant to falsification” or cover up attempts. Drawing on ideas from Lewandowsky et al., Douglas et al. assert that conspiracy theorists also suspect those of attempting to debunk theories as being agents of the conspiracy (538). This can be seen in Geller’s claims of a “Leftist–Islamic alliance” (“Gellar” [sic]), and Kassam’s rhetoric of a collusion between the Liberal media and “radical Islamists” (378), as discussed in Section 5.1.

According to Bessi et al., those prone to the adoption of conspiracy theories are often drawn to topics they deem to be “neglected by main stream media and scientific news and consequently very difficult to verify” (5). Regarding NGZ claims, Kassam said of the lack of mainstream coverage, “People say the press is covering up stories, that they don’t tell the truth and if you go out and talk about it you will be considered a racist or something like that. That tends to silence the discussion” (96). As discussed in Chapter 4, these claims were echoed by Interviewee B who insisted crime committed by immigrants in Paris was being covered up by the French media.

According to the research of Douglas et al., belief in conspiracy theories tends to be stronger “when people experience distress as a result of feeling uncertain” (539). To this last point, I believe the unclear rhetoric of NGZs, specifically the ambiguity caused by conflicting definitions and inconsistent locations, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 3,
leads to feelings of uncertainty that Douglas et al., and the work of Prooijen and Jostmann that they draw upon, say bolsters support for conspiratorial claims of this nature.

Returning to Douglas et al.’s interpretation of system-justification theory, the existential psychological motive of conspiracy theorists entails feelings of control. According to research drawn from Goertzel, people who feel that they are lacking control or experiencing anxiety may find the adoption of conspiracy theories empowering because they allow for the rejection of official narratives, wherein they and few others know the truth. They may also feel safer, with conspiracy theories operating “as a form of cheater detection, in which dangerous and untrustworthy individuals are recognized and the threat they posed is reduced or neutralized” (Douglas et al. 539). The threats NGZ claims have warned against—terrorism, sexual assault, economic pressure, and a lack of assimilation—as discussed above, are likely to leave their audience with feelings of anxiety and a decreased sense of power, thus strengthening the effect on individuals prone to conspiracy ideation.

The third and final psychological motive presented by Douglas et al. is social. Conspiracy theories have been found to “valorize the self and the in-group by allowing blame for negative outcomes to be attributed to others.” These individuals and their in-groups view themselves as “competent and moral but as sabotaged by powerful and unscrupulous others.” Belief in conspiracy theories is indicative of a sense of threat to individuals and their in-group, used to alleviate a sense of culpability for a perceived disadvantaged position, and is “associated with narcissism,” which is “linked to paranoid ideation” (Douglas et al. 540).
This is supported by Grzesiak-Feldman’s research, drawing on Kofta and Sedek, stating, “Conspiracy theories motivate people to prepare for collective self-defense against alleged threats from out-groups” (101). As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, immigrants, refugees, and citizens of the Muslim faith, as well as those on the political Left who support them, have been characterized in NGZ rhetoric as the “powerful and unscrupulous others,” or out-group, that are said to cause a threat to a politically Conservative, predominantly White, in-group.

The perception of in- and out-groups extends beyond the psychological factors that prime individuals for conspiracy ideation, and into how they develop their beliefs. Oftentimes, as explored below, this is determined along partisan lines.

5.5: Partisan Influence

In their book, *Echo Chamber*, Jamieson and Cappella discuss the assertion that “the highly segmented and partisan content of internet sites can lead to polarization of public opinion and the balkanization of knowledge and understanding,” drawing upon the work of Cass Sunstein. Balkanization—a term derived from the separation of the Balkan countries into “self-contained political units” after WWI—is said to “undermine public deliberation, social consensus, and united action within societies” (Jamieson and Cappella 191). When considering the hyperpolarization of online politics, a logical next question is of how to reach people of such divergent viewpoints.

Looking generally at information dispersal between speaker and audience, Bessi et al. draw upon the Bounded Confidence Model—wherein the opposing opinions of two people have the power to influence each other only if the difference between those views are within a certain range—to assert, “People are more likely to trust an information
someway consistent with their system of beliefs” (2). As Baum and Groeling describe it, “Parties do not ‘inject’ messages into a passive public; such messages are processed by individuals who accept or reject them depending in part on their perceived credibility.” They continue, “One source of credibility for a message is the belief that the speaker and listener have common interests,” where in- and out-groups are drawn along lines of political affiliation, which are dependent upon common interests of social and economic policy (Baum and Groeling 161). This is a plausible explanation of why the verbal NGZ claims made by Conservative pundits are given more credibility by Conservative media than the verbal or visual denials made by others, especially Liberal sources.

As this chapter will go on to discuss, ideas predicated upon partisan lines are disseminated via varying forms of media. Outlets employ what Jamieson and Cappella call “media frames,” as discussed in Section 5.1, which they define as, “organizing structures” that convey meaning through the use of “selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.” They are used to impart an interpretation of the world onto the audience. As they go on to explain, “When a one-sided frame is offered to audiences, they are likely to adopt the perspective within it” (Jamieson and Cappella 141). This becomes more significant when considering the authors’ idea of echo chambers, which they define as, “a bounded enclosed media space that has the potential to both magnify the messages delivered within it and insulate them from rebuttal” (76). As they assert, “All things being equal, the advantage in framing goes to the side of an exchange whose message receives more exposure” (143). Within a media echo chamber, repetitive exposure to the same ideas is inherent, and therefore, reinforcing of partisan claims. This can be seen in the
near-identical rhetoric heard among various NGZ claims, wherein new information is rarely provided, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Baum and Groeling also describe how, as audiences develop trust in a media outlet, “the ideological reputations their ‘brand names’ carry, serve as important judgmental heuristic cues which consumers employ to help interpret both the meanings and implications of partisan messages in the media” (162). While ideologically slanted outlets benefit from in-group identification, “New media perceived as siding with a particular party will actually be less persuasive for all” (181). “It is therefore unsurprising,” they conclude, “that politicians have increasingly worked to shape how the public perceives different news outlets” (181), such as Kassam’s claims that the Liberal media sympathizes with “radical Islamists” (378), or Trump’s claim that “Democrats always want to fight for the criminals” (qtd. in @CPAC). This brings us from a look at general partisan media dispersal, to specific Conservative versus Liberal media tensions.

As Jamieson and Cappella insist:

The more media bias is discussed, the more people believe it exists, regardless of whether the news at the moment favors Republicans or Democrats, a finding that could help explain why those in the audience of the conservative opinion media who repeatedly hear or read this claim are more likely to believe it. (xi)

They provide context by asserting “that members of a group exaggerate their differences with out-groups” (177). While outlets outside of the Conservative media have referenced NGZs, or areas that could be argued fit their description, in the past (e.g. Connor; Rieff), ongoing Paris NGZ claims seem to be predominantly disseminated by Conservative-leaning sources. Therefore, the following research primarily explores the tactics employed by Conservative media outlets to understand the proliferation of Paris NGZ
claims. This focus should not be taken to suggest that Liberal-leaning sources do not employ persuasion tactics of their own.

Jamieson and Cappella contextualize the previously mentioned research of Bessi et al. regarding shedding a light on information ignored or covered up by the mainstream media: “The conservative media portray themselves as trustworthy and reliable instructors who will guide audiences through the biases of the mainstream and arm them to critique ‘liberal’ deception” (Jamieson and Cappella 238). The authors argue that Conservative media creates a “self-protective enclave” for the in-group by endorsing outlets with similar views, insulating the audience from counterpersuasion by the political Left (out-group), “holds Republican candidates and leaders accountable to conservative ideals,” and “tightens their audience's ties to the Republican Party” (x). Conservative media “see their role as balancing the mainstream outlets, consisting of both major newspapers…major broadcast and cable networks…and their counterparts on radio and the internet" (145), wherein their rhetoric of a Liberal media bias provides a “common set of lines of arguments and a shared vocabulary for dismissing mainstream interpretations of news" (161). An example of this shared vocabulary can be seen in the conflation of NGZs with SUZs that started with Pipes and has proliferated through NGZ discourse by various Fox News hosts and guests like Sebastian Gorka (Gorka), Steve Emerson (“Europe is finished”), and Tucker Carlson (“Author warns against”) using the phrase “751 no-go zones.” According to the authors, “The decibel level of this critique rises when the information or interpretation that the ‘mainstream media’ offer is problematic for conservatives” (threatening to the in-group) (Jamieson and Cappella x). This leads to an attempt to “discredit their opponents by rhetorical frames deploying extreme
hypotheticals, using ridicule, attacking character, and engendering negative emotion” (20).

Once misinformation has spread, research suggests it can be very difficult to correct. “Online debunking campaigns have been shown to create a reinforcement effect in usual consumers of conspiracy stories” (Bessi et al. 1), who have been linked to “extreme and entrenched attitude positions” (Douglas et al. 539). More generally, this is known as The Backfire Effect, wherein the attempt to correct misinformation is said to be met with resistance by media consumers, and as Nyhan and Reifler posit, it can “actually increase misperceptions among the most strongly committed subjects” (304). According to Garrett et al., this is especially true among individuals who find the information objectionable or threatening (618). Recent research by Wood and Porter, however, casts doubt on The Backfire Effect: “Overwhelmingly, when presented with factual information . . . the average subject accedes to the correction and distances himself from the inaccurate claim” (30). Research by Ecker et al. found that despite not being able to completely reverse the effects of misinformation, stronger retractions “are effective in reducing the continued influence effects associated with strong misinformation encoding.” While “information that shores up existing attitudes is welcomed uncritically” (Jamieson and Cappella 75), Baum and Groeling argue:

The influence of partisan messages on viewers will depend upon whether: (a) the speaker shares the viewer's party affiliation, (b) the message imposes some cost upon the speaker, and (c) the news outlet conveying the message is viewed as biased in favor of or against the message being conveyed. (159)

This may also explain why the resurgence of NGZ claims in 2015 has been difficult to shake by Conservative media. The denials made by individuals within the alleged Paris NGZs conflict with the trusted media sources making the claims and cause confusion, but
each time a trusted social actor reasserts the claims, the audience has less work to do in fitting the discourse into their pre-existing understanding of the NGZ problem.

When it comes to claims of Paris NGZs, and attempting to correct misinformation, a contributing factor may be that the average American tends to have little knowledge of foreign affairs (Baum and Groeling 158). “Although international knowledge is associated with the important processes by which Americans vote in national elections and develop values, concepts and skills related to global interdependence, American levels of international knowledge remain embarrassingly low” (Beaudoin 456). Baum and Groeling state, “Instead they rely on information shortcuts, or heuristic cues, most notably the opinions of trusted political elites whom they consider credible,” wherein trust and credibility is largely determined by party identification (160). It is likely that many American, including the audience of Conservative media, have not traveled to the countries in question, or the specific alleged Paris NGZs. Therefore, they are more likely to rely on individuals they trust, especially within their in-group, like Kassam, who have allegedly been there, to relay their observations and conclusions of the areas.

Jamieson and Cappella introduce Tim Cuprisin’s idea of a Republican Transmission Belt, which they interpret as the advancing path between “the right-wing radical blogs to Rush Limbaugh’s radio show to Fox News and then into the headlines” (4). While researching alleged NGZs, it has been difficult to determine where various claims originate. However, sources like Geller Report, Breitbart, and Daniel Pipes, which have churned out dozens of blog posts, in addition to Kassam’s book, claiming to prove the existence of NGZs, appear to be the most prolific on the subject. Regarding talk radio,
in January of 2015, Rush Limbaugh responded to the planned suit against Fox News by Paris Mayor Hidalgo over Steven Emerson’s allegations that Birmingham, England was a NGZ, by claiming, “I’ve heard of them long before Fox ever reported on the existence of the no-go zones” (Limbaugh). These claims have made their way to Fox News because the network featured the Right-wing bloggers on their programs. It was then that NGZs started entering the headlines, whether because the mainstream media sought to discredit them, or because of things like the suit against Fox News that Limbaugh referenced. It was then picked up by politicians, such as Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal who maintained his stance under further questioning, despite no direct citations for the claims (Jaffe); U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands Pete Hoekstra, who later apologized for getting the country wrong, but not for claiming the existence of NGZs (“I got it wrong”); and President Trump. In an interview with George Stephanopoulos in December of 2015, the then presidential candidate said, “The real Paris is a different Paris than the City of Light that you read about.” He continued, “They have areas in Paris where it is so radicalized and so vicious…that the police refuse to go there. They will not go there. That’s what’s going to happen with our country” (qtd. in Chadwick and Dallison). That these claims have reached the talking points of the US President exceeds the extent Cuprisin described of the Republican Transmission Belt, and speaks to not only the platform that Trump provides Conservative opinion media, but also the implications of unverified theories entering the discourse of someone in a position often referred to as “the most powerful person in the world.”

An extreme example of this was when Trump retweeted three anti-Muslim posts made by Jayda Fransen, “the deputy leader of Britain First, a far-right and ultra-
nationalistic political group” (Landers and Masters). The Muslim Council of Britain, called these tweets “the clearest endorsement yet from the US President of the far-right and their vile anti-Muslim propaganda” (qtd. in Landers and Masters), while former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke responded, “Thank God for Trump! That’s why we love him” (@DrDavidDuke). According to Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Trump did not know Fransen (Merica), who has since been convicted of religiously aggravated harassment toward a Muslim woman (Porter), before he retweeted the videos. By appropriating the rhetoric of the Right-wing fringe, President Trump amplified their unsubstantiated claims to the national (and international) discourse, aligning with the idea of the Republican Transmission Belt. By asserting the existence of NGZs, he does the same.

5.6: Thoughts on the Use of Documentary Film

While the experience of one person, whether that of Kassam or myself, cannot speak to a definite “truth” about the communities within NGZs, going to Paris, observing the alleged NGZs, and visually documenting my experience, provided me the opportunity to fully immerse myself in the places I was researching. Conducting the research of this thesis via documentary film allowed me to investigate specific assertions made by NGZ claims and gave me solid standing to doubt the claims and assert potential motivations or factors of why they persist without visual evidence. In the words of Penn-Edwards, using video also allowed me to capture “spontaneous and transitory information” (267). By being on-the-ground with the light gear I brought, I was able to move throughout the alleged Paris NGZs as I wished, and to point the camera where I best thought addressed the claims. The act of collecting the footage as a blonde, White woman allowed me to
discredit multiple assertions made by the claims at once, such as the claim that visual footage could not be collected, and the frequent refrain that blonde, White women are not able to enter/stay in these areas. The visual footage of this methodology also allowed the audience space to draw their own conclusions between the literature and the observational footage presented. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, the NGZ claims suffered from a lack of visuals. By filling this gap, the documentary worked to provide new images and new information that the research of Soltas and Stephens-Davidowitz suggests is effective in changing perceptions of entrenched beliefs.

As discussed in Chapter 1, just like the credibility of verbal claims can be called into question, so too can visuals, such as questions arising from the editing process (Section 3.3). However, by selecting the observational documentary mode, I aimed to portray the alleged NGZs as authentically as possible (Penn-Edwards 271). To do this, I only used footage collected during my two-week observation period in Paris, including the French accordion music heard throughout the film. This light-hearted song exemplified the lack of fear I felt while walking around the alleged NGZs. My experience was very different than the one Kassam portrayed in his book, which speaks to the importance of varied voices and representations within the NGZ discourse. The participatory mode of my thesis not only invites others to visit the alleged Paris NGZs, whether for pleasure or for the purpose of documentation. It also proves it is possible to collect visuals within these areas and, thus, urges individuals and media outlets asserting the presence of Paris NGZs to gather the visual evidence they have yet to provide.

According to Stephen Reed, “Our cognitive abilities to comprehend, remember, reason, solve problems, and make decisions depend on a rich combination of words and
images” (13). Due to its ability to address claims and clarify their implications through writing and observational documentary, I am confident that the multi-modal approach of this thesis was an effective methodology for investigating the veracity of NGZ claims in Paris. While it is unclear the extent the visuals I collected, or the research I have provided on the discourse, will permeate the NGZ conversation, the research on documentary filmmaking, as well as the visual void it fills, suggests they will benefit the conversation.
APPENDIX: FILM ABSTRACT AND TREATMENT

Film Abstract

To discover the truth about “No-Go Zones”—Muslim communities said to be controlled not by the French state, but by Sharia law—documentary filmmaker Holly Koch spent two weeks in Paris, France investigating the claims. By juxtaposing archival news footage with observational and participatory footage, the audience is able to see the contradiction between them. An American in Paris NGZs explores the ideas of Islamophobia, racial bias, and Group Threat that have protected NGZs from counterpersuasion.

Film Treatment

The City of Light the world once knew is said to be no more. According to sources ranging from Right-wing bloggers to President Donald Trump, Paris has been invaded by what are known as “No-Go Zones” (NGZs)—Muslim communities controlled not by the French state, but by Sharia law. The claims, ranging in their definitions and severity, play on the adage that has emerged since the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001: “Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims.”

The alleged NGZs are the subject of significant controversy stemming from both a lack of credible evidence and in-depth attempts to discredit them. To fill this information and visual gap, An American in Paris NGZs uses documentary filmmaking to investigate the claims on-the-ground. As it explores the twelve areas of Paris put into question by the claims, the film combines the aesthetics of a travel video with investigative observation.

After being introduced to the debate and the actors within it, such as Fox News and the “Liberal media”, the audience travels with filmmaker Holly Koch to the areas the claims have told her she cannot go to answer the film’s central question: Are there NGZs in Paris?

Iconic shots of Paris, such as café-lined streets and the twinkling of the Eiffel Tower at dusk, are seen in tandem with footage of areas less often seen by tourists, like the parks lining the Boulevard Périphérique and the large revitalization project in La Chapelle. The audience is treated to a city symphony ranging from the traffic and chatter amidst the bustling streets, to the quiet lapping of the Seine near the Notre Dame, to the sound of the filmmaker’s 100 miles of footsteps as she traversed the city.

Throughout the film, street art is used as a motif to connect the disparate parts of the city. Repeated imagery of artists can be seen all over Paris, like in the alleys of Porte Saint-Denis, street signs in Barbès, and walkways in Le Marais. The artwork also acts as a metaphor for the changing Paris. It reminds the audience that street art might not have been part of the Paris they imagine or remember, but it is representative of an ever-evolving *frenchness*, with multiculturalism at its center.
Like the style of Ava Duvernay’s film *13th*, *An American in Paris NGZs* uses archival news footage of the claims with contradictory observational footage of Paris, and lets the audience reconcile the difference between the two. Koch maintains a presence within the film, acting as a surrogate for the audience, as well as addressing the insistence that blonde, white women will have the most trouble within the alleged NGZs. Throughout the film, she provides historical and literary context to explain the persistence of the claims despite a lack of evidence, and their implications.

With near-constant accusations of “Fake News” used by both sides of the political aisle, one of the only bipartisan ideas may be that America is undergoing a crisis of truth. While Conservative pundits and politicians stoke fear of terrorism to garner support for Conservative policies like the Muslim immigration ban or the US-Mexico border wall, the rhetoric they use from the War on Terror has been found to naturalize violence and engender racial bias. The observational footage of *An American in Paris NGZs* cuts through rhetorical frames and political motivations to disprove claims of NGZs in Paris that have real consequences to the Muslim communities they disparage.
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